



Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering 'it will be happier.'
-- Alfred Lord Tennyson

What's so Funny?

By Angela Mercy

My favorite ab workout is a boisterous, unstoppable belly laugh, and boy, could my abs use a workout. Jan Claussen and I are looking to cook up some online shenanigans with anyone else who'd like a good laugh.

After some heavy duty arm twisting (believe me that's hard to do with social distancing), I've convinced Jan to start us off with some of her comedy. I'll bring along a couple of jokes or funny stories. Hopefully each of you will bring something that's struck your funny bone recently. We might try some spontaneous laughter or we may just laugh at our own attempts to be funny. It only matters that we laugh! Join us via Zoom for our first meeting on Wednesday, January 13th at 10 a.m. We'll be sending a Zoom link in the BAH Update beforehand.



Source: Dreamstime.com

Here's Who to Thank for That Charming Holiday Greeting

Holiday cards don't arrive as often nowadays. Even before the pandemic, online greetings in various forms have supplanted the old fashioned cards in many cases. But there's something special about actually finding one in your mailbox with a heartfelt personal message.

This year's holiday card from BAH had really wonderful messages: *Six Feet Apart but Close at Heart* and *Counting Our Blessings*. We'd like to thank several member volunteers who were generous enough to make this happen: to Marilyn Glenn and Marilyn Burlingame for donating the stamps and printing costs, to Cat Macintyre for organizing it all, and to other volunteers for handwriting the individual holiday greetings: Thank you so much—it was lovely to receive and read the card reminding us that we belong to a community that has our back and we have many blessings to be grateful for.

Happy New Year from the LC

As we enter 2021, your Leadership Council is reviewing next steps for BAH. We've started to update basics like our *Mission Statement*, making a small change in November. And, inspired by the Village to Village conference, we have

created an *Inclusion/Diversity/Equity Statement*. In January, we'll start more planning for the year. We're working on a *Vision Statement*. If you have input or ideas, please let an LC member know.

Mission Statement: Our Mission is to empower seniors to stay active, engaged and thriving in the home and communities they love.

Inclusion/Diversity/Equity Statement: Bellingham At Home is committed to creating an environment that welcomes and values the contributions of each person. We believe that diversity is a source of strength, creativity and innovation for our organization, so we welcome members from all cultural backgrounds, races and ethnicities, gender preferences and interests.

An Interesting Movie about Death (That's Not Depressing)

By Kate Birr

Got Netflix? If you do, I have a suggestion for a BAH ambassador activity: Watch *Dick Johnson is Dead* on your own and then get together with other members and volunteers to talk about it.

Just so you know, this documentary is highly recommended, but it's NOT for everyone, apparently. I for one loved it. The idea's kind of quirky, but the people! Dick and his daughter and their more or less matter-of-fact handling of the subject are deeply engaging and thought-provoking. Dick is a retired psychiatrist and his daughter is a documentary filmmaker. She's making a movie of him while he's alive. In it, he "dies" a number of sudden deaths, to show what a speedy ending might be like. Spoiler Alert: They use stunt doubles, and he always comes back to life. But we learn that, in real life, he's suffering from dementia.

Critics on Rotten Tomatoes gave it a 100% rating, but viewers gave it (only!) 82%. Count me in the 82%--I'm a fan. Would you like to talk about it with me? You can watch it on Netflix (that's the only way to see it at this time), and join me and other interested BAH members and volunteers. Let me know if you want to participate, and I'll set a date to get together on Zoom.



Dick Johnson with his daughter, Kirsten, who made a documentary about his death.
(Photo: Jay L. Clendenin, Los Angeles Times)

This activity (watching the movie and discussing it later as a group) can be considered a one-off BAH event. Or it might be part of the "Speaking of Dying" conversation group that's starting up. Nine BAH members and volunteers signed in last month for the initial meeting of this group, which promises to be lively. We're interested in talking about everything from caring for a loved one to types of burial to favorite books and movies on the subject.

And if you don't have Netflix, you're still welcome to join us for the chat; just let me know if you're interested by calling the office.

Watch the official trailer at this location:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfTmT6C5DnM>.

what3words: Smartphone App Can Help Keep You Safe

CBS News recently aired a segment about a new smartphone app that provides precise location software. Developers of the app, what3words, have divided the entire world into three-meter squares and given each square a unique combination of three words. "what3words" addresses are easy to say and share, and are as accurate as GPS coordinates.

The news story featured an American couple walking on a beach in England. The man suddenly fell ill, and the woman called emergency services; however, she was unable to state their specific location and GPS coordinates were not working. She asked the operator if she had what3words, and since both parties did, they used the words from the app for emergency responders to find them. It was a happy ending for all. Check it out at <https://what3words.com/products/what3words-app/>.

Help Wanted



Volunteer Position:

Activities Committee

Help Chair Angela Mercy and other committee members come up with good ideas for one-off events and ongoing activities, and help make them happen.

