



Lisa Britton/For EO Media Group

Snow has buried sections of fence near Pilcher Creek Reservoir in southern Union County.

SNOWSHOE

Continued from Page 1B

The day before the hike near Phillips Reservoir, my wife, Lisa, and our kids, Max and Olivia, sampled the new snow near Pilcher Creek Reservoir west of North Powder.

This is a fine place to snowshoe, especially on a clear day, as the view of the Elkhorns is exquisite.

Tucker Flat Road is plowed a short distance beyond the turnoff to the reservoir — good ice fishing there — to afford access to one of the elk-feeding sites that make up the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Elkhorn Wildlife Area.

We parked at the end of the plowed stretch, beside an old homestead on the north side of the road.

The road, which becomes Forest Road 4330 (also known as the Porcupine Road), continues west for several miles into the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

I opted for a loop route under the assumption that snowmobiles would have packed down the snow on the road, making for a comparatively easy return.

A mistaken assumption, it turned out.

The Porcupine Road was unblemished, the snow as smooth as cake frosting, but with a consistency closer to powdered sugar.

Even though there was a slight downhill grade for the last half mile or so back to the rig, that section was every bit as challenging, physically, as our first uphill strides.

I didn't make the same mistake the next day.



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Snowshoe tracks along Tucker Flat Road.

Half birthdays and hope for the future

Ask any elementary schooler how old they are, and they will immediately tell you. It's an uncontrollable impulse for children to share how old they are, a badge of honor, even. So important is the measure of years they've survived that they might even add a fraction to that age, insistent that they're not 8, but 8½ years old.

I'm no child psychologist, but even I understand that distinction is meaningful to them for a number of reasons. It shows they're just a little older, a little more educated, experienced and capable. It shows they're that much closer to the next milestone and that they've survived. Six months, to a child, is a long time.

Six months

Mid-pando, six months can be a long time for adults, too.

The first six months of our pandemic were rough, but people adjusted. The safest, least controversial activities were outdoor activities practiced alone or in small groups. Activities like fishing. These activities flourished as people sought ways to find meaning, take care of their mental health and do something not involving a screen.

In the first six months of the pandemic, Oregon's fishing license sales surged by 18% over the previous year, per Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Our great state wasn't alone, either. Nationally, statista.com reports gross fishing license sales broke \$750 million for the first time in 2020.



CAUGHT OVGARD

LUKE OVGARD

I contributed \$922.83 of that while fishing my way across the country, chasing meaning but hiding it under a mask the

whole time (albeit begrudgingly after the third skin infection).

Summer came to an end, and I had my existential crisis about turning 30 in this strange new world where you had to recognize people only by their eyes.

Six more

I opened my eyes this week to see it was my own half birthday. The calendar claims it's been just six months since I turned 30, but I've aged a lot more than that.

This was a winter full of turmoil, heart-break, disappointment and hard times, but things seem to be looking up. As more people are vaccinated and more people survive infection, the number of potential hosts for the virus decreases, and some semblance of normalcy begins to return. It feels like we just might be clawing our way out of this pit we've been living in for the past year, and I am here for it. Restaurants are reopening, children can plan for their futures once again and for the first time in a year, planning for tomorrow doesn't feel foolhardy.

Six more

Six months from now, I'm optimistic that life in the United States will be rich and meaningful once again.

Undoubtedly, there will be a pall of death left behind. We've all lost loved ones, and we will never forget them. We cannot forget

them. COVID changed the world. Largely for the worse, and whether we like it or not, some things will never be the same. But not all of the changes brought on by this pandemic were harmful.

Restaurants, bars, theaters and stores have never been cleaner.

We have seen the glaring faults in our supply chains, healthcare systems and government infrastructure. Shining a light on what's broken is a great way to improve it, and we've done that.

Individually, we're now spending more time with family than ever and much to my delight, we're spending much of this time outside.

Most importantly, I think we're truly beginning to see just how precious that time is.

Time is finite. We can never get more of it. Young or old, healthy or sick, the days we've been given feel more like a gift to me than ever before. I'm not saying it's been easy. The past year has been one of the loneliest of my life, but so much horror has made me appreciate joy when I find it, and I'm ready to chase it more in the coming months as it becomes easier and easier to catch.

I've already made plans for my summer, my fall and, in the general sense, my future.

