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Marvelous Mural

by Kim Nowatzke



Neil Kienitz works on the mural for the NECA Northern Indiana Chapter office. The underpainting in burnt sienna can be seen on the two panels.

Thanks to the creative inspiration of a Michigan City artist and the foresight of an area executive, personnel and visitors to a Michigan City office can enjoy quite the conversation piece.

When Matthew LaFree started his position as executive manager of the Northern Indiana Chapter of National Electrical Contractors Association 3 1/2 years ago, he admired a commissioned 42 x 36-inch piece representing Washington, D.C., in the foyer of the office at 105 Woodland Court. Created in 2001 in honor of the national association's centennial

anniversary, it got LaFree to thinking about what could be done in the office to commemorate 2019's 75th anniversary of the local chapter.

"I thought it would be nice to have something representative of our area instead of D.C.," he explained.

That was when he began the search for a local artist to carry out his vision. He reached out to Janet Bloch, Lubeznik Center for the Arts executive director, who highly recommended Neil Kienitz. LaFree was familiar with Kienitz's work through

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his involvement in a series of South Shore posters. These were produced beginning in the mid-1990s as a mix of commercial and fine art by eight artists to highlight one of the last electric interurban railroads in the United States.

Kienitz and LaFree first began discussing their plans for the NECA project in the summer of 2019.

It would be created in a “realistic style,” Kienitz said. “I wanted it to have a very subtle illustrative style to it – a contemporary feel, but not a cartoony look.”

The two ultimately decided on a three-panel mural measuring 12 feet 2 inches wide and 42 inches high. Each panel measures 48 inches wide and 42 inches tall, with an inch between each panel. Kienitz’s medium for the piece was water-soluble oils.

Kienitz created his first mural in 2004 for Michigan City Animal Hospital, 2525 E. Michigan Blvd. At 13.5 feet wide and 10 feet high, it was quite the undertaking.

“When (owner) Rex Bailey first proposed the idea, it was scary. I told myself, ‘It’s just a big painting,’” Kienitz explained.

The NECA mural would need to symbolize the 11 counties that make up its Northern Indiana chapter, including: Lake and Newton counties in the west, Jasper and Pulaski in the south, and Elkhart, Cass and Kosciusko to the east.

He and LaFree ultimately decided on seven primary subjects that best represented the coverage area: the Dunes, steel mills, Michigan City Lighthouse, a barn, The University of Notre Dame, a Studebaker car and an Oliver tractor.

“I didn’t want to divide them. I wanted to inter-

mingle them,” Kienitz said. “That was probably the biggest challenge for me.”

LaFree wanted to include the Oliver tractor and Studebaker car because they were once manufactured in South Bend. Kienitz said he wanted to minimize the steel mills for aesthetic purposes, but still include the image because it’s an important part of Northwest Indiana history.

For the Studebaker, LaFree sent Kienitz a suggested image. The artist, however, said he must have looked at 700-800 more to be sure, but finally decided on the original one LaFree offered of a 1951 Champion.

“When I finished, I realized that no one was driving the car,” Kienitz said. “We had decided not to have people, but felt it was needed, so we added a silhouette figure inside.”

For some of the other subjects, Kienitz took photographs. For others, such as the barn, the image

materialized out of his own imagination. The barn provided perfect, subtle space to include the NECA logo, while also making sure it wasn’t overpowering.

“At first, the barn didn’t look old enough,” Kienitz said. “I painted over the whole barn with slightly warm and slightly cool grays, then wiped it off with a paper towel to make it look faded.”

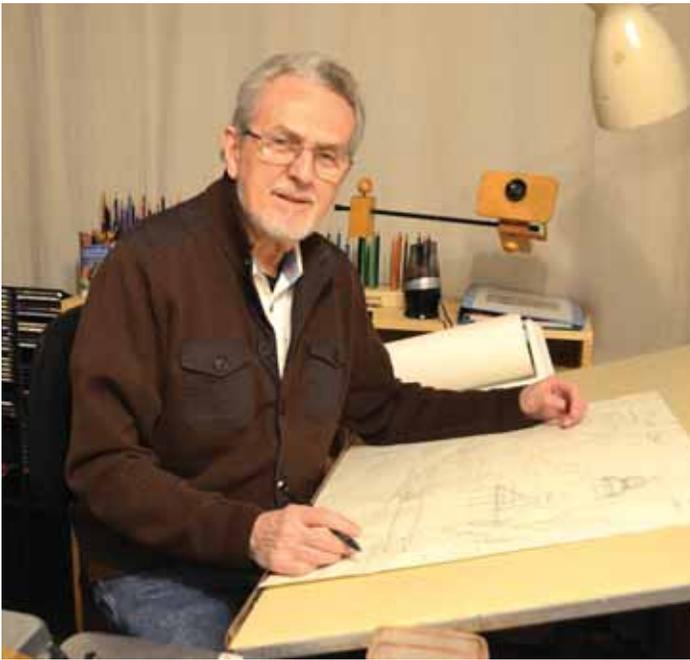
It’s hard to estimate exactly how many hours Kienitz spent on the mural.

“There’s a lot of planning which goes on all the time. It’s not all painting,” he explained. “Art-related things are on my mind all the time.”

Kienitz said he began the drawings for the mural at the start of this year and completely finished the project in April. He had to build the panels on which the mural was ultimately painted. They are constructed out of hardboard, similar to Masonite,



Matt LaFree and Neil Kienitz are photographed with the mural Kienitz created. LaFree is executive manager of the Northern Indiana Chapter of National Electrical Contractors Association.



Neil Kienitz is photographed working on drawings for the NECA 75th anniversary mural.

that is made out of very fine wood products pressed together.

“I like to paint on hardwood panels rather than canvas because they have less spring and a far smoother surface,” Kienitz said.

Next, a special oil primer was used on the panels.

To actually transfer the components of the piece, such as the barn or car, he used a system he’s perfected over the past two decades. First, Kienitz drew each one at a comfortable size. He then took each to *The Beacher* to get copies made at different sizes – both slightly smaller and slightly larger – so he had plenty to consider. He took the cut-out components and placed them all together on one page, which Reprographic Arts enlarged for him.

Kienitz then taped the large page to the panels and placed a piece of homemade graphite paper underneath the drawing. He traced over the drawn components with a red pen, which transferred each to the board. Then, the underpainting process with semi-transparent paint (so as not to cover up the components that have been transferred) began.

“One of the principles of design is harmony, and one of the subprinciples of harmony is repetition,” Kienitz said. “One function of underpainting is to enhance the degree of harmony.”

Kienitz said he knew the dominant color family would be cool-temperature blues, blue-greens and blue-violets, so he wanted a contrasting warm color. He chose burnt sienna. The finished layer of painting (over the underpainting) involves painting shapes and leaving spaces of the underpainting color to shine through to create an illusion of lines. The linework isn’t actually painted. The finished shapes with very narrow spaces between them create the illusion of linework.

