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IN ONE EAR • ELLEDA WILSON

'THEY CAN'T BE LEFT OUT'



My grandson, **Dante Williams**, who is 7, has been saving pennies for the year, picking them up everywhere," **Brenda McKune** wrote. Dante's father is **Cliff Williams**.

"I thought it was for his piggy bank, but it's not. Last week he told us he needs to go turn them in because he's taking names off the **Wishing Tree** to help Santa."

The Wishing Tree program works like this: Children in need write gift requests on paper bell ornaments, which are hung on Christmas trees in local businesses. People pick a tag off the tree, buy the requested present, and turn it in at a Wishing Tree collection center.

Dante liked the idea, and wanted to help make sure children who otherwise might not receive presents weren't overlooked at Christmas. "They can't be left out," he told his grandmother.

"It was the cutest thing," she noted. "So serious." By being in the paper, she hopes it will "get other children on board to helping others, as he wants more to help."

Dante isn't the only family member with a need to help others who are less fortunate. Brenda has set a shining example. She started **Scrap Hunger**, an event to "feed those in need," more than 10 years ago. The idea for the event came to her in her sleep, after going to bed with a "heavy heart" after realizing the Warrenton food pantry's shelves were getting bare one year.

Dante's grandfather, **Lewis McKune** (pictured with Dante), took him to Columbia Bank in Warrenton to turn in the pennies — which were in big jugs — and he wound up with \$90.76 for his Wishing Tree shopping spree. Since the bank had a tree, Dante chose the paper bell tags right there, then went shopping.

"I'm proud of him," Brenda added. "He got four tags from the tree. He overspent by \$6.38, but that's fine by us."

"I thought with all the sad," she observed, "it would be great to have some sweetness written about."

THE CALIFORNIA GIRL



From the Christmas Eve 1890 edition of *The Daily Morning Astorian*:

One eye-catching front page tidbit is a notice advertising the presence of **Miss Lillian F. Smith**, "The California Girl, Champion Rifle Shot of the World." She is pictured courtesy of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

The California Girl was appearing at the "Shooting Range, No. 75 Main St., between First and Second. Open every afternoon and evening except Sunday. Wednesday afternoon for ladies and children: Exhibition to commence at 2 o'clock sharp. Prizes awarded for competitors. Instruction given in shooting."

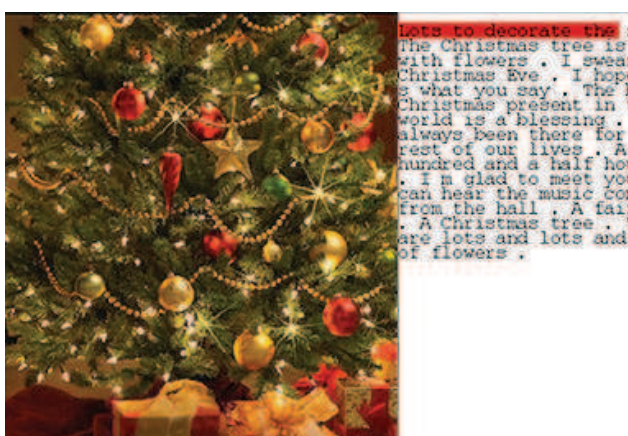
A little background: Lillian joined **Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show** at the age of 15 in 1876, and became sharpshooter **Annie Oakley's** younger rival and nemesis. To put it politely, their personalities clashed.

Annie was the better shot, but Lillian got most of the publicity with the royal family during the show's 1887 London season.

Feeling slighted, Annie left the show in a huff. The tables turned in 1889, when Lillian left the Wild West Show, and Annie rejoined it.

Annie Oakley's fame has endured to this day. Sadly, The California Girl's arrival in Astoria was just one of the many stops she made on her long, slow slide into obscurity. (tinyurl.com/riflegirl)

AI: PLEASE DON'T SING



It's actually not new news, but it's news many might find disconcerting, at best: A Christmas song was created by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Hang Chu, a Ph.D. student, is the culprit, umm, creator, reports Smithsonian.com. He trained a neural network using 100 hours of digital music, footage from the video game *Just Dance*, 50 hours of song lyrics, and images with captions.

