

Those Yuletide Times of



Halcott

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Winter 2020 - Vol 93

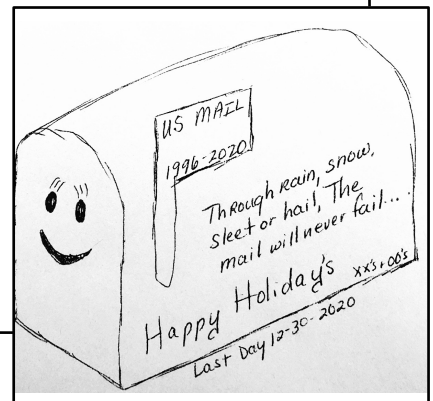
Winter 2020

Goodbye!

“Through rain, snow, sleet or hail, the mail will never fail...”

Since the summer of 1996 I’ve tried to live by that motto as I’ve delivered mail in the beautiful Halcott Center valley. I will be leaving the route and area on December 31st. Please be patient with your new mail person. They’ll have a lot to learn about all of you amazing folks. I’d like to say a huge “THANK YOU” to all the Halcott Highway folks over the years who have

kept me safe on the delivery route and to all who have shared their families’ ups and downs with me. You are all AMAZING FOLKS!! I will hold you in my thoughts and prayers always. “As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.” John F. Kennedy.



Goodbye, my dear HCR folks, until we cross paths again. Always, “Norie67,”
Lanore Baker.

Will this ever end?

Judy Diaz

[Ed note: Judy sent this to us for the Autumn issue and since we had no space, we saved it for Winter. Sadly, except for the hot weather mentioned below, nothing much has changed!]

Wearing a face mask and gloves has become the new normal. Everyone looks like a bank robber or surgeon. I haven't worn lipstick in ages. I'm so tired of watching TV with the screen divided into little boxes; reminds me of the old TV show, The Partridge Family. And not being able to sit in a restaurant is awful. I personally do not want to eat outside in this hot weather. I haven't gone to the movies since this all started. I really want

to go to the mall and shop but they're closed. I don't want to order everything on-line but with the holidays coming up, I guess I have no choice.

I'm complaining about the little things when I should be thankful that I'm healthy and Covid-19 free. We all have to pray that they find a vaccine and they do it fast. We've lost too many lives already.

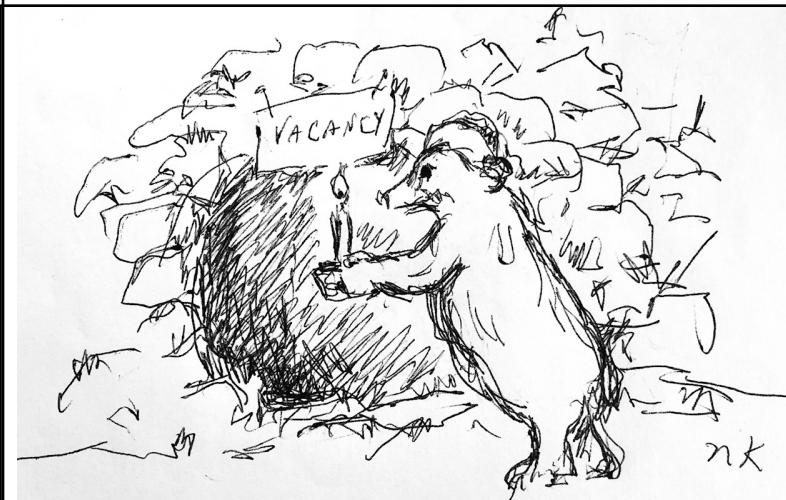
Be well and stay safe

It's A What?!

A few days before Thanksgiving, a plea for help came from neighbors Greg and Camille on Mead Road. They had spied a large dark bird perched on a stone wall near their house; the bird appeared injured and unable to fly. They had identified the peculiarity as a cormorant.

A cormorant in Halcott?? The discovery added to our history of strange birds in the Catskills.

