

Britney, Bennifer, Beatles and Broadway POP CULTURE IN 2021

BY JOCELYN NOVECK
AP National Writer

Britney was freed. Bennifer came back. So did Broadway, yay! And actually, the Beatles! As for Bond — James Bond — he said goodbye, at least the Daniel Craig version.

Harry and Meghan spoke to Oprah, and boy, we listened. We listened, too, to Taylor Swift, who sang about a failed affair and a still-missing scarf (ex-lovers: hang onto knitwear at your peril!)

It was a year for reunions: The cast of “Friends,” for example, and three of the “Sex and the City” foursome, in a reboot. And revivals: “West Side Story” made an Oscar-buzzy splash 60 years after the original. Even Tony Soprano came back, sort of, for a minute.

Live entertainment brought a wary joy — wary because at any time, it could stop. And nice guys won out — at least in TV comedy, where “Ted Lasso,” Jason Sudeikis’ show about an endearingly earnest American coach transplanted to cutthroat British football, swept the Emmys. The whole “Ted Lasso” cast was great, but if we’re seeking to capture the mood of the year, let’s maybe look to the goldfish.

Who? You know, the goldfish. The happiest animal, Lasso likes to tell his players, because it only has a 10-second memory (though science may beg to differ). That’s good when you’re holding a grudge in sports, but also when you’re trying to get through a rollercoaster year like 2021, when we thought we were up and then we were down again. And again. And again.

So here’s to you, happy goldfish. And here’s our annual, highly subjective trip down pop culture memory lane:

JANUARY

On Inauguration Day, a star is born, and we’re not talking about an elected official. Amanda Gorman, 22, captivates a nation, reciting “The Hill We Climb” in her distinctive yellow coat and red hairband. Within hours, the eloquent national youth poet laureate

has gained more than a million followers on Instagram (now close to 4 million); soon, she has million-print book orders, a modeling contract and a hosting gig at the Met Gala. Runner-up inauguration star: Bernie Sanders’ Mittens’, inspiration for many a bobblehead.

FEBRUARY

“Could this whole night have been an email?” co-host Tina Fey asks of the Golden Globes, an awkwardly virtual ceremony that still has its moving moments, including a heartbreaking speech by Taylor Simone Ledward, widow of posthumous winner Chadwick Boseman: “I don’t have his words.” These Globes will be remembered, though, for revelations of the shocking lack of diversity in the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. A judge upholds — for now — the conservatorship governing Britney Spears, as a new documentary, “Framing Britney Spears,” shines light on the troubling case.

MARCH

It’s a big night for women at the Grammys, where Swift becomes the first female performer to win album of the year three times, and Beyoncé gets her 28th win to become the most decorated woman in Grammy history. But the biggest news this month is Harry and Meghan’s bombshell interview, in



Britney Spears supporters celebrate the ruling that ends the pop singer’s conservatorship on Nov. 12, 2021, in Los Angeles. A Los Angeles judge ended the conservatorship that has controlled Spears’ life and money for nearly 14 years.

AP PHOTO/CHRIS PIZZELLO, FILE

which Meghan speaks of a fairytale life that turned dark and made her suicidal, and alleges experiencing racism in the royal family.

APRIL

It was about time. Chloé Zhao takes the best director Oscar for her lyrical “Nomadland,” only the second woman in history (and the first woman of color). The in-person but stripped down Oscars bring back red-carpet glamour — that abrupt ending was super weird, though. April is also Titanic anniversary month — worth noting because of Bowen Yang’s hilarious impersonation, on “Saturday

Night Live,” of the iceberg itself, who’s moved past that sinking thing but is eager to promote his album.

MAY

Let’s devote this month to friends — meaning “Friends,” aka Joey and Phoebe and Chandler and Monica and Rachel and Ross, who hold their long-awaited reunion. Among the revelations: A mutual, previously unknown crush between Jennifer Aniston and David Schwimmer, and Lady Gaga’s fondness for Phoebe’s “Smelly Cat.” Also: the monkeys who played Marcel weren’t nice, and this is the last reunion (we’ll see about

that).

JUNE

One of Hollywood’s more compelling relationships is apparently finished. Kim Kardashian West details in “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” why she filed for divorce from Kanye West in February: “I don’t want a husband that lives in a completely different state,” she says, and “I want someone who wants to work out with me.” Spears speaks, telling a judge that she wants her life back. “I’ve lied and told the whole world I’m OK,” she says. She was not.