After the network digested all that, he fed it a generic photo of a Christmas tree and let 'er rip. Researchers dubbed the resulting Christmas tree paean "neural karaoke." A better word would be jarring. A screenshot from the video is shown.

With a piano tinkling in the background, the monotone female-ish voice intones about "lots and lots and lots of flowers," and "I swear it's Christmas Eve. I hope that is what you say ... I've always been there for the rest of our lives. A hundred and a half hour ago. I'm glad to meet you." You can hear the "song" and read all of the lyrics at bit.ly/AInoise

"White Christmas" it ain't.

DECK THE WRECK



According to Parikiaki.com, the **Zenobia Wreck** off the coast of Larnaca, Cyprus, sits 137 below the surface (<http://bit.ly/wrecktree>). The ferry wound up at the bottom in June 1980 after capsizing during its maiden voyage.

At last, the Zenobia is celebrating her first Christmas. A group of divers brought a tree down to the ship, then decorated it. One of them even donned a Santa suit for the occasion. A still shot from a video, courtesy of Parikiaki.com, is shown. Never fear, the ornaments are as green as the tree — they're nontoxic and non-water-soluble. Merry Christmas, Zenobia.

ELF YOURSELF



By ELLEDA WILSON, THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Looking for something sublimely ridiculous to waste some time on during this holiday season? Go ahead and Elf Yourself at elfyourself.com, along with 1.7 billion others.

You can also "elf" significant others, parents, dogs, cats, you name it. (Hopefully George the Cat will forgive the assault upon his dignity, pictured.) The more the merrier, as you're allowed to "elf" up to five humans/pets/whatever at a time. You can be elfing in the workshop, or hip-hop dancing or at an office party ... there are several venues in which to embarrass yourself.

ELEVATE YOURSELF



There's always one person who stumps you at holiday gift-giving time, so here's a repeat offbeat suggestion: Buy 'em a title from the **Principality of Sealand**.

In case you're wondering, Sealand is actually a fortress island, Roughts Tower, built by the British in the North Sea, in international waters, during World War II, then later abandoned. The fortress, pictured courtesy of the principality, was taken over by **Roy Bates** and his family in 1966.

In 1967, Bates raised a flag and declared the island would henceforth be known as the Principality of Sealand, an independent sovereign state and the self-proclaimed smallest country in the world. At the same time, he made himself prince, and gave his wife the title "**Princess Joan**." They are pictured, inset.

And now, at sealandgov.org, anyone can become Sealand royalty — for a price. The **title of lord, lady, baron or baroness** will set you back about \$44.99.

"Thank you for the prompt and excellent service in making me a lord," one satisfied customer wrote. "At last people will call me sir without adding 'you're making a scene.'"

Better yet, **own a piece of Sealand territory** (1 square foot, to be precise) "and become part of its Swashbuckling History!" You'll even get a property title certificate, all for a modest \$29.99.

Sealand's offerings truly might be the perfect gift solution for the person who already has everything.

LOCAL BREVITIES



Glimpses of Yuletide past from *The Daily Morning Astorian*, Tuesday, Dec. 25, 1883:

"The hearts of numerous little ones were gladdened last evening at the various churches, which were handsomely decorated and brilliantly illuminated ... elaborately draped and festooned with evergreens ... and glittering Christmas trees laden with presents.

"At the Congregational church the usual style was varied by the appearance of a huge ship, full-rigged and with swelling sails, which rounded gracefully into port and began discharging cargo. It consisted of innumerable toys, drums, jewelry, books, tea sets, embroideries, fancy articles, in great profusion.

"At the Baptist church Santa Claus with his elk team arrived promptly on time and with a sleigh load of beautiful presents for all.