Volunteer Position:

Volunteer Committee

Help Chair Iris Parker and other committee members administer BAH's volunteer program, including enlisting new volunteers; someone with good communication skills who likes to talk to people would be ideal.

Note: Committees meet monthly.

Beneath the Sweater and the Skin

By Jeannette Encinias

How many years of beauty do I have left?
she asks me.

How many more do you want?

Here. Here is 34. Here is 50.

When you are 80 years old
and your beauty rises in ways
your cells cannot even imagine now
and your wild bones grow luminous and
ripe, having carried the weight
of a passionate life.

When your hair is aflame
with winter
and you have decades of
learning and leaving and loving
sewn into
the corners of your eyes
and your children come home
to find their own history
in your face.

When you know what it feels like to fail
ferociously
and have gained the
capacity
to rise and rise and rise again.

When you can make your tea
on a quiet and ridiculously lonely afternoon
and still have a song in your heart
Queen owl wings beating
beneath the cotton of your sweater.

Because your beauty began there
beneath the sweater and the skin,
remember?

This is when I will take you
into my arms and coo
YOU BRAVE AND GLORIOUS THING
you've come so far.
I see you.
Your beauty is breathtaking.

Encinias's book of poetry, simply called Poems, will be published in the Spring.

A Cool and Unusual Volunteer Opportunity

By Howard Furst

Would you like to help Peruvian high school students learn English? Passing an English certification test is a requirement for entrance to university there and a school in southern Peru is looking for native English speakers to help prepare their students. You'll meet with them online using Google Meet, similar to Zoom. Best of all, you don't need to know Spanish or be a teacher—this is all about conversation.

I've found it to be fun, stimulating, and educational—for me.

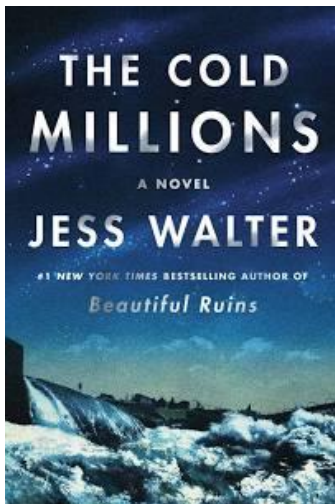
The program asks you to commit 90 minutes or more a week. If you are interested and want to know more, please email me your phone number (h_furst@hotmail.com) and I'll get back to you with more information.

Bellingham At Home Volunteers Step up To Help the Senior Center

A special shout out to our volunteers Marilyn Stemerick, Janet Simpson, Marilyn Glenn, Alice Counts, Nancy Gagne, Marla Finkelstein, Patrice Clark, Karin Clumpner, Jane Pryce, Milt Krieger, Iris Parker, and Brenda Lawrence, who called many members of the Bellingham Senior Activity Center to check on their general welfare and make certain they were aware of the meal program and online activities available from BSAC.

BSAC members were very happy to receive the calls, and the BSAC administrators appreciated the support. There were too many people for their small staff to call, and they really need the information to support the members' needs.

BAH Book Group Delves into a Propulsive Novel about Class Warfare



Our selection for January is The Cold Millions by Jesse Walter. The NY Times described it as “a propulsive, richly entertaining novel about two brothers swept up in the turbulent class warfare of the early twentieth century.” NPR calls it a ‘literary miracle,’ and the Washington Post calls it “One of the most captivating novels of the year.”

The story is set in Spokane, which instituted a ban on public speaking in 1909. Free speech demonstrations erupted in that city, pitting police and government officials against transient workers, many of whom identified as Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World). It features a fascinating cast of characters including cops and hobos, suffragists and socialists, madams and murderers.

Please join us for a lively discussion via Zoom on Wednesday, January 27th at 2 p.m. Watch for a link in a BAH Update.

For Bellingham At Home Members Only: In Case You Get Asked to Renew Your Senior Center Membership....

...Don't. Your BAH membership already includes membership in the senior center.

Dear Gabby: Pandemic Etiquette

By Elaine Cress

Dear Gabby,

My husband and I have agreed to only meet others in the garage and six feet apart with a mask if we're not eating.



A friend stopped by unexpectedly to deliver some heartfelt news about a mutual friend in the hospital. I invited her into the living room and offered her a cup of tea. I felt comfortable with her as a safe, COVID-free friend. While I didn't ask the litany of screening questions, I knew she had been on a ferry and to the hospital. Although we have a heater in the garage, it is a bit of a hassle to light it. After my friend left, my husband asked why I had broken our agreement.

What do you think I should have done?

--Distressed over It All

Dear Distressed:

Unfortunately, COVID doesn't make allowances for situations of "heartfelt news" or the inconvenience of meeting in the garage. You could have met your friend outside with your coat on and walked directly to the garage, asking your husband to light the heater if you could not. This instance gives you an opportunity to role-play with your husband about other tricky situations where the virus goes up against your innate wish to be gracious.