JULY

Nice guys don’t always

finish last — especially not in 2021, when audiences seem to crave something upbeat and folksy and guileless. The second season of “Ted Lasso” debuts this month, bringing a new set of challenges to the amiable coach and his underdog club, AFC Richmond. In two months, the show will sweep the comedy Emmys — we’re just telling you now, because our September entry will be packed! “Heck of a year,” Sudeikis will say, Lasso-like.

AUGUST

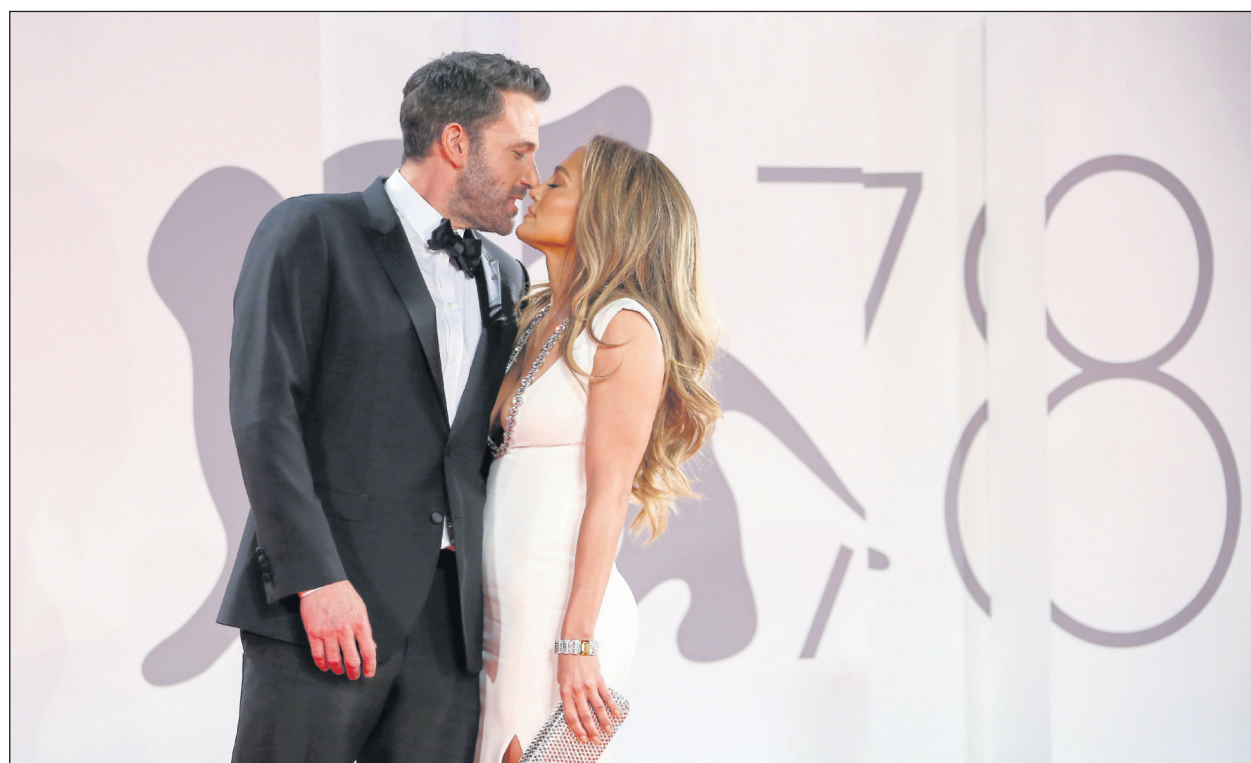
Who saw this coming? It’s Bennifer! Almost 20 years after their very public romance, Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck have found each other again, and they’re packing on the PDA, with paparazzi pics of kissing at dinner, on a yacht, on red carpets. ... The internet rejoices. On a sad note, it’s the end of a rock ‘n’ roll era as Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts — the beat AND heartbeat of the band — dies at age 80, just before the Stones go back on tour.

SEPTEMBER

“There’s no place like home!” That’s the original Glinda, Kristin Chenoweth, welcoming Broadway audiences back to “Wicked.” Enthusiastic post-pandemic theatergoers — masked and vaccinated — also flock to hits like “Waitress,” “Hadestown,” “The Lion King” and “Hamilton.” The Met Gala is back, with mandatory PCR tests and a decidedly young vibe led by hosts Timothée Chalamet (in sweats and high-tops), Billie Eilish, Gorman, and tennis star Naomi Osaka. At the Emmys, it’s Lasso time, and also time to hail comedy heroine Jean Smart, who takes a trophy and basks in her “JEANaissance.” New on TV: the South Korean survival drama “Squid Game,” making an audacious entrance. In the courtroom, music star R. Kelly is convicted of sex trafficking — a milestone in the #MeToo movement, especially for Black victims of sexual abuse.

