

# OPUNTIA 427



**Halloween 2018**

**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) and [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org). My e-mail address is: [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com) When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

**IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL NOT COME**  
photos by Dale Speirs

I had originally thought to illustrate this issue with Halloween decorations, but the opportunity arose to show you a genuine ghost shopping mall. The New Horizon Mall, with 500 retail units, was completed in early 2018. Located near the rural hamlet of Balzac, about a half-hour drive north of Calgary city limits, it was to be a destination mall.

The grand opening was scheduled for May 2018, but has been put off indefinitely, as only 15 units were leased as of October 15, when I visited it. The vacant mall made the national news.

I drove out there on a weekday afternoon, having other business nearby. The news reports for once were not exaggerated. The mall is the size of several football fields. The cover photo shows one of the corridors of the mall. If you look closely, you can see two figures at the far end. I did not see ten people in the mall, not counting the two security guards who in later life will undoubtedly be telling their grandchildren about their time in the ghost mall.

On this page at upper right is an exterior view of the mall. The red car is the Opuntiamobile. I came in through the main entrance, the view of which is shown at lower right. The store sold smartphone cases. It was wide open but there was no clerk in sight. Probably went to the washroom, and left everything unattended on the very valid grounds that no one would steal anything.



On the next page are multiple views of the mall. I only went down one corridor and looped back a second, so these photos illustrate just a fraction of the mall.





I would say the landlords weren't just agreeable, they were desperate.





I'm guessing this was supposed to be the food court.

But enough spookiness, let's move on to other Halloweenish matters.

# HALLOWEEN FICTION

by Dale Speirs

[ See also OPUNTIA #395, page 13.]

## Never Celebrate Halloween In Maine.

There should be a legal moratorium on cozy mystery series set in small Maine towns, where the heroine is a newspaper reporter, has children, etcetera. Give Maine a break from its horrific murder rate, and relocate the stories to Iowa or Prince Edward Island. One wonders why the Maine State Police can't seem to put a cap on those village murders.

WICKED WITCH MURDER (2010) by Leslie Meier is part of a series set in small-town Maine. The protagonist is Lucy Stone, mother of four, who works for the local newspaper, and was actively involved in community affairs, not to mention being an amateur sleuth.

Tinker's Cove, Maine, was preparing for Halloween. Stone was a busy woman but took the time to stroll out into the woods and find the first body, that of a magician who worked children's parties. A newcomer named Diana Ravenscroft arrived in the village and opened a shop selling candles and crystals. The very thing the place needed. She therefore followed one of the rules of cozies, running a marginal business in a rural area.

Ravenscroft was a self-proclaimed witch and also did psychic readings. She was blamed for everything from the murder to a local drought to anyone's illness. The middle part of the novel was taken up by a soap opera between the level-headed folk and the "Burn, witch, burn" faction.

Finally Halloween arrived. The kids were out trick-or-treating, and most of the folk were at parties, one of which had Stone volunteering. A noisy bunch were hanging around Ravenscroft's store in the hopes of seeing a skylad ceremony of some sort. She was much vexed by people following her around to see what a witch would do on the night. I can't say I had any sympathy. She knew or ought to have known what she was doing when she blew into town and announced to all and sundry that she was a witch.

Stone exercised the stupidity expected of cozy sleuths and put herself in harm's way at a Samhain ceremony of witches out in the back woods. The local coven

was riven by feuding, to the point of settling arguments with poisons and burnings. Stone escaped in the nick of time, as we knew she would.

The police have an easy time, as the coven members had sent each other emails complaining that the burning alive of the first victim took too long, and stabbing would have been more efficient.

CANDY CORN MURDER (2015) continued the saga of Lucy Stone at yet another bloody Halloween in Tinker's Cove. The Great Pumpkin Fest included a children's party, giant pumpkin weigh-in, underwater pumpkin carving, and pumpkin catapulting. Lucy's husband Bill and his friend Evan Wickes built a catapult for the contest. An old car was the target which the catapults had to hit with a pumpkin.