Continued on Page 4

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“Often, underpaintings are done in numerous values of one or two colors,” Kienitz said. “It’s not always a flat color as in this case. Underpainting is incredibly important to the creation of fine art.”



Neil Kienitz completes the NECA logo on the rural barn he painted for the office mural.

Kienitz shared another challenge the mural posed.

“Sometimes, I had to be working on two panels at the same time because I had to be using the exact same color and brush load where they lined up,” he



Neil Kienitz paints an Oliver tractor that was once manufactured in South Bend.

said. “The multi-panel process made for an interesting experience.”

While the finished mural hangs in one of the main office spaces easily seen from the lobby entrance, a total of 40 high-quality copies were made by Bukva Imaging. The 11 current NECA board members will receive a 58.5-inch wide by 25-inch high matted and framed copy as a holiday gift, while the remaining 29 former board members will receive an unframed copy.

“We are very pleased with how it turned out,” LaFree said.



This high quality image taken by Walt Bukva of Bukva Imaging was made so copies of the mural could be distributed to present and former board members of the NECA Northern Indiana Chapter.

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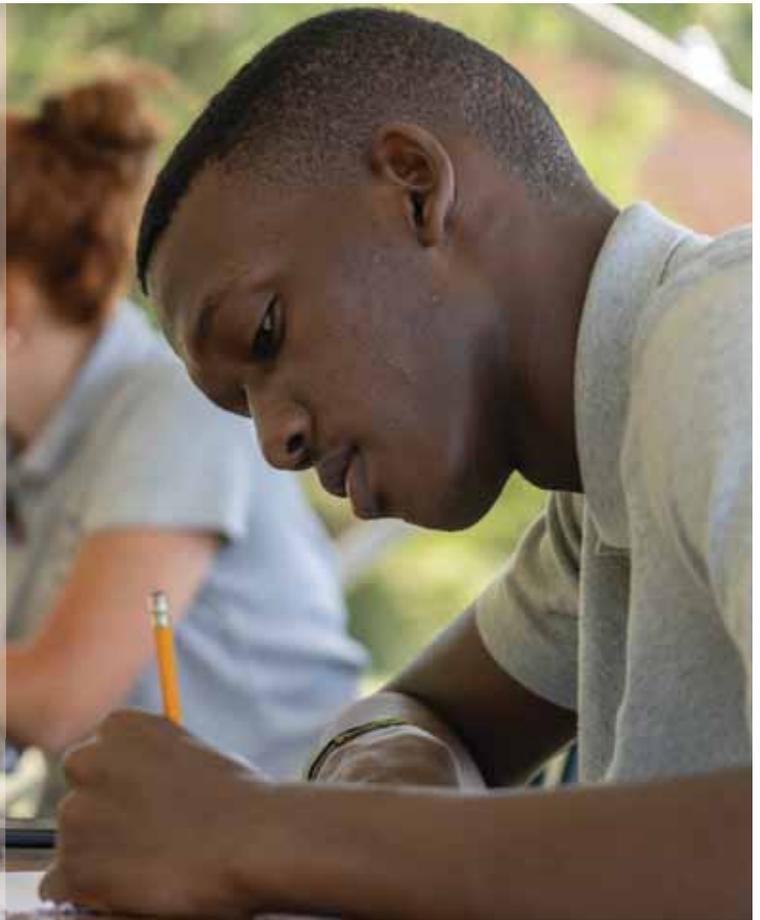
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Holiday at the Pops to Feature Student Apprentices



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LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra will present the 26th annual “Holiday at the Pops” as a virtual concert at 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12.

No in-person seating is planned because of COVID-19. The performance will be recorded live at LaPorte Civic Auditorium, 1001 Ridge St. Conductor Chuck Steck and the LCSO will present holiday favorites, joined by soloists Cripple Creek and tenor Tim King.

The performance, presented without intermission, will include Tchaikovsky’s “Nutcracker Suite,” a new arrangement of “Have Yourself a Merry Little

Christmas” for the gentlemen of Cripple Creek, and arrangements of Mannheim Steamroller and the Trans-Siberian Orchestra.

Eight student apprentices will perform with the full orchestra: Brad Oeseburg, cello; Logan Gard, clarinet; Afyah Giuliani, violin; Jacob Keen, trumpet; Danielle Lilly, bassoon; Ayden Morros, percussion; Victor Sirugo, piano; and Zoe Sleeper, horn.

“Pay per View” tickets are available for \$20 at www.lcso.net only. The concert will be available for viewing until New Year’s Day, 2021.

Visit www.lcso.net for more details.

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Harbor Country Singers

To mark its fifth anniversary, Harbor Country Singers' Christmas celebration will include two free performances Sunday, Dec. 13.

The first concert is at 3 p.m. EST at Sawyer (Mich.) Highlands Church, 13100 Red Arrow Highway. The second is at 6 p.m. EST at Converge Community Church, 601 W. Buffalo St., New Buffalo, Mich.

Sponsored by The School of American Music in Three Oaks, Mich., the program will include familiar carols and songs, performances by area musicians and a debut appearance by a brass quintet assembled especially for the day. A diverse mix of music educators, performers, a farmer and LaPorte City Band members, the players are Madison Kutch and Chuck Steck on trumpet, Donna Mitchell on French horn, Steve Watson on trombone and Richard Watson on tuba.

Both venues will be arranged to accommodate large gatherings and social distancing. Guests will be asked to sign in, and masks will be required for the duration of the concert. Space is limited for the concerts. Visit <https://schoolofamericanmusic.com> for reservations.

The program will be available through Facebook Live on the SAM Facebook page for those unable to attend. The performances are supported by The Pokagon Fund.

Barker Mansion

The staff at Barker Mansion, 631 Washington St., have released the December schedule of events.

December hours are 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. For the three Fridays before Christmas, the hours are from 4 to 9 p.m.

Visitors can stop by to see the gingerbread village, which is designed and built by Michigan City area non-profits and elementary schools.

Tours are available of pop-up exhibits that look at the history and traditions of winter holidays through the ages.

Visit www.barkermansion.com for reservations or more details.



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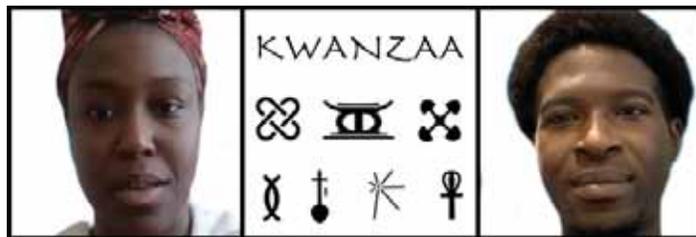
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Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Las Posadas!



Sarah Folkins, Ryan Natalino, Andres Robledo, Bob Thorson and Tito Sanchez-Williams in a reading of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol"

Dunes Arts Foundation (DAF) is offering free multicultural online videos on its website to provide high-quality, family friendly holiday entertainment during this time of social distancing.