OCTOBER

In an almost too-good-



Jennifer Lopez (right) and Ben Affleck pose for photographers upon arrival at the premiere of the film “The Last Duel” during the 78th edition of the Venice Film Festival in Venice, Italy, on Sept. 10, 2021.

PHOTO BY JOEL C RYAN/INVISION/AP

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I hardly recognized myself once I stopped shaving

I stopped shaving in August. I just started to let my beard grow.

It was kind of a lark. And then I knew I should just keep it going because my son started to say it really looks good on me.

Then, when I changed glasses frames, I got to the point that nobody was recognizing me anymore.

A couple of editors in the newspaper office thought I was a college professor. They didn’t

know it was Joe.

I stopped to get my daughter’s car serviced at a garage near Bristol, and the owner said I just looked so totally different that he couldn’t hardly figure out it was me.

The same thing happened at a Christmas Eve service at a church near Abingdon. People I have known for more than 20 years could barely recognize me.

All the while, my 15-year-old son kept cheering me on.

By Christmas, my beard had gone past Kenny Rogers level and was approaching ZZ Top.

A neighbor called me Santa Claus.

Somebody else called me Grandpa.

Then, on a road trip through Radford, we stopped at a rest area. I washed my hands and looked in the mirror and didn’t even recognize myself.

By then, I had been growing this beard for four months. I was used to it. But it was freaky to look in a mirror and not even know that was me.

Then, this past week, I was walking barefoot at Virginia Beach, wearing shorts and a light jacket. I did not have on any glasses. And I probably looked weary.

That’s when a strange woman called out to me, near the ocean

waves, asking me if I wanted a bag of bagels.

She said she had just come from working at the homeless shelter around the corner. And I started to wonder what I looked like with the scraggly beard.

Did I look homeless? Did I look like I was getting ready to settle under the fishing pier ahead of me and try to dig out a hole and make it through the night?

I told her I wasn’t homeless and that I was staying in a hotel just up the boardwalk. She had it like she knew me and clumsily carried on a conversation that made absolutely no sense.

I got away and tossed the bagels in a nearby trash can.

And then I went toward another mirror. Had I really gone from a guy with wire-rimmed glasses in the photo that runs with this column to a scraggly, middle-aged guy that looked 10 years older than he really was and was possibly resembling somebody homeless?

At that point, I decided perhaps I had reached the zenith of my beard experiment.

I’ll be shaving soon. My son may be disappointed, but the beard is going away.

But the funny thing is, once I shave it all off, I’ll likely start it all over again.



Joe Tennis

Tennis Anyone?

Injury turns cowboy into a writer

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
 Special to the Bristol Herald Courier

A Tazewell County, Virginia, farmer — who may be one of the last few Appalachian cowboys — is preserving cowboy culture through his writing, lifestyle, and actions.

John Rhudy, a long-time farmer, herds beef cattle on horseback on his Burke's Garden farm, proud to be carrying on an Appalachian lifestyle that started with his family as far back as the 1800s.

But an accident this spring while on a young colt has left the farmer recuperating at home for several weeks, granting him just enough time to pen creative words that speak to the heart of anyone who loves that special place called home.

Not only is Rhudy a caretaker of the land, he's also a writer.

He's always dabbled with words, recognizing his talent ever since his high school teachers encouraged him to pursue a career in English. But, instead, he majored in geography.

And, while the accident is keeping him from mowing hay and mending fences this summer, Rhudy, 52, is still finding plenty of inspiration to write.

He wakes every morning to the beauty of the Burke's Garden community, looking down into the hollow at Banks Ridge where his cattle graze around his mountain home.

The farmer has a knack for composing poems about his passion for the agrarian culture that runs as deeply as his Southwest Virginia roots.

"The accident has made me think about the things I've always wanted to do," said Rhudy, who took a spill from a bucking horse the end of May, causing him to suffer from a pelvic hematoma the size of a softball. While being transferred to Roanoke Memorial Hospital, Rhudy lost nearly half of his blood volume.

With several more weeks to recover, the cowboy said he is pacing himself.