"A noticeable feature of the Christmas trees in every church in the city last evening was that every member of every Sunday school was handsomely remembered. No one went empty-handed away, and the glistening eyes of the little folks showed how well they appreciated the armfuls of good things that were so abundantly distributed."

Yes, Virginia, in Astoria there really was a Santa Claus. • A little thought-provoking seasonal ditty:

"What shall I give my husband?/ What shall I give to my wife?/

"Are the questions that puzzle the people/ And worry their peaceful life.

"Give to your husband a meerschaum (pipe)/ "Give to your wife a gown/

"And put some crepe on the door-knob "When the bills for both come down."

COMMUNITY NOTES

SATURDAY

Sit & Stitch — 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Homespun Quilts & Yarn, 108 10th St. Bring knitting, crochet or other needlework projects to this community stitching time. All skill levels welcome.

Columbia Northwestern Model Railroading Club — 1 p.m., in Hammond. Group runs trains on HO-scale layout. For information, call Don Carter at 503-325-0757.

Spinning Circle — 1 to 3 p.m., Astoria Fiber Arts Studio, 1296 Duane St. Bring a spinning wheel. For information, call 503-325-5598 or go to astoriafiberarts.org

Karaoke — 7 to 8 p.m., Sea-

side Lodge and International Hostel, 930 N. Holladay Drive, Seaside. Free session, all ages, for those who love to sing karaoke. Refreshments served. For information, call 503-738-7911.

SUNDAY

Seniors Breakfast — 9 a.m. to noon, Astoria Moose Lodge, 420 17th St. Cooked to order from menu, includes coffee. Cost is \$5 for seniors 62 and older, \$7.50 for those younger than 62. Breakfasts are open to the public. Proceeds after expenses help support local and other charities.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Support Group — 2 to 3:30 p.m.,

Seaside Public Library, 1131 Broadway. Family to Family Support Group, for anyone with friend or loved one suffering from a serious brain (mental) illness. For information, contact Myra Kero at 503-738-6165, or k7erowood@q.com, or go to nami.org

Line Dancing — 5:30 to 8 p.m., Seaside American Legion, 1315 Broadway. For information, call 503-738-5111. No cost; suggested \$5 tip to the instructor.

MONDAY

Chair Exercises for Seniors — 9 to 9:45 a.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. For information, call 503-325-3231.

Senior Lunch — 11:30 a.m.,

Bob Chisholm Senior Center, 1225 Avenue A, Seaside. Suggested donation \$3 for those older than 60; \$6.75 for those younger than 60. For information, call Suzanne Bjaranson at 503-861-4202.

Columbia Senior Diners — 11:30 a.m., 1111 Exchange St. Cost is \$6. For information, or to have a meal delivered, call 503-325-9693.

Warrenton Senior Lunch Program — noon, Warrenton Community Center, 170 S.W. Third St. Suggested donation of \$5 for seniors and \$7 for those younger than 60. For information, or to volunteer, call 503-861-3502 Monday or Thursday.

Astoria Rotary Club — noon, second floor of the Astoria Elks Lodge, 453 11th St. Guests always welcome. For information, go to AstoriaRotary.org

Knockers Pinochle Group — 1 p.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A, Seaside. Cost is \$1 per regular session per person. Players with highest and second highest scores split the prize. Game is designed for players 55 and older, but all ages are welcome.

Mahjong for Experienced Players — 1 p.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. For information, call 503-325-3231.

Line Dancing for Seniors — 3

to 4:30 p.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. Not for beginners. For information, call 503-325-3231.

WEDNESDAY

Chair Exercises for Seniors — 9 to 9:45 a.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. For information, call 503-325-3231.

Warrenton Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) — 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., 88786 Dellmoor Loop, Warrenton. Moms of children ages infant through kindergarten are invited. Free breakfast and child care provided. For information, go to mops.org/groups/warrenton