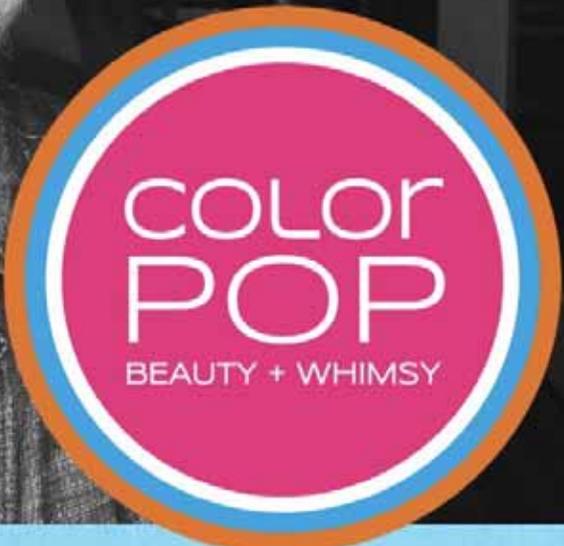


Erin Pettigrew and Patric Johnnie tell Kwanzaa stories

Viewing is free, but a **\$5 donation** is appreciated.

Go to the stories at:
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Dunes Arts Foundation, known for the Dunes Summer Theater, was formed as a nonprofit in 1951. DAF's mission is to provide high-quality performing and fine arts that inspire audiences and promote community spirit. The organization is located at 288 Shady Oak Dr. in Michigan City. The mailing address is P.O. Box 384, Michigan City, IN 46361. For more information visit www.dunesarts.org.



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The Kal-Haven is a Trail for All Seasons



Nothing better than a fall ride on the Kal-Haven.

When we all began sheltering-in-place earlier this year, we reckoned we had better lay in a prudent supply of dry goods.

That meant only one trip: a deadhead run to Country Life Natural Foods at 6451 52nd St. in Pullman, Mich., to lay in a supply of beans, oatmeal, dried fruit, bulgar wheat and whatever else might catch our fancy.

But in going to County Life, we had in the back of our minds a winter walk on the Kal-Haven Trail. How best to get through the pandemic than a walk, in any season, on that linear state park that extends some 33 miles from South Haven and Lake Michigan on the west to Kalamazoo on the east. While the Kal-Haven doesn't actually run into the Celery City, it does connect on the east end with the Kalamazoo Valley River Trail, which will run you right into downtown Ka'zoo.

We know, because we have ridden and walked every inch of the Kal-Haven.

And we knew on that bleak day in late February, when the whole world seemed to be shutting down, that we had to get out for a walk in nature after our provisioning trip to Country Life Natural Foods.

And that's just what we did, even though there was still packed-down snow on the trail from snowmobilers.

So, we charted a course from Pullman to Grand Junction, parked for free in the trail lot and headed east on foot on the Kal-Haven.

I can't begin to tell you how good it felt to be back on that elixir of longevity that we know and love as the Kal-Haven Trail.

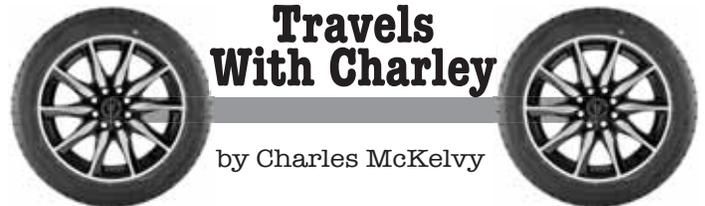
We peered ahead through the tunnel of over-arching trees and imagined what they would look like when they started budding out in spring or fully leafed in summer. And the fall color on the Kal-Haven?

Are you kidding me?

It is to ride for, and ride the Kal-Haven in fall we have. Many times, this, the year of COVID-19.

Allow me to elaborate:

On an absolutely splendid October morn, we put the rack on the car, mounted the bikes to it and headed back to Grand Junction. Gone were the bleak snows of February



Travels With Charley

by Charles McKelvy

and in their place the bright colors of October. The Kal-Haven was awash in fall color. And, having as we do a pair of zippy e-bikes, we effortlessly made short work of the 10 scenic miles between Grand Junction on the west and Gobles on the east.

Oh, and a word about Grand Junction and its eponymous name. Seems the town was the only



Train spotting in Grand Junction

railroad junction between South Haven and Kalamazoo in the 1870s. The west-east running Kalamazoo & South Haven Railroad, upon which the Kal-Haven Trail was created in the late 1980s, and the north-south running Chicago & Michigan Lake Shore Railroad intersected in Grand Junction. Oh, and as an added historical curiosity, Grand Junction was destroyed by a devastating fire on Oct. 8, 1871, the same day as the Great Chicago fire.

But we didn't go to Grand Junction on that grand and glorious October day to study history, nor to watch for trains along the north-south running CSX railroad, which also runs through Harbert and Michigan City.

No, we had a 20-mile, traffic-free bike ride in mind, and we satisfied our ambition and then some by pedaling merrily through that long tunnel of sun-dappled trees. The leaves were turning, and the temperature was a balmy 62 to 68 most of the way. We were properly attired for cool-weather cycling, so what was not to like?

Nothing.

Absolutely nothing.



One of the original trail signs.

And there has been nothing we haven't liked about the Kal-Haven Trail since our friend, Meg Warner, introduced us to it in 1989. We had met Meg, who was working as a veterinarian in South Haven at the time, on

the Shoreline Bicycle Tour in 1987. The ride that year extended from Three Oaks to Traverse City. Our first stop was in South Haven, where Dr. Meg, as we called her, bid us return to her fair city for future cycling adventures. We did, and when she told us of this bold new trail being created between South Haven and Kalamazoo, we headed up for a look, along with the dog Dr. Meg introduced us to, Pokey. Yes, Pokey loved the Kal-Haven. He even took an unplanned plunge into the Black River during one of our spring walks on the trail.

Now, when we return to the Kal-Haven, in any of the four seasons the "trail for all seasons" is open, we think fondly of that lively little Pekinese-Beagle mix we adopted in South Haven in 1987.

We thought of Pokey this summer when we rode from South Haven to Grand Junction. We had him in our hearts as we rode from Grand Junction to Gobles in the fall, and we will have him with us in winter and spring when we bike and/or walk those miles between Gobles and Kalamazoo.

Pokey was our Kal-Haven Trail mascot, and he

still is. He wanted us to enjoy the Kal-Haven for all it's worth. Even though it is absolutely free to ride, it is priceless. All 33 miles.

Even in the dead of winter, when the snow has mostly melted away, the Kal-Haven Trail is a balm for weary souls. We rode the Kal-Haven from Bloomingdale to Kalamazoo and back on Sept. 11, 2001, and we were glad we did. Why, because we found peace and quiet and natural beauty on the trail when the whole world was spiraling into darkness. We couldn't have thought of a better way in which to spend that tragic day in American history. And, ironically, it wasn't a dark day at all, that late summer Tuesday in 2001. It was breathtakingly beautiful, and taking a gentle, purposeful ride on the Kal-Haven was just what we needed before returning to the grim 24/7 cycle of bad news.