"It's been a slow process. I've used to going and doing," he said. "I've passed my mid-life. If I'm going to do more things, I guess



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

A fall from a horse has taken 52-year-old John Rhudy, shown above and below, from an Appalachian cowboy to a writer and a poet.



now's the time."

He wants to spend more time with his children while they're still living at home. He'd also like to raise and train Border Collie dogs.

And, not far from his thoughts are his plans to pick up a pen and write.

'Outstanding in his field'

"I have somewhat a talent for writing," Rhudy said with a humble voice. "I need to put it to good use to preserve my lifestyle and way of life."

With the user name "Sweat and Bailin' Twine," the farmer has created an account on Substack, an email newsletter platform that also allows journalists to build a portfolio while finding an audi-

ence. His writings, some of which are free to view, can be found at <https://johnrhudy.substack.com>.

The cowboy, whose world is all about working cattle, said he doesn't know much about the publishing world.

"I don't know if I could ever make a living as a writer, but I do want to get the word out about my writing and test the waters," he said.

His writing, "My Mistress," found on Substack, summarizes the love for his home. An excerpt reads, "... I've been here since my day of birth, this valley's my only home. Had to live in other places but my heart did always roam. Back to the fertile fields and the grassland so lush and green. I can't

put forth the words and explain to others what I mean..."

Off the cuff, he wrote a poem this week which describes his recent accident with great detail and emotion. He named it, "The Last Time."

"I look up at the monitors, the gauges and lights I hear, faintly through the earphones on my ears, the sound of the props We soar over land I've ridden gathering cattle although I can't see below I know this for I know the flight paths of med flight from watching them while working I still feel the colt beneath me

The explosion as he tries to get away from whatever troubles him He's been one of the easiest

colts I've started Just goes to show how unpredictable another being can be

I feel the eruption of pain in my abdomen I see the ground coming up to meet me I grab the reins to keep from losing him I remember it all

I count my blessings to feel the pain and remember the why I appreciate the medical professionals doing their jobs And I give thanks for this setback

Knowing I have the chance to heal and go back to the life I love

I also pray I'll never know the last time I'll ever ride a horse

For this is not the last time..."

Spreading the word

Rhudy also finds merit in writing about the struggles of agriculture in modern society.

"People in agriculture make up only 2% of the population in order to feed the whole world," Rhudy, who is dedicated to telling people about the plight of the local farmers and the satisfaction he gains from making a living at it, said.

But, he's afraid farm families are facing extinction.

"We're on the third and fourth generations that have few ties to the land," he said. "Even in rural Tazewell, my children's friends have no grandparents who farm. We have

adults with children who think their food comes from Walmart or McDonalds."

Rhudy sees it as his job to spread the word about agriculture.

"I guess you could call me a freelance PR person for agriculture," he said with a laugh.

Through an earlier friendship made during a team roping event, Rhudy made connections with an editor of "The Roping Pen," a publication for team roping and rodeo, who requested some of Rhudy's writings for publication.

In one of his articles, Rhudy expresses his passion for an industry that may be losing a connection to society. He writes, "Those of us involved in farming and ranching owe it to our way of life to educate the public, which is constantly bombarded by false information from the mainstream media and animal rights/environmental groups."

Where he belongs

Despite his love for raising livestock, Rhudy graduated from Southwest Virginia Community College and Radford University in 1997 with a degree in geography, later earning a master's degree in education in 2019 from Bluefield University.

After college, he worked for Senah Farms in Burke's Garden before finding a job with Clinch Valley Community Action and Head Start where he was a transition and disability supervisor for a year.

He worked for Steele Cattle Services for more than 20 years before the company transitioned to G&G Livestock, his current employer.

"I never take for granted how fortunate I am to live in Burke's Garden. We're blessed with this winding mountain road where we've been able to keep out development," he said.

"This is my home with its fertile farmland and breath-taking scenery. My family moved here in 1802 and they haven't been able to run us off yet."

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at citydesk@bristol-news.com.

NIGHTLIFE CALENDAR

JUNE 28

BLUE RIDGE COMEDY CLUB: Bristol, 620 State, 8 p.m., Not Ones (Hot Sauce Comedy)

BRISTOL HOTEL LUMAC ROOFTOP BAR: Bristol, 510 Birthplace of Country Music Way, June 28, 6 p.m., Keller & the Kinfolk. 276-696-3535.