Next time a little kid tells me they're 5½ or 8½ or 11½, I'm not going to think they're naive. They know that every day matters, and they know that in today's world, a half birthday is worth celebrating.

Order performance fishing apparel or read more at caughtovgard.com; Follow on Instagram and Fishbrain @lukeovgard; Contact luke.ovgard@gmail.com



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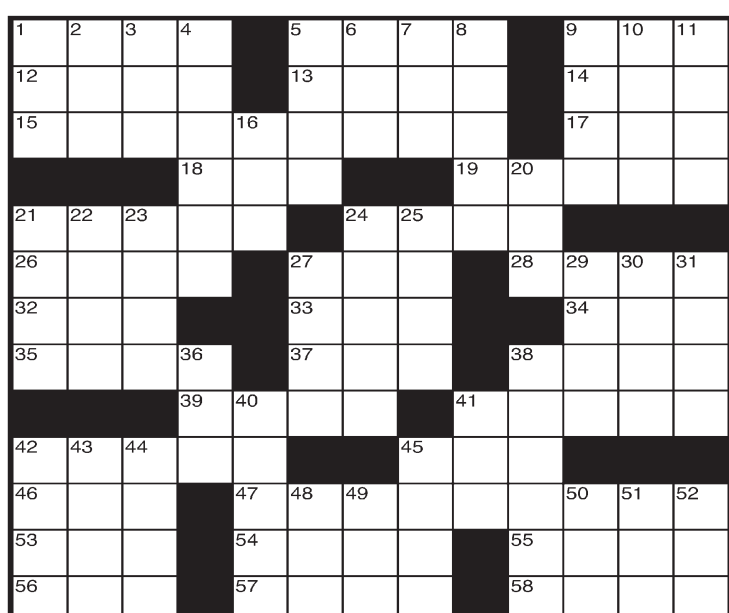
CROSSWORD PUZZLER

- ACROSS**
- 1 Yearn (for)
 - 5 Free ride
 - 9 Mail pouch
 - 12 Not resist
 - 13 European capital
 - 14 Ms. Lupino
 - 15 Strait of —
 - 17 Kind of dance
 - 18 Pointed tool
 - 19 Motif
 - 21 Water slide
 - 24 Vacuum part
 - 26 Not polluted
 - 27 Desire
 - 28 Giraffe feature
 - 32 — Khan
 - 33 A Miss America host
 - 34 Stodge with bangs
 - 35 One and only
 - 37 Caesar's law
 - 38 Polluted air
 - 39 Drying oven
- DOWN**
- 1 Written record
 - 2 Ginza purchase
 - 3 Bird beak
 - 4 Whirl around
 - 5 Laze around
 - 6 Ego ending
 - 7 Gulf st.
 - 8 Lawsuit bases
 - 9 Take the bait
 - 10 — Clayton Powell Jr.
 - 11 Yawn
 - 16 Blow away
 - 20 Squawker
 - 21 Balance-sheet gurus
 - 22 Quasimodo's creator
 - 23 Siberian river
 - 24 Keller or Hayes
 - 25 Black gemstone
 - 27 Bellow
 - 29 Jane Austen title
 - 30 Chicken's digs
 - 31 Tavern inventory
 - 36 Use sparingly
 - 38 Jerking (away)
 - 40 Trojan War story
 - 41 Debate side
 - 42 Partly closed
 - 43 Collar site
 - 44 Encircle
 - 45 Burlap fiber
 - 48 Exec's degree
 - 49 Corsage flower
 - 50 Collection of fauna
 - 51 Work unit
 - 52 Morse syllable

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	D	D	B	E	S	S			M	A	X
L	O	U	A	N	I	M	A		A	L	I
L	E	G	E	N	D	S		C	A	C	T
		A	G	O	K	I	L	O			
A	S	P	S		W	O	O	D	E	N	L
T	H	E	T	A	C	H	I	C	E	A	
R	E	P		S	M	E	L	T	M	A	R
I	L	A	S	E	A	Y	E	A	R	N	
A	F	F	L	U	E	N	T	L	E	N	S
		I	S	A	K	O	A	K			
D	E	F	O	G	P	A	Y	S	O	F	F
A	C	T		E	R	A	S	E	U	R	L
S	O	Y		A	R	T	S	R	A	Y	

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