The Kal-Haven Trail is well-suited to those on foot (with or without dogs), bicycles, cross-country skis, snowshoes or snowmobiles looking for a way forward in a



Riding and railroading in Bloomingdale. It doesn't get better than this.

world that often seems to be marching backwards.

And so you know, the Kal-Haven Trail is part of Van Buren State Park in South Haven and managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Also, there are 31 panels placed along the trail celebrating Michigan history. Visit them at www.michigan.gov/mhc/.



A sign you're on the Kal-Haven Trail.

to the clearly marked sign that will direct you to the trailhead along Wells Street. You also can contact the Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail at P.O. Box 191, Bloomingdale, MI 49026 or by liking them on Facebook at kalhaven.org.

Ride on!

Kurt Russell and Goldie Hawn are a Treat in “Christmas Chronicles 2”

by Andrew Tallackson



Santa (Kurt Russell, right) and Mrs. Claus (Goldie Hawn, left) take Kate (Darby Camp) and Jack (Jazhir Bruno) on a tour of the North Pole in “The Christmas Chronicles 2,” now streaming on Netflix.

“The Christmas Chronicles” was by no shakes a classic, but there was something fun about watching Kurt Russell shed his Marlboro Man image to play Santa. For once, it looked like he was having fun. Embracing his silly side. And the story was pure Christmas cheer, with the big guy in red inadvertently helping a family in mourning rediscover a little joy in their lives.

The success of that 2018 Netflix film – it was one of the streaming platform’s most-watched offerings that year – made a follow-up inevitable. And like most sequels, “The Christmas Chronicles 2” ups the ante with way more special effects than is necessary. But if we squealed with delight upon seeing Russell’s longtime love, Goldie Hawn, pop up at the end as Mrs. Claus, then Round Two is savvy enough to know more of these two is in order. And that is what we get: two movie stars, united personally for nearly 40 years, delighted at being together in a story that at times is overkill, but more often that not delivers the goods.

Now streaming on Netflix, “The Christmas Chronicles 2” introduces two parallel stories that eventually weave into one. The first involves a former elf turned disgruntled human, Belsnickel (Julian Dennison, “Deadpool 2”), who wants revenge for being exiled many years ago by Santa and Mrs. Claus. His plans involve somehow stripping the



“The Christmas Chronicles 2”

*Running time: 112 minutes. Streaming on Netflix.
Rated PG for mild action/violence and brief language*

North Pole, and all of its toy-making shops, of their power, thereby denying children the thrill of opening their presents on Christmas.

The second story thread involves a returning character from the first movie, Kate Pierce (Darby Camp), now a teen and unhappy her mother (Kimberly Williams-Paisley) is dating again after their father’s death. The suitor, Bob (Tyrese Gibson), is a good guy with an anxious, but sweet son, Jack (Jazhir Bruno). They’re all on vacation in Cancun, which Kate appears ready to flee for home. Kate has become one of those whiny, sullen teens who complains about everything, and who views everyone as morally inferior to her. So, yeah, not a barrel of laughs, but thank heavens for Bruno as Jack. The young actor, who just appeared in the HBO Max remake of “The Witches,” is adorable: a bundle of energy and good cheer in the face of Kate’s whoa-is-me demeanor.

Eventually, Kate, Jack and Belsnickel end up at the North Pole, and when Belsnickel’s plans swing into high gear, it’s up to Santa, Mrs. Claus, Kate



Belsnickel (Julian Dennison) attempts to destroy Christmas in "The Christmas Chronicles 2."

and Jack to save the day.

Watching Russell and Hawn together, their relaxed chemistry propelling scene after scene, you have to wonder why these two haven't done more movies together. They click for all the obvious reasons. She is all gentle, maternal love, he is playful and easygoing. Russell also gets another big musical sequence, this time at a Boston airport and with Darlene Love, herself, joining in for a rousing Christmas tune.

Of course, Kate will come to peace with her family's state of flux, and the Clauses will find a way to triumph. Who wants to watch a movie like this if it ends on a sour note? Director Chris Columbus ("Home Alone," the first two "Harry Potter" films) piles on the visuals, the most epic fail being the chintzy elves that look like effects, not actual beings. There also are a fair share of chase sequences, high in the sky above otherwise serene landscapes. We don't really need these big moments because Russell and Hawn are so perfect together. The belong together.



Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com



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HBO's "The Undoing" is a Masterful, Thrilling Whodunit

by Andrew Tallackson

Two episodes into "The Undoing," HBO's deviously entertaining adaptation of a 2014 novel by Jean Hanff Korelitz, an article appeared online dismissing it not just as shallow, but also as "white entitlement porn."

Now *that's* not a phrase you hear every day. Unsure what the writer meant, I was intrigued to read beyond the attention-grabbing headline. It seems the writer placed the six-episode limited series in the context of the college admissions scandal in which wealthy white celebrities bribed certain schools to gain easy acceptance for their children. "The Undoing," thus, was a way for viewers to "get off" on the story of affluent whites taking a nasty tumble. That the show relished their downfall, while also trying to elicit sympathy for them, was deemed irresponsible. Characters such as these, it was argued, do not warrant our empathy.

What a crazy reactionary world we live in! Evaluating entertainment on a case-by-case basis apparently is no longer the norm. If something clashes with our personal beliefs, then by golly, no one else better have access to it.

Yes, "The Undoing" is set in the world of New York's white elite, and yes, their extravagant lifestyle is the subject of much rumination over the course of the series. But it also exists as the type of juicy mystery Hitchcock favored, where a woman fears her husband is not the man she married, that he may harbor dark secrets that include adultery and murder. As a twists-and-turns thriller, the show is hypnotic, featuring some of the year's best performances.

Like any thriller that involves a brutal fall from grace, the Manhattanites at the center of "The Undoing" appear to have an idyllic existence. Grace (Nicole Kidman) is a successful psychotherapist. Her husband, Jonathan (Hugh Grant), is a beloved oncologist. Their son, Henry (Noah Jupe), attends an elite middle school where yearly tuition hovers at \$50,000.

Grace is active at the school, her latest endeavor being an auction to raise scholarships for families that can't afford to send their children there. And it is through the auction that Grace meets one of the moms, Elena Alves (Matilda De Angelis). Talk about an odd bird. She seems fixated on Grace, the most awkward exchange between the two unfolding in the bathroom at her gym, where a totally nude Elena thanks Grace for her kindness. And at the auction itself, Elena appears on the verge of mental collapses, leaving early.

The next day, Elena is found savagely murdered



Hugh Grant and Nicole Kidman star as a wealthy couple under fire after he's accused of murder in HBO's "The Undoing."

in her artist studio. Worse, Jonathan is missing and considered the prime suspect.