This fellow was just up the road from Scott Moroff's, where, several years ago, an emu - yes, emu - ran through the yard when Michael and I were visiting. My dear husband attempted the capture, but a well-placed kick freed the bird from his grasp, and it bounded through Tim



Johnson's fields toward Vly Mountain. (Full story: *TTOH*, Vol. #3, Summer '98)

And just a few years ago, we picked up a loon in Fleischmanns, a migrant that had become grounded during a snow storm. Once it landed in a snowbank, it was unable to take off again, as loons can only propel themselves skyward from the surface of water. If not for an observant neighbor who noticed the black bird in the dark of night, the loon would have perished. A trip to the Friends of the Feathered and Furry Wildlife Center in Lexington afforded it time to rest up before it was released to continue its southern sojourn.

Cormorants are not completely unknown to the Catskills; I have spotted them occasionally on the Pepacton Reservoir, and less so on the Schoharie Reservoir.

Our valley and the surrounding area is beneath a high and wide migratory byway between Canada and points south. Two years ago during spring migration, I was hiking near the top of White Man Mountain in Roxbury. In just over 2 hours, I observed approximately 1700 Canada Geese in almost two dozen groups, heading northward. They were following 2

distinct routes: one above Route 30; the other, traveling above County Route 6 towards the head of the Denver-Vega



Valley, on their long passage to northern Quebec.

Occasionally, injuries or other circumstances ground migrating birds, bringing us back to the cormorant. When Camille reached out to us, I happened to be on my way to the Wildlife Center where I volunteer a few hours each week. With Greg's assistance, Michael captured the cormorant. There was a spot of blood on its chest, but he was otherwise a lively fellow. Into a box he went and on to the clinic. Upon examination, Missy Runyan, rehabilitator extraordinaire, discovered a pellet wound to the chest. Judging by the

condition of the wound, the bird had been shot just hours before. This is what deflates us at the clinic. Senseless injuries, often leading to an animal's death, are perplexing and saddening. Why would anyone illegally shoot a migrating cormorant?

Cormorants look like neither ducks nor geese, and hunters are required to identify their prey before shooting, but not all hunters are responsible hunters. Maybe someone didn't want a water bird eating "their" fish; herons, eagles, and osprey are often shot because of it. Perhaps someone just wanted to shoot something. In any case, here was the injured cormorant. Next up, a trip to the vet hospital for x-rays. No broken bones, wings functional. One pellet, under the skin, was removed. An elevated blood lead level required a few more days for treatment.

Within a week, Mr. C was released along the Hudson River. We assume, most hopefully, that well before Christmas he had already reached his southerly destination.

Without neighbors who notice, and wildlife experts who spend their own time and money to help those with no voice, he probably would not have survived. If you have a wildlife problem, you can call Michael and me at 254-6508.

The Friends of the Feathered and Furry Facebook page has great photos

and animal updates, and you can check out Missy's website at fffwildlifecenter.com *PD*

COVID, ROCKY, AND THANKSGIVING 2020

Christine Chesire

This past week, Rockefeller and I both went home.

Historically, right before every major holiday, my cell phone blows up with text messages from friends and relatives gearing up for the big day. In anticipation of events like a Thanksgiving feast, we discuss everything from food preparation to travel plans to "Tell me again how you think that centerpiece will look on my dining room table." This year, however, my texting threads took a more somber tone. Instead of swapping recipes, my core group of friends and relatives exchanged Covid-19 concerns. The CDC had warned families not to gather in large groups. The deadly virus was highly contagious and big groups of people would only exacerbate the pathogen's spread. Naturally, my phone was filled with worrisome texts about the virus' possible impact on everyone, especially their loved ones. I continued to read sad admissions that "no matter how normal we would try to make this holiday", most of us would not be able to

spend Thanksgiving 2020 together.