Send your covid etiquette questions to Dear Gabby at deargabby98225@gmail.com



The Christmas Blizzard

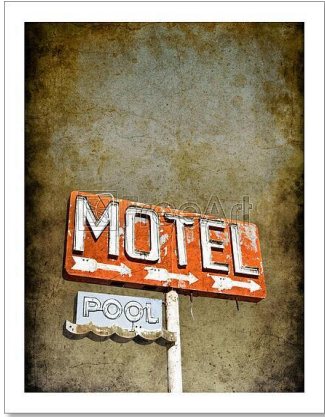
By Lauren Phillips

Every year that my not-yet-husband and I drove from Chicago to Warsaw, Ind., to visit his folks at holiday time, we stayed at a run-of-the-mill franchise motel not far from their retirement village. Right across the highway was another little motel we'd noticed, not a franchise, that we thought might have more personality, be more fun. (Cue hysterical laughter.)

So that's where we were headed as we hopped in the car after work on December 23, 1984, newly married and intent on bringing Don's mom, now a widow, a little holiday cheer. It started snowing on the way and the temperature was dropping. Maybe it was a little windy.

As soon as we checked in at what I will call the Motel from Hell (TMFH), it was immediately apparent why franchises are so popular among travelers. Cigarette burns on the rickety furniture, towels more like postage stamps, tissue-thin bedding; the tiny bathroom, dank, dark, and forbidding, featured an even tinier metal shower with a mildewed shower curtain—you get the picture. As we looked longingly across the highway, the sign in front of what we now understood to

be the Taj Mahal blinked No Vacancy. But hey, we thought, as we fell exhausted into the rickety bed, we'd only be here to sleep two nights.



fa5672119 FreeArt

December 24th dawned—or maybe not. This would be impossible to prove, thanks to the raging blizzard that had obviously been hard at work all night. I don't know how much snow was on the ground, or how hard the howling winds were blowing, or how low the thermometer had sunk. I will just say that it took us about 10 minutes, heads down and clinging to each other, to plow across the highway in our sneakers to the coffee shop that was, miraculously, open. The car hadn't even acknowledged us when we turned the key and Triple AAA just laughed. But, another miracle, while we were eating, a local tow truck pulled into the lot to help out another family and the kind driver agreed to come look at our car after he had towed theirs.

"I know I could get her started if I could get her inside; she'll start for sure at 15 or 20 below." We waved goodbye to our car as he hooked it up to the truck and disappeared.

And then another act of kindness: a nurse at the assisted living facility agreed to come and pick us up so we could spend the day with Dorothy, and take us back to TMFH at the end of her shift at 3 pm. This is when things went totally off the track.

It turned out the owners of TMFH had decided that Don and I, their only guests, were not coming back! After all, our car wasn't there! Not only had they not cleaned the room and put out fresh "towels," they had turned the heat off—and refused to turn it back on. The coffee shop was closed.



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For dinner, we had the container of fancy mixed nuts that we had planned to give to Dorothy the next day. Oh, and cokes from the coke machine; unfortunately, these were frozen solid. We took them into bed with us, where we huddled together under the mingy blanket and *all* the clothes we had brought, and eventually they thawed enough to drink. The one TV station we could pull in was playing round-the-clock Christmas movies, most of which we had never seen (and were never to see again, thank heavens).

True to his word, the tow truck driver delivered our car back to us on Christmas morning, by which time the wind had stopped blowing, leaving behind a gazillion feet of snow and temperatures well below zero. "I wouldn't turn her off until you get back to Chicago," he said gravely. And we didn't.

To this day, we look back at 1984 and smile at the memories: shivering and laughing as the bed wobbled dangerously, our bellies growling, from 4 in the afternoon to 9 in the morning—one of the best holidays we've ever had.



Source: istock.com



'Twas the Season – Even in 2020



BSAC's 2020 Festival of Trees drew from a virtual audience this year, as locals went online to view and bid on decorated trees and later to celebrate the annual event. Once again, BAH members came up with a beauty.

Left: Marilyn Glenn and Steve Tatham's "Woodland Magic" tree raised \$1200 for BASC.

Right, in a Zoom window:
Scrub Hubner was the featured entertainer at BAH's annual holiday party.



Cat McIntyre MC'ed as Bellingham At Home members and volunteers celebrated via Zoom, with a slide show of photos from the Before Times. Thanks to all for sharing their pictures and to Marilyn Glenn for putting the show together. Below are a few of the slides from the holiday party show.



And now, *a very Happy Birthday* to our members celebrating a birthday in...

★ ★ ★
January

Judith Koontz

Ann Nugent

and

Welcome!

To our newest member, **Deborah Watkins**

Bellingham At Home Contact Information

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Phone: 360 746-3462 E-mail: info@bellinghamathome.org

Website: <http://BellinghamAtHome.org>

Bellingham At Home is a program of the Whatcom Council on Aging, which is a 501(c)(3) organization,
and a member of the Village to Village Network.