CAPONE'S: Johnson City,

227 E. Main St. June 28, 7 p.m., Pop Evil. www.caponesejohnsoncity.com or 423-928-2295.

JUNE 29

CASCADE DRAFT HOUSE: Bristol, 828 State St. June 29, 7 p.m., Some Old Friends. 423-573-1185.

JUNE 30

ABINGDON VINEYARDS: Abingdon, 20530 Alvarado Road, 7 p.m., Logan Halstead; July 2, 5 p.m., Justin Wells. 276-623-1255.

BLUE RIDGE COMEDY CLUB: Bristol, 620 State, 8 p.m., Comedy Knockout 4.0. 423-765-3320.

WOLF HILLS BREWING CO:

Abingdon, 149 Deadmore St. June 30, 6 p.m., Larry Keel Experience. 276-477-1953.

JULY 1

BRISTOL HOTEL LUMAC ROOFTOP BAR: Bristol, 510 Birthplace of Country Music Way, July 1, 7 p.m., Carly Booher Edwards & The Barbirds Single Release Concert. 276-696-3535.

CASCADE DRAFT HOUSE: Bristol, 828 State St. July 1, 7 p.m., Arcane Days. 423-573-1185.

DELTA BLUES BBQ: Bristol, 724 State St. 7 p.m., Allskate 423-573-3382

GYPSY CIRCUS CIDER COMPANY: Kingsport, 2645 Fort Henry Dr. 7 p.m., The Dimestore Cowboys. 423-212-5012.

MICHAEL WALTRIP BREWING: Bristol, 221 Moore St. July 1, 7 p.m., Chris Long. 276-821-3020.

QUAKER STEAK & LUBE: Bristol, 629 State St. 8 p.m., James Meadows. 276-644-9464.

See **NIGHTLIFE**, Page D6

Getting the cart before the 15-year-old's lecture

I've had this odd habit of filling up the shopping cart at the grocery store then walking onto another aisle and leaving it sitting there while I'm looking for something else.

My son can't stand that. He's 15. He knows better than me. I've been on this planet three times longer than he has. But, yeah - he knows better than me

Last week, we made a trip to the grocery store and piled all kinds of

stuff in the shopping cart. Then he went one direction and I went off looking for something else. Cheese, I think. Meanwhile, he was running after potato chips, or some such snack.

For a few moments, we lost track of each other.

And then I got a lecture. "Dad, why did you leave the shopping cart just sitting here with all of our stuff? Somebody could've taken it."

"It's not our stuff yet," I said. "It still belongs to the store. All we've done is gather all the stuff in the building in the shopping cart."

"Yeah," he returned. "But we could have had to go around the store and get everything again."

I could not argue with that. That time, he did have the voice of reason.

I guess I just wanted to feel independent and be able to walk freely without pushing the next week's worth of food stuff.

On Wednesday, we went in different directions again at the grocery store.

My son went around one side of the freezer aisles as I went around another.

I grabbed a big, frozen, family-size package of lasagna.

"I got this for later," I said. With those words, I reached over and put the heavy package of frozen lasagna on the bottom of a shopping cart.

Without looking up, I said, "I know this is the store brand and your sister is gonna be mad, but I'm sure she'll have enough spices to put it all together. She'll make it good. She can add extra cheese. We will just leave it in the freezer."

At the end of me saying all that, I looked up and noticed that my store brand lasagna speech was not being

See **TENNIS**, Page D2



Joe Tennis
 Tennis Anyone?

A summer vacation without the gadgetry

Editor's Note: Sharon Randall is off this week. The following column is from 2015.)

On my way back from the post office, I drove past a school. The parking lot sat empty, the place looked abandoned, like a dry well waiting for rain.

Summer vacation. The thought made me smile. As I waited at a red light, something zipped by my window: A boy, 10 or 12, sailed along the sidewalk on a skateboard _ kick, glide, kick, glide _ with his eyes, mind and fingers locked on a cell phone, texting.

When he stopped at the curb just inches shy of traffic, I whispered, "Thank you!" He glanced up to see the light had changed, then skated across the intersection texting all the way. I watched until he was out of sight. When the car behind me honked, I moved on.

Driving home, I kept thinking about that boy. Things have changed since I was his age. Yes, I do mean in more ways than just the discovery of fire.

Summers in my childhood were spent doing ... mostly nothing. We lived miles from town surrounded by cow pastures and apple orchards, with a railroad track 50 yards from our back door.

I remember sitting for hours in an apple tree, daydreaming, watching clouds, tossing apples down to the cows and listening for the rumble of a train. When I heard it in the distance and felt the tree start to tremble, I'd scramble down and hold my breath, waiting.