"The Undoing," directed by Susanne Bier ("Bird Box"), was adapted by the prolific David E. Kelley ("Ally McBeal," "The Practice") who, lately, with shows like "Big Little Lies" and "Mr. Mercedes," is fascinated by the dark underbelly within society, one that lurks beneath the surface before erupting in a fury of uncontrollable violence. And what "The Undoing" is really about, much like Gillian Flynn's masterful "Gone Girl," is this: How well do you really know your spouse? The secrets that lurk in the dark corners of every marriage.

As a thriller, "The Undoing" relishes what's called the "misdirect." It sends you down as many rabbit holes as possible before the killer is revealed. And the suspects in Elena's death are endless. Not just Grace and Jonathan, but also Grace's father, Franklin (Donald Sutherland), Elena's husband, Fernando (Ismael Cruz Córdova), even Grace's son, Henry.

Kidman is phenomenal here. Really, with "The Undoing" and "Big Little Lies," she's doing some of the best work of her career. Watch her in the early scenes, when detectives drop bombshell after bombshell about Jonathan. Her eyes blaze with shock, her body language retreating into betrayal, fol-



Turning in the show's most delicious performance is Noma Dumezweni (right) as attorney Haley Fitzgerald.

lowed by feverish attempts to pull it together. And because we are never sure if Grace is the guilty culprit, the character is a fascinating portrait of a wife and mother under fire, matched scene for scene by Grant, shucking the stammering romantic lead shtick that made him a star in favor of constant moral ambiguity.

Grace's well-intentioned desire to save her family comes under constant scrutiny from Haley Fitzgerald, the high-powered attorney hired by Franklin to represent Jonathan in court. She's played by Noma Dumezweni in the most delicious performance of the series. "People hire me to create muck," she declares, and by that she means create an element of doubt in terms of the evidence stacked against Jonathan. And as a successful black woman, she can't help but put Jonathan's decision to flee in the context of white privilege: "It is what rich, white people do when threatened. They conceal the ugly truth to protect themselves and their family units, their places in society, their public image, and they think that can get away with it because they're rich."

Is Jonathan guilty of using his wealth to cloud all suspicions leveled against him...or is he covering for someone else? The last 15 minutes of the sixth and final episode unleash a jawdropping revelation, followed by a pulse-pounding chase that will scorch your nerves.

For all its lofty discussions on wealth and entitlement, "The Undoing" also wants to entertain, to keep us guessing right until the end, thrilling us in the process. It succeeds.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

“Superintelligence” Emerges as a Sweet Love Story

by Andrew Tallackson



Melissa McCarthy and Bobby Cannavale star as a former couple reunited by a computer in “Superintelligence,” now streaming on HBO Max.

“Superintelligence” begins as a high-concept comedy about an inquisitive, potentially dangerous form of artificial intelligence, then reinvents itself as a sweet rom-com about a woman who regrets walking away from the love of her life.

The shift in tone is radical, but it is the love story of “Superintelligence” that makes it more, and more satisfying, than the high concept that kickstarts it.

The movie, now streaming through HBO Max, is the fourth collaboration between its star, Melissa McCarthy, and her director-husband Ben Falcone, their past efforts including “Life of the Party,” “The Boss” and “Tammy.” This is my favorite because it reintroduces McCarthy on a softer note.

What do I mean by that? In comedies like “The Heat” with Sandra Bullock and “Identity Theft” with Jason Bateman, McCarthy wields profanity like weapons of mass destruction. As if she aims to shock you into submission. Now, I am no prude, but when every sentence is crammed with every identified variation of the F bomb, the laughs are like an assault. “Superintelligence,” however, is a reminder that a PG rating does not dilute McCarthy’s gifts as a comedienne. It redirects them somewhere special.



“Superintelligence”

Running time: 106 minutes. Streaming on HBO Max. Rated PG for some suggestive material, language and thematic elements

She plays Carol Peters, who left the corporate world for philanthropic efforts, but with those plans at a standstill can’t gain re-entry into executive-level positions. During a job interview conducted by a former college roommate, Carol is asked to conduct the conversations while seated on an oversized bean bag, a scene that capitalizes on McCarthy’s deft skills at physical comedy.

And it is after the interview, which goes terribly flat, that Carol is contacted by a sentient, superintelligent entity who speaks in the form of late-night talk show host James Corden, Carol’s favorite celebrity. Turns out, the artificial intelligence is curious about humanity, about what makes it tick. And he’s selected Carol because it deemed her “average,” which as Carol learns, is not meant as a compliment.

With the “plot” now in motion, the film can go one



James Corden provides the voice and image of the artificial intelligence orchestrating the reunion of Carol and George.

outlandish sight gag after another, or deepen her experience with life itself. Surprisingly, and thankfully, “Superintelligence,” written with sly wit by Steve Mallory, goes for Door No. 2.

Now, having Corden voice the A.I. entity feels more like a product of the movie’s high concept, not because Corden’s dialogue is particularly clever. Although, the fact that the entity’s voice changes when someone other than Carol speaks to it leads to a supersized laugh thanks to her good friend Dennis (live-wire scene-stealer Brian Tyree Henry).

But back to Carol. It seems she walked away from a perfectly good relationship with a college professor, George, to redefine herself within the charitable sector. It remains her greatest regret. She still loves him.

A film like “Superintelligence,” which asks us to believe a romantic spark still exists with George, sinks or swims based on whether we believe the chemistry between Carol and George. He is played by one my favorite actors, Bobby Cannavale (“The Station Agent,” “The Irishman”), a performer who, like McCarthy, can be outrageously brash one minute, gently subdued the next. He is the perfect match for McCarthy. The minute George and Carol run into each other at a local market, we see it instantly. The way he looks at her. He’s still interested. And the blessing of Mallory’s script is, there is no other woman, just a regrettable deadline: He’s leaving for a new teaching position in Ireland. How effortlessly McCarthy and Cannavale feed off each other lends considerable charm to their rekindled relationship. You root for these two.

That is definitely true during the climax of “Superintelligence” in which the James Corden-voiced computer appears intent on destroying the world. No needless special effects, no scenes of mass chaos. Instead, Carol, alone, in tears, yearning for more time with George. As she proved in her vastly underrated “Can You Ever Forgive Me?,” McCarthy can ditch vulgar theatrics and effectively tug at your heart.

Indeed, “Superintelligence” is full of surprises.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at drew@thebeacher.com

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Rotary Club Alinsky Award

The Michigan City Rotary Club is accepting nominations for the Paul J. Alinsky Excellence Award through Jan. 9.

The annual award honors the late Paul Alinsky, who was a past chamber board chairman, Rotary Club president and Sentinel Alarm Co. founder. He passed away in 1997. It recognizes someone from the community who exhibits dedication to community service and excellence, passion and innovation in his/her vocation/career.

A nomination form is available at www.mcrotrary.org and must be returned to Michigan City Rotary Club, P.O. Box 9372, Michigan City, IN 46361. The submission deadline is Jan. 9. The recipient will be announced Feb. 11, 2021. The selection committee will include Rotarians and community leaders.

