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SLEIGH BELLS TOLL

Scary story by Hermiston student hits the shelves in time for Halloween



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Hermiston High School student Ben Armstrong signs a copy of an anthology that contains his story "Sleigh 54" on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021, in the school's commons.

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Ben Armstrong, a junior at Hermiston High School, may have just taken his biggest step yet as a published author.

The 17-year-old celebrated Wednesday, Oct. 20, as a birthday and the release of "What Remains: An Inked in Gray Anthology," edited by Dakota Rayne and San G. Crow. Armstrong wrote a short story, "Sleigh 54," which was published in the book.

Hermiston High School staged a signing party for Armstrong, who said he was enjoying the attention his first major published story has brought. He had been published on a few websites previously, but those sites are small, Armstrong said.

Family members were in attendance — his mother, his father, his stepfather, his stepmother and his sister. Friends, his girlfriend, teachers and other well-wishers also showed up to the gathering. Everyone took their turn swarming around the young author in his moment of triumph.

Armstrong's story earned its place among 16 tales in the book. Three hundred short stories had been considered for publication; all but the 16 were rejected, Armstrong said.

Delia Fields, Hermiston School District librarian, orga-



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Hermiston High School student Ben Armstrong poses with some admirers before signing copies of an anthology in which his story "Sleigh 54" appears. The book signing took place on Armstrong's birthday, Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021.

nized the signing for Armstrong. She said he is one of those students she often sees in the library, and she likes his story.

"It's very clever and very creative," she said. "For me, it's a fun kind of scary story, because I'm not into some of the super creepy dark ones. It's just enough twisted."

She said she thinks Armstrong is "on his way" to an impressive literary career. She said she likes his drive and skill. As he gains confidence, he will continue

charting a path as an author, she said.

Armstrong, in contrast to older writers, has the benefit of technology. He is able to find markets for his writing more easily than people who did not grow up with the internet, Fields said.

Armstrong and his story, evaluated

At the event, Armstrong agreed people often see horror writers as dark, brooding individuals. That is not the case for

him — at least not all of the time.

"Maybe when I'm alone," he said. "When I'm around people, I try to be gleeful."

Armstrong's mother, Jennifer Keith Armstrong, boasted of her son's creativity. While she likes his story and is proud of his accomplishment, she does not usually enjoy scary stories.

She said she asks him "to write a story where everyone is happy and no one dies."

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Local libraries try to bounce back with regular events

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

As COVID-19 restrictions lessen, local libraries have been steadily resuming a regular schedule of events. Library patrons, too, have been returning, slowly but surely, according to library representatives.

Friday morning, Oct. 23, offered a test of local's willingness to visit library events, with the Traveling Lantern Theatre

Company performing "The Merry Tales of Robin Hood" at the Hermiston Public Library. Twenty-three people attended the performance, which was a good turnout, according to librarians.

Mary Dowdy, Hermiston library assistant and children's programmer, said she has seen a steady increase in event attendance. For some time, she has read to children at the library. Her readings are on Tuesday morning. She is doing these now, but they were canceled for much of the past couple of years.

Starting the second week of September, she resumed her public reading schedule. During the first week, however, no one showed up. This was not a big surprise for her, as she knew it would take a while for families to know she was reading for children again. Her worries began, however, the following weeks.

For the second and third weeks, only five children showed up to the story time, she said.

As she likes reading to children, the small number of attendees troubled her. She wondered if, perhaps, the weekly event should be stopped, at least for the time being.

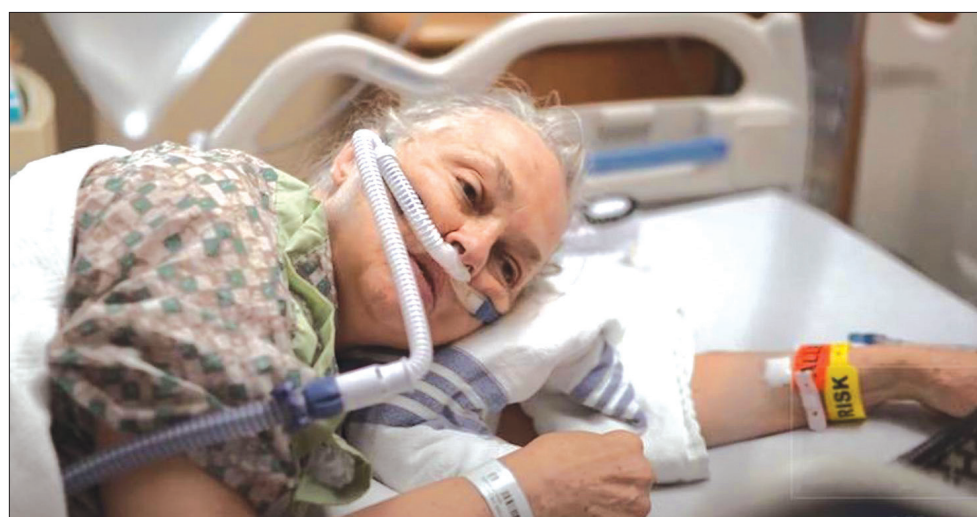
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Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Mary Dowdy, Hermiston library assistant and children's programmer, poses Monday, Oct. 25, 2021, with a couple of books she plans on reading for children's story time. Local libraries are working to bring back more of their programs as the pandemic ebbs.

Vaccination falls prey to political beliefs



St. Charles Health System/Contributed Photo

An unvaccinated patient fights COVID-19 in the St. Charles Health System in Central Oregon. Rural counties in Oregon have seen a surge in cases from the delta variant of the virus, which has predominantly hospitalized unvaccinated people.

Oregon's rural and urban counties drift further apart; health officials question how to rebuild trust, save lives

By ALEX HASENSTAB
Oregon Public Broadcasting

PORTLAND — There is a clear correlation between COVID-19 vaccination rates and political affiliation in Oregon counties, and experts said it's about more than just politics — it's also about where and how people live, how they feel about authority

and whether they believe they have a voice in how government decisions get made in this state with deep partisan divides.

University of Oregon political science professor emerita Priscilla Southwell said that while vaccines are not inherently political, they have become so in much of the United States. In Oregon, areas where a majority of people are registered Republicans report lower vaccination rates. But Southwell said another, and perhaps more influential, type of demographic split is at play.

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