Wickes was not a pleasant house guest and Lucy despised him, although he and Bill were good buddies. That problem was soon resolved. At the competition, Wickes went missing, but not for long. Bill's catapult scored a direct hit on the trunk of the car, popping it open to reveal Wickes' corpse. The police operated on theory that the nearest person was the culprit, so they arrested Bill for murder. Lucy went into Miss Marple mode.

A local hometown boy made good had some rapidly growing businesses that he wanted to keep rapidly growing. He tried to halt the Pumpkin Fest because the underwater pumpkin carving event was to be held in the local pond. That happened to be where he dumped the body of his first wife, who supposedly deserted him and ran away. He feared someone might dredge up an old bone while splashing about in the water.

He also feared competitors in the marijuana growing industry. That was revealed as the reason he killed Wickes, who had been thinking of taking up the occupation. The epilogue tied up a very complicated mess of plot threads rather neatly.

This brings me to TOWN IN A PUMPKIN BASH (2013) by B.B. Haywood, a pseudonym of Robert R. and Beth Ann Feeman. It is part of a series of novels about Candy Holliday, a part-time newspaper columnist at the village of Cape Willington, Maine. There are Halloween food recipes at the back of the novel. It's different from other Maine Miss Marples because Holliday lives on her father's blueberry farm just outside the village and doesn't have any children.



Holliday was born on October 31, thus Halloween is a more than special day for her. The annual Pumpkin Bash was approaching, with Holliday in charge of the Haunted Hayride, which looped to her pumpkin patch and a faux graveyard. The problem was the graveyard had a corpse in it which was not faux.

Meanwhile, a local realtor was having difficulty renting a vacant house where a murder was committed two years ago. Guess who was involved with that one? Not unreasonably, the police made Holliday the prime suspect for the pumpkin patch killing.

From there, the plot made a detour into genealogy. Holliday, instead of Marpleing about the village to prove herself innocent, was more concerned with the antecedents of the village's rich folk, including why a certain local-history book is missing from the library and who was actually buried in what grave. The family is so wealthy that their hired hand drove a Bentley. A missing heir was found and others came out of the woodwork to grab their piece of the loot.

The pumpkin patch was crawling with television crews, since it made a good visual for a mundane murder. It boosted the tourist trade during what would otherwise be a dead time of year (pardon the expression), and pumpkin sales were up.

Holliday almost didn't get to celebrate her birthday or attend the Halloween Bash, having followed tradition and put herself in front of the killer's gun. Fortunately the police arrived in the nick of time. The plot was overly complicated and took a long time to be resolved, but one supposes that many cozy readers liked it that way, because there are other books in the series.

DEATH OF A PUMPKIN CARVER (2016) is by Lee Hollis, the pen name of siblings Rick Copp and Holly Simason. It is part of a cozy series about Hayley Powell, food critic for a newspaper at Bar Harbor, Maine. It's different from all the others because it's not set in Tinker's Cove or Cape Willington, nor is there anyone named Jessica.

Powell is a single mother with two children, and her personal life was a mess. Events became worse when her deadbeat ex-husband Danny returned to town at Halloween, broke as usual.

In this series of novels there are intermittent infodumps, not as background for the plot, but recipes for food. When Hayley has some pumpkin bread pudding

and a martini, it wasn't just a throwaway line in the narrative. It went like this: *"So thankfully I had my bread pudding fresh out of the oven, not to mention a delicious, soothing cocktail to wash it down with, so bottoms up, everybody!"* Then immediately followed in the text, not in an appendix, the recipes for Pumpkin Bread Pudding and Pumpkin Pie Martini.

Since Hayley didn't have any money for Danny to sponge, he stayed with his Uncle Otis. The uncle didn't believe in banks, and had \$40,000 cash in his mattress, which only Hayley and Danny knew about. Otis was soon found dead in a cemetery, without benefit of a funeral service or burial. The mattress was found ripped open and the cash gone, while the rest of the place was untouched.