In a “normal” year, the holidays can be a difficult time for some Americans. Not everyone relishes in the moment. Some folks have to go to work on holidays, some suffer from the blues during this season, and some lack the funds to throw the kind of get-together they would like. Add to that a global pandemic and a spice of recent election season contention and this Thanksgiving was like no other we



had ever experienced before. In my opinion, that is why so many of us who were starved for some good news, clung “like a raptor to a tree branch” to the story of Rockefeller, the little Saw-whet owl who, in mid-November, was found hiding inside the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree.

The tree originated in Oneonta, New York, it was cut down, and it made the two-day journey to Manhattan. Transportation workers who assisted in the installation of the tree at its traditional viewing venue of Rockefeller Center found the beautiful owl. She had sought safety inside the coniferous fir.

Saw-whet owls are the smallest

owls in the Northeast. Although she was tiny, this owl was found to be full grown. She was named Rockefeller in honor of the tree and its location. Ultimately, she was moved to the Ravensbeard Wildlife Center in Saugerties, New York. Upon arrival at Ravensbeard, it was determined that she was dehydrated and hungry. She was x-rayed, given medical treatment and fed. Many marveled at how she made it so far and had existed for so many days for such a little creature. One of my favorite pictures of her at Ravensbeard was of her wearing a knit shawl so that she could keep warm. She was almost smiling and she looked so stylish!

The thing that made Rocky, as she was later called, such a national hero is that she was a survivor. She was a survivor at a time when our country was so desperate to hear about survivors and know survivors. These days, you can’t turn on the television without seeing the ubiquitous face mask or without watching the growing tally in the lower right hand corner of the flat screen, of Coronavirus deaths of our fellow Americans. It has been said that if you want to tell someone something, tell them with a picture. The picture of 2020 will be and continues to be the face mask. It is a constant symbol of Covid-19. With that in mind, it is no wonder that our nation was captivated by a tiny displaced

owl, wearing not a face mask but a chic autumn-inspired orange wrap. How many of us wanting to put something nice on and “get out of the house for a change” looked at Rocky and thought, “Ah, someday.” Governor Cuomo mentioned Rocky several times in the “Deep Breath Moment” segment of his Covid-19 Update e-mails. Most recently, he put the video up of Rocky’s release from Ravensbeard. He knew we needed a respite.

Two days after Rocky was released south, I made my way west. Unlike my friends, this year, I made the decision to see my parents at Thanksgiving. On that Thursday morning, I drove 200 miles on the Pennsylvania Turnpike to spend an hour near them.

November in Pennsylvania is always a bleak time of year. As I drove for miles and miles, all I could see were rows and rows of wiry, brittle, brown trees. They went on and on like endless victims of a bad home perm you give yourself during Covid. Against a sunless skyline, the lush green leaves of summer were long gone. The ray of sunshine in my mind however, was that I would get to see my mother and my father in just a few hours and Thanksgiving was my mother’s birthday.

I can’t help but think that the range of emotions that I felt on that drive were similar to the emotions that Rocky’s

wildlife rehabilitator felt as she let Rocky go. You never know if and when you will see someone again. Along the way, I felt happiness and exhilaration that I would soon see my 80-something year old parents. But not lost on me was the air of caution, knowing that I had to keep my distance and their safety in mind at all times. I also knew that because of the virus, my visit would be brief and that it would not be what it usually is. Also, I would inevitably feel emptiness upon having to leave them so soon. I could not be there for long and my brothers would not be there. The gathering would be very, very small.

I spent Thanksgiving dinner in a separate room from my parents. I wore the all-important mask. From the other room, I ate “the fixins” and I brought my own utensils and my own water. A neighbor took my temperature. I had also had a negative Covid diagnosis prior to making the journey.

Thanksgiving night, I stayed in another location blocks away from my parents. We did not hug. We had no contact whatsoever. It was a different kind of Thanksgiving. A 2020 kind of Thanksgiving, one like America has never had before. I knew however, that I was one of the lucky ones. Even though there were empty chairs at the Thanksgiving table, including mine, there was a chance that the chairs might be filled again.