Past recipients include: Les Radke, Bud Ruby, Duane Mertl, Ron Benz, Jerry Karstens, Emerson Spartz, Glen Lubeznik, James Welborne, Kathleen Lang, Bernie Scott, Jan Radford, Tom Ringo, Jim Dworkin, Dr. Lisa Hendricks, Marty Corley, Don Babcock, Al Whitlow, Dion Campbell, Cyndi Davis and Rotary service volunteers. In 2016, in honor of the club's 100th anniversary, the award recognized every Rotary Club member over the past century.

A memorial inscribed with the names of past recipients is on display at City Hall, 100 E. Michigan Blvd. The recipient is awarded a replica of the memorial, along with a contribution to a charity of his/her choice. More information about the Rotary Club of Michigan City is available by visiting www.mcrotrary.org or by following the club on Facebook.

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Bridgman Public Library

Bridgman (Mich.) Public Library will host Karen Dionne's Zoom program, "My 20-Year Journey to Bestselling Author," at 6 p.m. EST Tuesday, Dec. 15.



Dionne

Dionne, a Michigan native and *USA Today* bestselling author, will discuss how she came to write her breakout psychological suspense novel, The Marsh King's Daughter, and the recent followup, The Wicked Sister, both set in Michigan's Upper Peninsula wilderness.

The library is located at 4460 Lake St. The Zoom link can be accessed at www.bridgmanlibrary.com

Museum Launches Virtual Programs

South Bend's The History Museum is launching a series of free weekly virtual programs hosted by staff members.

The schedule includes:

- Dec. 10 – "A Look Back," hosted by Archivist Kristen Madden and exploring images from the museum's archives.
- Dec. 17 — "Artifact Alley," hosted by Registrar Kristi Dunn and providing a look at artifacts from the museum's collections.
- Jan. 7 — "Curiosities of Copshaholm," hosted by Curator of Copshaholm Skylar Stasney and showing rooms and artifacts in the Oliver Mansion.

No reservations are required. Individuals can visit www.historymuseumSB.org or the museum's Facebook page to access the link at 7 p.m. EST the day of the program.

The museum is located at 808 W. Washington St. Visit www.historymuseumSB.org or call (574) 235-9664 for more information.

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Boys & Girls Clubs Seeks Community Support to Reach Campaign Goal

Boys & Girls Clubs of LaPorte County is turning to the community to reach its \$140,000 campaign goal, having raised \$105,000 to date.

In a typical year, BGCLCP provides after-school and summer programming for about 500 children ages 4-18. However, it has made dramatic changes to its operations in response to COVID-19, including: implementing in-depth safety protocols, expanding club hours during school closures and eliminating membership fees so cost does not prevent youth from participating.

At the special extended day clubs, members receive academic support in addition to traditional



Painting pumpkins is just one of the many activities children recently participated in through Boys & Girls Clubs of LaPorte County.

programming that promotes character and healthy lifestyles. In recent weeks, club members have painted pumpkins, played fall bingo, dressed up for themed "Spirit Days" and participated in physical fitness activities.

BGCLPC's Pine and Westcott clubs are scheduled to operate daily from 8:15 a.m. to 6 p.m. until at least Jan. 15.

Contributions to the annual campaign can be made at www.bgclpc.org/give/ or by mail to the Charles

R. Westcott Club, 321 Detroit St., Michigan City, IN 46360.

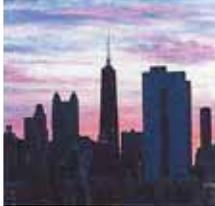
Contact Michelle Shirk at mshirk@bgclubmc.org for more details.

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American Red Cross

The American Red Cross LaPorte County Chapter will sponsor the following bloodmobiles:

- South Central Junior-Senior High School, 9808 S. County Road 600 West, Union Mills, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday, Dec. 11.
- First Church of God, 2020 E. Lincolnway, LaPorte, noon-6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 14.

Donors must be in good general health and feeling well, at least 17 (16 with parental consent) and weigh at least 110 pounds. Call (800) 733-2767 or visit red-crossblood.org for more details. Visit rcblood.org/ together for more details.

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Visit With Santa

Taking COVID-19 into consideration, the YMCA Elston Branch, 1202 Spring St., will host a drive-by visit with Santa from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 12.

Santa will wait in the circle drive to greet families, who can drive by and receive a goodie bag, as well as a chance to drop off letters for the North Pole.

Downtown Cookie Walk

LaPorte's Eighth Annual Downtown Cookie Walk is from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12.

Businesses are asked to prepare and pre-wrap — Ziploc bag or other type of bag — more than 200 cookies. People can buy a collectible 2020 cookie tin, walk downtown and collect a cookie from each participating business.

Due to COVID-19 safety concerns, tins only will be available by reservation. Call Lindsay at (219) 369-3039 or email lindsayj@laportepartnership.com to reserve one (limit one per family). Those who secure a tin receive a designated pickup time, thus eliminating traditional lines the day of the walk. Reserved tins not picked up in advance will be available at 9 a.m. the day of the event at the Santa Chalet in Plaza 618. Participants must have correct change (\$10) to pick up a tin.

Social distancing will be enforced during the pickup process, and masks are required. Businesses are asked to either limit participants in the shops or distribute cookies on the sidewalk.

Call (219) 324-8584 for more details.

Leeds Project Heart

Leeds Public House, 401 Franklin St., has named two recipients of its December Project Heart.

The first is Paladin, which assists people with disabilities, their caretakers, children and seniors. The second is Independent Restaurant Coalition, which supports local restaurants and bars. A portion of drink proceeds in December will benefit both groups. Visit leedspublichouse.com for details.

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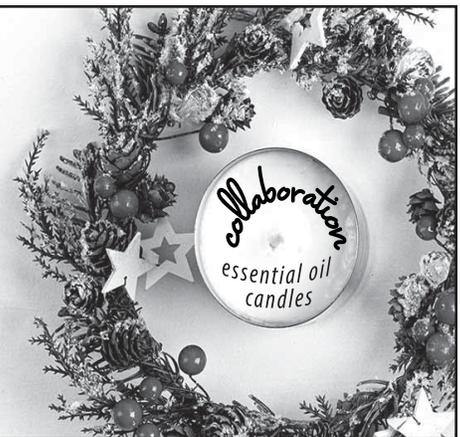
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Activities to Explore

In the Area:

Dec. 10 — HAPPY HANUKKAH!

Dec. 10 — Acorn Watch Party: The Bergamot's Holiday Concert, 8 p.m. EST. Free. Info: www.acornlive.org

Dec. 12 — LaPorte's Eighth Annual Downtown Cookie Walk, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Cookie-tin reservation: (219) 369-3039, lindsayj@laportepartnership.com

Dec. 12 — Drive-by visit with Santa, 10-11:30 a.m., YMCA Elston Branch, 1202 Spring St.