The cows never knew what to make of it. They'd just stand there looking puzzled. Cows like to do that. If they could scratch their heads, they would. As the engine roared by, I'd jump up and down, scattering the cows and waving my arms at the engineer. He in turn, bless his good, kind heart, would blow the train whistle, just for me.

Talk about fun. Clouds and cows and trees and trains and apples and kindness and, best of all, time to daydream. What more could a child _ or anyone _ want from summer vacation?

My children grew up on the coast of California's Monterey Peninsula surrounded by beaches and parks and urban forests, just a few blocks from the Little League ballfield.

"Go play," I would say, and they would.

I made sure they (and I) had time to daydream. What else is childhood (and motherhood) for? That's what I want for my grandchildren, and for yours: A daydreaming kind of summer.

The skateboarder on his cell phone made me wonder: What will his summer be like? Will he take time to daydream? I surely hope so.

We are all, I believe, contemplative creatures by nature, thoughtful and imaginative and curious.

We long to examine our lives, to understand how we feel, to imagine possibilities and make great decisions for our futures.

Cows aren't the only ones who find it hard to understand what's going on. To do that, we need time to do "nothing," to connect with ourselves and each other with our eyes and words and touch and hearts and souls.

My grandparents often sat on their porch on summer evenings saying

little, enjoying the quiet, waving at passing cars. I loved sitting there with them.

My husband and I have a similar ritual, sitting on the patio, listening to birdsong and marveling at the sunset.

Machines and gadgets are grand inventions. Who would want to give them up? But somehow we need to learn to control how we use them, rather than allowing them to control us and our children and our lives.

It sounds simple, but it's strangely hard to do. We need to summon the courage to shut them off once in a while _ our cell phones, TVs, computers and other diversions _ and allow ourselves the joy of being fully human, fully aware of life in ourselves and in others in the world all around us.

Sometimes we need to do nothing. Especially in summer.

Here's wishing you and yours a summer to daydream.



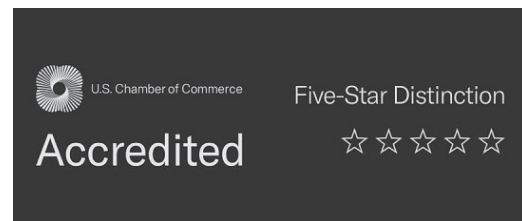
Sharon Randall
My Opinion

U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AWARDS BRISTOL CHAMBER FOURTH CONSECUTIVE 5-STAR ACCREDITATION

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has awarded the Bristol TN/VA Chamber of Commerce with its designation of Accredited with 5 Stars for its sound policies, effective organizational procedures, and positive impact on the community.

"When chambers of commerce earn the distinction of being Accredited, it truly is a mark of excellence for the organization, its staff, and its leadership" said Raymond P. Towle, U.S. Chamber Vice President, Federation Relations and IOM. "This designation recognizes the positive impact these organizations have had within their communities, and it honors their commitment to continuing to serve local businesses. From connecting small business owners with needed resources, to advocating on behalf of their region with lawmakers, these chambers convene thought leaders to strengthen the collective voices of their members."

The purpose of the U.S. Chamber's Accreditation Program is to facilitate continuing excellence in the chamber industry and to foster a pro-business environment across America. In order to receive Accreditation, a chamber must meet minimum standards in their operations and programs, including areas of governance, government affairs, communications, and technology. This extensive self-review can take 6-9 months to complete.



Beth Rhinehart, President & CEO of the Bristol Chamber stated "this incredible accomplishment is the result of a strong team commitment and effort by our entire staff and board. I am so incredibly proud of this recognition as it embodies the work we do on behalf of the community and our businesses".

"This is yet one more example of how the Bristol Chamber continues to reveal itself as the preeminent membership organization for business and strong community partnership" shared Jerry Kirk, Division President for Renasant Bank and Chair of the Bristol Chamber Board of Directors. "I am proud to serve this organization and to support its mission of Advancing Economic Vitality".

Local chambers are rated Accredited, 3-Stars, 4-Stars, or 5-Stars. State chambers are recognized as either Accredited State Chamber or Accredited State Chamber with Distinction. The final determination is made by the Accrediting Board, a committee of U.S. Chamber board members. available on BristolChamber.com



Tennis

From Page D1

heard by my son.

Actually, I had dropped that package into a shopping cart belonging to a man - somebody I did not know.