The people of Ravensbeard will likely never see Rocky again and although I have not spoken personally with any of them, I am certain they feel it was such a privilege to spend time with and care for such a beautiful creature, just as it is with many of the birds they come in contact with. Rocky has a great chance at life because of the tremendous care she received from the humans at Ravensbeard.

As humans, we are able to feel exhilaration while also feeling sadness. Although difficult, we can feel accomplishment while also experiencing emptiness. That evening at dusk when Rocky was set free into the wild, the woman who extended her arm so that Rocky could take flight had to feel a sense of accomplishment. I don't know for sure but I can only imagine she also felt emptiness. You don't let a creature that beautiful and that iconic go without experiencing some kind of hollow as you say good-bye.

I did not get to hug my mom this year. That was my emptiness. But I did get to be there as she blow out the one birthday candle that my dad held in his hand, away from the cake, for safety reasons. And that, folks, was my accomplishment.

I know some of you reading this have lost someone you know or love to Covid-19. I have. Each day is an accomplishment. And there are a good

many Americans who are survivors. As I write this piece, someone in my family has come off a ventilator and is doing much better. We can all look forward to the day when Covid takes flight and leaves our lives for good. And unlike Rocky, we can hope that she never returns.

MCS Happenings

And speaking of the havoc that Covid has been wreaking, what's going on with the school kids in our valley? I asked Jamie Vogler, mother of Landon, for help in finding out. She told me that currently there are 10 kids from Halcott who attend school. School is full-time now and the feedback from both parents and children is very positive.

Jamie, Adina Johnson and Ashton Grochell are all home-schooling their kids: Landon, Aubrey and Teagan and Grace and Georgia. Jamie and Ashton are also working part-time at Belleayre! Happily, grandmothers have stepped into the breach to help. It's a very good thing when grandmothers learn all over again how to do long division, how to define a verb, which native American peoples lived in this sacred valley before we did and other stuff we have forgotten!

The kids are loving the attention from family members and seem to be thriving as well as excelling in their work. MCS is very supportive; teachers from the school check in periodically

over a Zoom call.

Yes, Covid is a nasty thing, an invasion not only of our health, but also of our rights, our privacy, our incomes, our sense of security. But, there is a slender silver lining in all of this: families spend more time together. I loved the one day I spent in front of a computer with my red-headed kindergartener for his "virtual" classes. There was a shared intimacy, almost conspiratorial about what was learned together that day. (All classes had to do with Johnny Appleseed, if you're interested.) When he spontaneously introduced his "Nana" to his teacher during the Zoom call, my chest swelled with pride and my eyes pricked with tears. His older sister on another day of virtual learning ran downstairs with her computer to show her class the family dog.

I think the American can-do spirit may be seen very strongly in our kids. Watching them strap on their mask matter-of-factly as they are dropped off for their at-school days evokes in me a sense of wonder. How easily they are coping! We can learn from the practicality that our kids assume with a sort of mental shrug of their shoulders in the face of these serious times.

Learning is a family affair. We give to our kids, I guess, the stability of families facing crisis together; they give to us fine little examples of the quiet unsinkability of the human heart. This is

indeed a most welcome silver lining. **IK**

PASSAGES

Belleayre Mountain Ski Center plans to open around December 9th. The staff there has been taking various training sessions on the precautions recommended for pandemic skiing. There will be no childcare available and limited food service, mainly a "grab and go" menu. All tickets, lessons etc. must be pre-purchased on line.

The website is your best bet for up to date procedures: Visit Belleayre.com for snowcasts, latest on Covid-related scheduling, and all other information. Ski safe!

Ruth Kelder

[Editor's note: We lost Ruth this summer after a very noble and spirited battle with cancer. Her daughter Pattie's reminiscences here show that her feisty character was a mark of her entire life. Thank you, Pattie!]

When Innes asked me to write about Mom for Passages, I didn't know if I was up to the task. I started by gathering a page of comments written on sympathy cards. They mentioned Mom's character, ways she contributed to the Town, dedication to God and family, how many lives she touched . . . but no article emerged. Yet, by using the context of

local history I was able to succeed. Hopefully the reader will enjoy this trip down memory lane.