Dec. 12 — High Dunes Hike, 10:30 a.m.-noon, Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

Dec. 12 — Virtual concert, LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra 26th annual "Holiday at the Pops," 7 p.m. Tickets: \$20. Reservations: www.lcso.net

Dec. 12 — Acorn Live Stream: Bryan Lubeck Hosts Christmas at the Acorn, 8 p.m. EST. Free. Info: www.acornlive.org

Dec. 13 — Beginner Bird Drawing & Painting Workshop, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Registration: Kristina Knowski's Arts Facebook event/click on Eventbrite page.

Dec. 13 — Harbor Country Singers' Christmas celebration: two free concerts. Times: 3 p.m. EST @ Sawyer (Mich.) Highlands Church, 13100 Red Arrow Highway/6 p.m. EST @ Converge Community Church, 601 W. Buffalo St., New Buffalo, Mich. Reservations: <https://schoolofamericanmusic.com>. Live streaming through The School of American Music Facebook page.

Dec. 18 — Jeff Daniels Online and Unplugged!, 8 p.m. EST, through The Acorn. Tickets: \$15. Reservations: www.acornlive.org

Through Dec. 31 — New exhibit, "New Views," Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St. Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays/11 a.m.-4 p.m. weekends. Closed Tuesdays. Info: www.lubeznikcenter.org, (219) 874-4900.

Through Jan. 4, 2021 — Works by Jamie McNeil, Queen of All Saints Catholic Church Legacy Center, 1719 E. Barker Ave. Gallery hours: 6 a.m.-8 p.m. Info: jessicar@qas.org.

In the Region

Dec. 10 — South Bend's The History Museum free virtual program, 7 p.m. EST. Topic: "A Look Back," hosted by Archivist Kristen Madden. Access: www.historymuseumSB.org

Dec. 15 — Bridgman (Mich.) Public Library Zoom program, Karen Dionne's, "My 20-Year Journey to Bestselling Author," 6 p.m. EST. Zoom link: www.bridgmanlibrary.com

Through Dec. 20 — Elkhart Juried Regional Art Exhibition, Midwest Museum of American Art, 429 S. Main St., Elkhart. Hours (all times Eastern): 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tues.-Fri., 1-4 p.m. Sat.-Sun. Info:

info@midwestmuseum.us, (574) 293-6660.

Through Dec. 23 — Holiday Gift Gallery, Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Shopping hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tue., Thur., Fri.; 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat.; additional Wednesday hours: noon-4 p.m. through Dec. 23; by appointment — (219) 462-9009. Info: www.artbarnschool.org for more details.

Through Jan. 3, 2021 — “A Christmas Story Comes Home Exhibit,” Hammond’s Indiana Welcome Center, 7770 Corinne Drive. Center hours: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. daily. Info: www.achristmasstorycomeshomes.com

Through Jan. 13, 2021 — Members Art Show, Chesterton Art Center, 115 S. Fourth St. Regular business hours: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. Info: www.chestertonart.com, (219) 926-4711.

Through Jan. 16, 2021 — “Series 6,” annual holiday Berrien Artist Guild exhibit, Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph, Mich. Viewing hours: noon-4 p.m. EST Fri.-Sun. Info: (269) 449-2167, www.boxfactoryforthearts.org

Wreaths Across America

The Three Oaks Rebecca Dewey Chapter of the National Daughters of the American Revolution is working to ensure all veterans laid to rest at Fort Custer National Cemetery are honored on National Wreaths Across America Day.

This year, the ceremony will be held simultaneously at more than 2,100 locations across the country Saturday, Dec. 19. The goal is to place a live, balsam fir veteran’s wreath at the headstone of every veteran buried there.

Each wreath sponsorship costs \$15. The Rebecca Dewey Chapter not only is raising money to put wreaths on veteran’s graves, but also a portion of the proceeds will be donated to the local Blue Star Mothers group and a local veteran’s group. Funds will be collected through Dec. 15.

Fort Custer National Cemetery is located in Augusta, Mich. Anyone interested in donating to the Wreaths Across America effort, or needs additional information, should contact Sandy Wilhoit, Rebecca Dewey NS-DAR, at sswilhoit@aol.com

Holiday Gift Gallery

Art Barn School of Art’s Holiday Gift Gallery will sell fine art and fine crafts to support local artists and art-educational programs.

Shopping hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, additional Wednesday hours from noon to 4 p.m. through Dec. 23 or by appointment by calling (219) 462-9009.

Art Barn is located at 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso. Visit www.artbarnschool.org for more details.

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**THIS WEEK
IN HISTORY**

On December 10, 1520, Martin Luther publicly burned the papal edict that demanded he recant or face excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church.

On December 10, 1830, Emily Dickinson, America's most important woman poet, was born in Amherst, Mass.

On December 10, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt was awarded the Noble Prize for his role in ending the Russo-Japanese War.

On December 10, 1917, in an area outside Omaha, Father Edward Flanagan founded Boys Town.

On December 10, 1948, Chicago's Meigs Field was officially opened.

On December 11, 1719, the first recorded New England sighting of the Aurora Borealis took place.

On December 11, 1901, Guglielmo Marconi received the first radio signal sent across the Atlantic Ocean. The signal traveled from England to Newfoundland, a distance of approximately 2,000 miles.

On December 11, 1909, the first public showing of movies in color was achieved by running film through red and green screens. Many viewers complained of headaches.

On December 11, 1936, upon the abdication of King Edward VIII, the Duke of York became the British ruler, taking the title of King George VI.

On December 12, 1792, in Vienna, Ludwig van Beethoven, 22, paid 19 cents for his first music lesson from Franz Joseph Haydn.

On December 12, 1870, South Carolina's Joseph Raney became the first black to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.

On December 12, 1901, the first radio signal to cross the Atlantic was picked up in Newfoundland by inventor Guglielmo Marconi – transmitted from 2,000 miles away.

On December 12, 1925, the nation's first motel, which went by the name "Motel Inn," opened in the California city of San Luis Obispo.

On December 12, 1977, 29 people were killed, including the entire University of Evansville basketball team, when their DC-3 crashed on takeoff from Indiana's Evansville airport.

On December 13, 1769, New Hampshire's Dartmouth College received its charter.

On December 13, 1927, Yehudi Menuhin, a 10-year-old child violinist, made his successful New York debut in Carnegie Hall. After the triumphant recital, he was asked what he would like next. "Some ice cream," was his reply.

On December 13, 1928, George Gershwin's "An American in Paris" premiered in New York's Carnegie Hall.

On December 13, 1978, the ill-fated "Susan B. Anthony" dollar was issued by the U.S. Mint.

On December 13, 1993, the space shuttle Endeavour returned from its mission to repair the Hubble Space Telescope.

On December 14, 1902, the cable ship Silverton set out from San Francisco to lay the first cable from the mainland to Honolulu. On Jan. 1, 1903, the cable was ready to transmit messages.