But, this guy just stood there, smiling and basically starting to laugh at me.

Meanwhile, my son was about 15 yards away with our shopping cart, loaded with the spinach and the bread, and he was standing there laughing at me. "Sorry, dude," I said to the man. "I think I got lost."

The guy laughed and said, "That's OK."

I walked towards my son, feeling every bit as dumb as he has ever made me feel with all of his teen logic lectures. But, this time, I didn't get one of his lectures.

Our laughter kind of just said it all.

jtennis@bristolnews.com

CHAMBER ACCREDITATION FACTS

- The Bristol Chamber first received accreditation by the United States Chamber in 1965, one year after the U.S. Chamber began accrediting chambers
- The Bristol Chamber is the **OLDEST ACCREDITED CHAMBER** in Tennessee and the second oldest in Virginia
- The Bristol Chamber is one of only 7 chambers in both Tennessee (4) and Virginia (3) with a 5-Star Accreditation
 - There are **ONLY 132 5-Star Accredited** chambers in the entire country
 - **ONLY 1.8%** of the country's 7,000 chambers, receive the 5-Star distinction
- The accreditation process can take six months to one year for a chamber to complete
- To gain 5-Star Accreditation means the chamber has met all minimum requirements and **90-100% OF ADDITIONAL CRITERIA.**
- The Bristol Chamber received **PERFECT SCORES** in 7 of the 9 categories

HC ONLINE
Find breaking news, photos, video, polls and more at HeraldCourier.com.



Interested in joining the Bristol Chamber?
Contact Amy Shuttle at 423.989.4862
or ashuttle@bristolchamber.org



20 Volunteer Parkway
Bristol, TN 37620
423.989.4850
www.bristolchamber.com

Appreciating small gifts and the good times

Lately I've been thinking about gifts. Not just the gifts we wrap in paper and give to people who don't need them. But all the gifts we are given that make life such a pleasure and enable us to give back in some way to the world.



SHARON RANDALL

Yesterday, my older son sent me a video of 19-month-old Leilani, learning to fly. They were playing at a park when Leilani ran over to the swings. But instead of asking for help to climb onto the swing's seat, she leaned over it to lie on her belly. Then she lifted her feet, spread her arms like wings and sailed back and forth.

"Are you flying?" asked her dad.

She beamed up at him with pride and yelled, "Yeah!"

Then I heard my boy's familiar laugh, a waterfall of delight.

That video was two priceless gifts in one: The sight of a little girl taking wing, and the sound of her daddy's laughter.

I thought of what my mother would say when she had barely enough money to buy groceries: "The best gifts in life can't be bought. God gives them free and clear to a grateful heart."

Today I awoke to another gift: Rain. Enough rain to soak the Earth without washing us away.

I once took rain for granted. Never again. After recent years of little rainfall, we keep a bag packed, ready to go, in case we need to run from a wildfire.

If you live in a drought-prone place like California, you learn to appreciate rain. If you want to complain about it, you keep the complaints to yourself.

We often fail to appreciate people and things that mean so much to us, until one day, we realize we don't have them any more. But there's a simple way to show appreciation before it's too late: Just say "thank you."

Gratitude changes everything, both around us and within us. It opens our hearts and minds and souls to freely give and receive.

More than an awareness, it takes determination to show true gratitude — to feel it, say it and mean it with all our being.

What does it mean to you when someone thanks you for something you've done? It helps, doesn't it? It may even make you want to do it again.

One summer, years ago, I flew back to the South to visit my stepfather, John. We'd had a rough spell in our family, losing in a painfully short span of time my mother, my husband and my brother Joe's wife, all to cancer.

John now lived alone in the house we all once shared. One evening he and I sat on the porch sipping iced tea as we had often done on hot summer nights. Thunder rumbled on the mountains. Lightning bugs glittered in the yard. A scent of honeysuckle filled the air.

We traded questions, catching up on the family. Finally, I said, "So, how are you doing in this big house without mama?"

Please see RANDALL, Page D5



EMILY BALL, BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Nancy Osborne-Musick, a retired Russell County early childhood educator, wipes tears of joy after receiving the degree of Bachelor of Human Letters honoris causa from the University of Bridgeport at the Martha Washington Inn in Abingdon Wednesday.

Early learning teacher surprised with diploma

CAROLYN R. WILSON
Special to the Bristol Herald Courier

ABINGDON, Va. — Christmas has come a little early this year for one Russell County woman.