Dad and Mom met at the square dances in Westkill and Lexington where Dad was caller and fiddler for the Melody Boys and where Mom ran the concession stand (the proverbial way to a man's heart). In 1953, she came to Halcott as a bride. Before that, she had been raising a motherless niece ("the third daughter I never had") while working as Chief Operator in the Windham telephone office. Mom did not seek a position over here because she would have bumped one of her new neighbors from a job. Instead, she opted – with Dad's help – to raise kids, a house, a garden and meat hens. (The mean roosters didn't stand a chance; they were "the first to go"!)

The garden produced well. Once in the '60s when Mr. Mookas of the Acropolis came to pay his taxes, he saw her carrying a bushel of beans down the garden path. By the time she reached him, he had \$3.00 in his hand to buy the basket for his boarders. Mom wisely refused, saying they were to feed her family for the winter. The next year the bean crop failed, so those 80 quarts of beans ended up feeding us for *two* years!

Early in marriage Mom became the unofficial bookkeeper for the tax collector. Each January, Dad would take on KP duty as "the least he could do" for his assistant. Mom was elected to the post upon his death, so between them, the

tax collector lived on Turk Hollow for around 60 years. We still have an envelope from the '60s (the last time the county motor paved Route 3) cleverly addressed to the Tax Collector on Holey Turk Hollow Road.

Like other young wives of the '50s, Mom was active in the life of the community and the church. A Granger for many years, she played Grange songs and many a Christmas carol on "the old tin can", her private nickname for the perpetually out of tune gray upright piano in front of the stage. Sometimes Dad played the violin with her. The Ladies Aid lost no time in placing a certain red suit in her custody saying, "We know *you* will take care of it!" (Ditto the church membership book which had been lost for decades.) Consequently the suit came to reside with us where its homespun appearance has changed little over the years.

Mom always sang in the choir "back home," so it was natural for her to attend church in Halcott. Claretta Reynolds was quick to recruit her as Sunday School teacher for the two and three year old class. She asked Claretta what she expected her to teach such little ones, then set to work. (Mom wasn't the granddaughter of a one room schoolhouse teacher for nothing!) Over the years, she gave many Halcott kids their first introduction to formal schooling. At the height of the Halcott baby boom, I think there were 17 chairs around her table in

the back corner of the church.
Incredible!

Sis (Arlene) Griffin was church pianist before leaving town in the late '50s as Mrs. Herb Needleman. Once again, Mom was recruited for what became a mere 60 year stint until failing eyesight forced her retirement from the bench. A child of the '30s, she (like Dad) had received the unheard of gift of free music lessons. Out of gratitude, Mom returned it to God by never accepting any pay for playing the piano during Sunday services. Along the way, she often had a choir. In time, soprano Doris Reynolds moved away and alto Glennie VanValkenburgh died. Soon after that, Shirley Bouton and Mom had the good sense to buy robes and start a youth choir for the teen boomers who were ready to stop attending Sunday School. Members came and went, but that choir sang every Sunday for over 40 years.

There were many capable housewives in town, so there was no need for Mom to become much involved in 4H, Juvenile Grange, Ladies Aid and the like. She *did* enjoy Home Demonstration Programs, although her participation halted when Fleischmanns High School merged with Margaretville Central School and a new cafeteria cook was needed. For 25 years Mom greeted and fed kids, *lots* of them, before retiring in 1993 as cafeteria manager, having once

more put her bookkeeping skills to work for the taxpayer.

Mom was no stranger to hardship. At the age of seven she saw her father collapse near death. Soon afterward, the farm was lost along with her later dream of college. In the year my brother was born, a dozen of our parents' immediate family members died while the pastor (who later apologized) remained silent to their grief. Then Mom was widowed at the age of 47, lost a 42 year old daughter (nearly dying herself in the process), dove into chemo at the age of 90 and lost her "third daughter" shortly before her own death. No wonder the scripture passage read at her funeral (Proverbs 31) was about a strong woman. Yet she had a good life and held on to her faith.