On December 14, 1910, a \$10 million gift from Andrew Carnegie established the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The purpose was to work toward peace through research, publications and other educational activities.

On December 14, 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundson made the first recorded visit to the South Pole, beating out an expedition by Robert F. Scott.

On December 14, 1972, after three days of exploration, the Apollo 17 astronauts blasted off from the surface of the Moon.

On December 15, 1791, the first law school in the United States was born when the trustees of the University of Pennsylvania elected James Wilson to the post of professor of law.

On December 15, 1890, "Sitting Bull," chief of the Sioux Indian nation, was shot and killed in South Dakota in a skirmish with federal troops.

On December 15, 1939, "Gone With the Wind" premiered at Loew's Grand Theater in Atlanta.

On December 15, 1987, Gary Hart, who dropped out of the race for the Democratic presidential nomination because of his relationship with model Donna Rice, returned to the campaign, saying, "Let's let the people decide." They did, and he lost.

On December 15, 2000, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine closed for good.

On December 16, 1773, at the world-famous Boston Tea Party, American colonists (dressed as Indians) boarded a British ship, at anchor in Boston Harbor, and threw 342 chests of tea into the water.

On December 16, 1916, Grigori Rasputin, the "mad monk" who wielded a mystical influence over the Czar and Czarina of Russia, was lured to a Petrograd palace and poisoned. When this failed to kill him, he was stabbed to death and his body sunk beneath the ice of a local canal.

On December 16, 1959, The Second City improvisational comedy troupe staged its first performance in Chicago.

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*Thank you for your patience
during the COVID-19 pandemic*

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Prayer to the Blessed Virgin

(Never known to fail.)

Oh, most beautiful flower of Mt. Carmel, fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my necessity. Oh, Star of the 'Sea, help me and show me, herein you are my mother. Oh Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth! I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart to succor me in this necessity. There are none that can withstand your power. Oh, show me herein you are my mother. Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee (3x). Holy Mother, I place this cause in your hands (3x). Holy Spirit, you who solve all problems, light all roads so that I can attain my goal. You who gave me the divine gift to forgive and forget all evil against me and that in all instances in my life you are with me. I want in this short prayer to thank you for all things as you confirm once again that I never want to be separated from you in Eternal Glory. Thank you for your mercy toward me and mine. The person must say this prayer 3 consecutive days. After 3 days, the request will be granted. This prayer must be published after the favor is granted.

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Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter

The Law of Innocence by Michael Connelly
(hardcover, \$29 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook. 421 pages.)

WOW. That one word actually could be my whole review. However, I am too excited to not tell you more. What a surprise this story is! Monty Python said “and now for something completely different,” and no where else has that been more true.

“Innocence is not a legal term...The justice system can only deliver a verdict of guilty or not guilty...”

“The law of innocence is unwritten...for every man not guilty of a crime, there is a man out there who is. And to prove true innocence, the guilty man must be found and exposed to the world.”

Thoughts for quiet contemplation, right? You may say it's only semantics, but isn't that what law is all about? A lot of words that lawyers hope will sway a jury or judge to their way of thinking?

The star of this story is Mickey Haller, Connelly's Lincoln Lawyer, famous in many novels and even on the big screen with Matthew McConaughey as Haller.

This latest Lincoln Lawyer novel had me immediately drawn to a plot that puts Haller in the precarious position of having himself as a client. Made me think of “*physician, heal thyself.*”

Haller has given up the booze, so he's quite sober as he leaves a bar one night, only to be pulled over by LAPD. It seems like a bogus stop, until the cop notices the back license plate is missing and insists he look in the trunk — liquid of some kind is dripping out from underneath....

Not good. The trunk contains the body of a man, bound and shot in the head. And, he is known to Haller as a former client — Sam Scales. Sam owed Haller a lot of money for representing him in several court cases. The prosecutor thinks that's enough cause for a murder charge.

One day you're a successful lawyer in L.A., the next you're in jail charged with murder. Bummer. Time to get his team together.

Haller's ex-wife, Dana, who works in the D.A.'s office, is on board as his stand-in lawyer, along with his half-brother, Harry Bosch, now retired from the LAPD, Cisco Wojciechowski, his investigator, and Lorna Taylor, his case manager. Now, where to begin?

Here's the problem — it is proven Scales was killed in Haller's garage and apparently, an unsus-

pecting Haller drove his body around the next day without knowing it, until he was stopped by Officer Walton.

The prosecutor, Dana Berg, known around the courthouse as Death Row Dana, fights Judge Warfield to impose a \$5 million bond on Haller. That's 10 percent to a bail bondsman, and money Haller can't get his hands on. So, it's off to the Twin Towers Correctional Center to begin working on his case from a jail cell with help from daily visits from his team.

The heart of Haller's case is to get a not-guilty verdict, clear his name and find out why Scales was murdered, by whom and why he was chosen as the fall guy?

The autopsy on Scales shows biofuel elements under his fingernails. This leads the Haller team to a company called BioGreen and another former client of Haller's named Louis Opparizio. Still not seeing any connection to the murder and Haller? Keep digging.

As Haller explains, “*The paper trail of a case is a living thing that grows and changes.*” His team is amassing a notebook full of papers, but where is it leading? Connelly explains the legal finagling for us armchair lawyers. The sneaky way both the defense and prosecution try to outfox each other is a ballet in motion — dancing around the facts known and unknown, trying to keep ahead of each other. Picking the jurors is a lesson in psychology — looking for men and women who might be sympathetic to Haller's

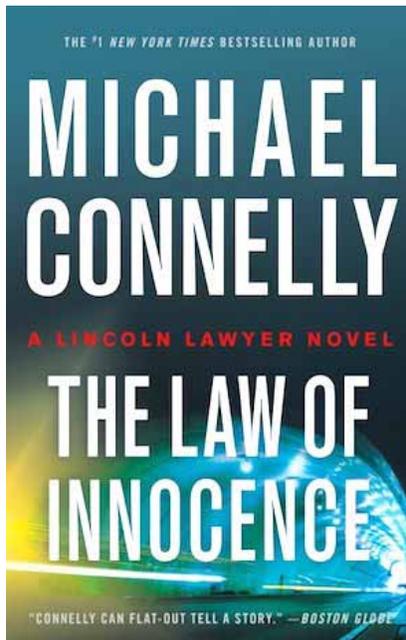
plight involves a lot of variables.

A break — maybe — occurs when two FBI agents visit Haller. Why are they interesting in the murder of a con man? The case might be embedded within a federal case, having something to do with the day Haller is beat up on the bus taking prisoners from court back to jail. Time to start looking in other directions.

Like John Grisham, Connelly guides us through the mystifying legal system, never letting up on the action and endgame — who did what to whom and why? And, in this case, clearing the name of a brilliant defense lawyer before he gets killed.

Written in first person, we get an up close and personal view of our legal system. It may not always be pretty, but it always begs the question: Is justice really blind?

Till next time, happy reading!



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