Overwhelmed by her family's surprise last week, Nancy Carol Osborne-Musick shed tears as she was handed a diploma more than 50 years in the making.

During a special commencement ceremony at the Martha Washington Inn in Abingdon, the 75-year-old childhood educator was awarded an honorary degree for her selfless work in a Southwest Virginia community.

The Lebanon, Virginia, resident received the honor from a university more than 600 miles away in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Two university presidents

boarded a plane en route to Southwest Virginia last Monday with the sole purpose of presenting the distinguished award that recognizes the Russell County woman's lifelong contributions. Among her crowning achievements is the launching of Great Expectations Learning Center in Lebanon, where she served 25 years as the director of the early learning academy for 3- to 5-year-old children, alongside fellow teacher and friend, Betty Dingus.

Danielle Wilken, president of the University of Bridgeport, and Mark Scheinberg, president of Goodwin University and a University of Bridgeport Trustee, addressed a small audience of family and friends during the

conferral of the Bachelor of Human Letters honoris causa which translates "for the sake of honor."

The university is among many educational institutions in the country that recognize excellence by awarding honorary degrees to individuals with long records of achievements in particular areas.

"It's really important to honor the heroes in our communities," Wilken said, following the ceremony. "It's obvious that Nancy has done a lot for her community and lifted people up and it's important to recognize that."

Former Virginia Sen. Phillip P. Puckett, a childhood friend of Osborne-Musick, was the keynote speaker during the ceremony. "Nancy has made the community

a better place to live. She is a lady that every community needs," he said from the podium.

The Rev. Jeffrey Kinder, a pastor at Rosedale Baptist Church in Rosedale, Virginia, where Osborne-Musick is a member, offered the benediction.

Three of Osborne-Musick's grandchildren also had roles in the ceremony. Granddaughter Sara Grace Osborne, 12, sang the alma mater for Bridgeport University while granddaughter Rachael Osborne, 10, displayed an original painting of the university she created for the occasion and grandson John-Marc Osborne, 10, served as greeter and usher.

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TENNIS ANYONE

Santa brought a backyard log cabin and years of adventure

I believe in Santa Claus, and if you don't mind me sharing a nearly 50-year-old memory, I'll tell you why.

The year was 1974. Richard Nixon had resigned as president earlier in the year, and I remember how tired I was of seeing his face on TV.

This was also the foundation of my education. I was a kindergarten at Arrowhead Elementary

School in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

If you find Abingdon Elementary School, where my kids attended, and draw a line straight across the state you'll precisely hit the H-shaped Arrowhead, which took its name from being the site of an old Native American encampment.

Back then, while Virginia Beach was still filled with open space and woods, I longed for some kind of backwoods adventure.

Santa Claus must have known all that.

I mean, he sees us when we're sleeping. He knows when we're awake. He knows when we've been bad or good. So, I was good for goodness sake.

Back to the backwoods, I could still see Tennessee and the steam train of Tweetsie Railroad at Blowing Rock, North Carolina — not to mention riding on the chairlift at Gatlinburg.

You see, our family would pass right through Bristol to make it to my mama's hometown of Greeneville, Tennessee. Here, on a trip in 1972, I would learn about the Lost State of Franklin and the coonskin caps worn by Davy Crockett.

The mountains got in my

blood, and I guess I wanted a place all my own. Only, I never told Santa Claus about all that.

I guess he just figured it all out. (As John-Boy Walton once said on television, "I reckon he's a right-smart man.")

Santa Claus must have had big sleigh, too, in 1974 because that was the year I woke up to find a log cabin standing in my backyard Christmas morning.

It had cut-outs for windows and a doorway. Only, if you were much taller than an elementary school kid, you would hit your head on the ceiling.

By the spring of '75, kids in my old neighborhood came over to play in the cabin. As I recall, my brother and I had the only wooden log cabin around. In time, my brother slapped makeshift additions onto the back. He even built a gravity-fed sink in the log cabin.

When our family made a big

move from one house to another, going only about three miles away, my daddy instructed the guys on the moving truck to put the log cabin on board.

By the spring of 1980, the same year my beloved grandfather in Greeneville died, I remained a cabin dweller — now in fifth grade — as my daddy found a place for the greatest-ever to stand between the bases of three, 200-foot-tall pine trees.

Today, that cabin remains between those trees, where my parents live. It has become a storage shed Daddy feared may have also attracted some snakes. It's probably also a bit rotten.

But, to me, it will always be the proof that there is a Santa Claus.

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