I came across Mom's prayer list the other day, creases worn through and edges tattered from nightly handling over the years . . . so many categories and names (maybe yours!). Mom was a Prayer Warrior, in it for the long haul. Each Sunday she took *two* prayer lists home so she could lift people in prayer in different rooms. When someone persistent in prayer (like Mom or Nancy Ballard) leaves us, the void takes on an added dimension, especially at the end of a generation. It is up to those of us who remain to take up the challenge and fill that gap. Tall order!

The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Winter 2020 *Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*



The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Winter Worship Hour

This winter, worship will be held at 5:30 p.m. on Sundays. Wearing masks, refraining from singing, and use of alternate pews continue. We believe it is safe for you to attend. Sometime in the spring TBA, we plan to resume morning worship.

On A Personal Note

As I was finishing this column, a phone call came. “Would you be willing to do some caregiving?” Of course I was willing! No one wants an old friend to have to consider nursing home care, especially in a Covid climate. Nevertheless, I had to take an honest assessment of my abilities, and come to the realization that I don’t presently have the physical starch to be a dependable mainstay. How disappointing.

Yet I do have opportunity now to do *something*, as long as folks speak up with, “So and so has such and such a need. Can you help?” or “I need this or that. Are you available tomorrow?” I don’t do social media, so please remember to ask.

* Resources: I might have what you need (even baby items), or know who to call, where to get things, and how to “make do” in creative ways.

* Time: I can offer a ride or sit with the homebound (as Covid restrictions allow),

pick up groceries and prescriptions, share a quart of homemade soup or stew, bake a holiday item, be a walking companion, and so on.

* Moral Support: I can converse by phone, write a card and pray.

Why do I find it so important to help? There are countless Biblical references for helping, but I will say this instead. Experiencing loss after being a caregiver is a bit like retiring in one’s prime. One day you are highly productive, making a real difference; the next day you hit a brick wall at full speed and land in the dust while the rest of the world rolls by. Being needed too much can be unhealthy. Not being needed at all is worse. It’s easy to get tired of my own company, and there are limits as to how many times in a row I want to eat the same one dish meal. Under these circumstances, it seems like sharing solves problems for everyone.

Thanksgiving Table Grace Memories

“Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God has done.” wrote the hymnist Rev. Johnson Oatman, Jr. as a chorus for some verses about tough times.

“We don’t pray, so you can just help yourself and go eat,” said the buffet host, who paused before politely adding, “unless you want to pray.” Forks poised in mid-air.

How was that for a Catch 22 on someone else's turf? I grabbed a plate and prayed silently on my way to the food.

I think of this experience as we leave our national holiday of Thanksgiving and round the corner to Advent because 2020 has been such a difficult year for so many. Still, there must be some blessings to be found somewhere amid the hardships. Here are a few that rise to the surface for me.

- * Family and friends who double the joys and halve the sorrows, AND Good Samaritans who rush to pick you up when you go down,

- * Neighbors who are neighborly, who share info, time, advice and resources, AND Speaker phones, face time phone calls and phone calls from Australia,

- * Safe medical and hospital visits, providers who go way beyond "second mile" giving, sources of medicines and supplies,

- * New babies, safely delivered during a

pandemic, with straight baby toes all in a row, and the dexterity to suck on them!

- * Older calloused toes, knobby with arthritis, that still have many miles left in them,

- * The *joie de vivre* of children that bubbles over with welcome contagion,

- * Flowers, lovingly delivered, each an intricate work of Divine art, even if "here today and gone tomorrow",

- * Songbirds, those tiny miracles of migration, so varied in color and song, so industrious and dedicated,

- * Adaptability and good old Yankee ingenuity,

- * Basic necessities we used to take for granted: jobs, homes, vehicle repair shops that are open, internet and phone access,

[Ed Note: In keeping with her sweet cheeriness, Pattie had many other blessings to count, but to quote a master, "If everyone of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."]

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