After Uncle Otis's body was found, Hayley's first reaction was to prepare Pumpkin Soup, recipe immediately inserted, even before she begins sleuthing. Danny was well known to the townsfolk to be hard up for money, whereas Hayley was a respectable working single mother, so suspicion automatically shifted to him. Police caught him trying to leave town. He said he was going to Bangor to buy Halloween presents for the kids. Sure he was, said the trooper.

Hayley's snooping revealed that Otis's ex-wife was desperate for money because of medical expenses. However, it turned out that an unrelated case of identity theft and power-of-attorney fraud was the motive. Otis had stumbled across it, and the culprit feared it was either him or her and made the obvious decision.

The fact that Hayley's family and friends were white trash made the job easier in deflecting suspicion. It all worked out in the end though, after several murder attempts on both Hayley and Danny. The survivors sat down to a hearty meal of Pumpkin Chili Crock Pot. Recipe included.



**Halloween In The Outlands.**

WITCHES’ BANE (1993) by Susan Wittig Albert is set in Pecan Springs, Texas. China Bayles operated a herbal shop. Her next-door neighbour was a crystal shop, run by Ruby Wilcox, a self-proclaimed witch. Wilcox was the target of Rev. Billy Lee Harbuck, who regrets that the auto-da-fe is no longer legal. It’s different than any Maine cozy with witch neighbours because it is set in Texas. So there.

What with harassment from the Deppity Dawgs and the Reverend’s picket lines, life was rough for the two women. Halloween was approaching, always a good time for the self-righteous to rant about Satanists. The crystal shop was trashed by vandals undoubtedly doing the Lord’s work, or so people believed.

Very frightening. Bayles calmed down Wilcox with tea, scones, and a special jelly: *Ruby came to the table and sat down. She hadn’t said anything for four or five minutes, which is probably a record. But she drank her tea and ate a scone slathered with jelly, so I guessed she was all right.*

*She pointed to the jelly. “What’s that?”  
“Prickly pear jelly”  
“You’re kidding. Those green things that look like mittens covered with thorns?”*

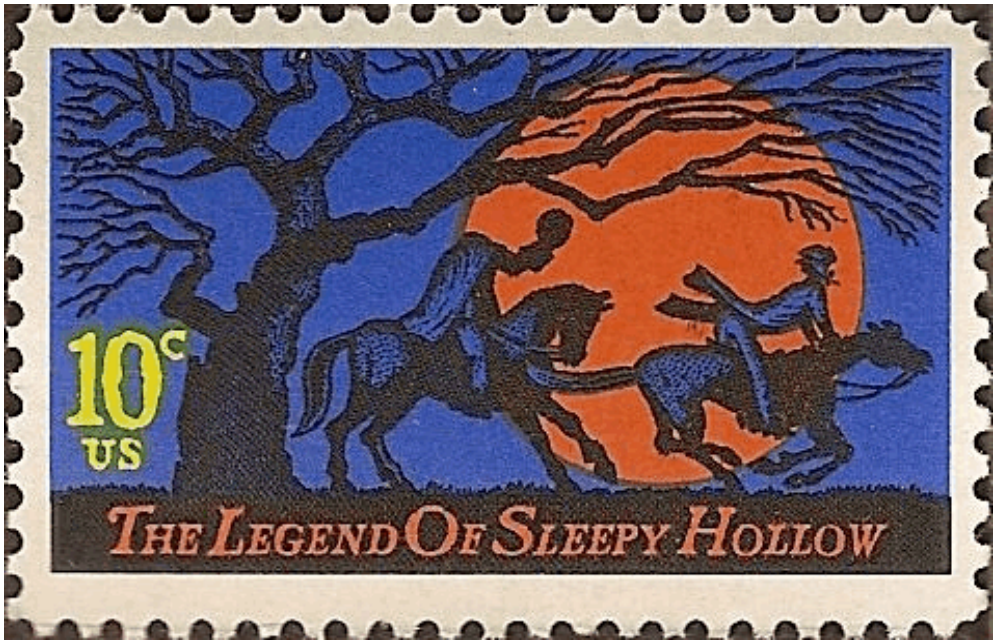
*“They’re good for jelly”, I said. “Wonderful, in fact. The fragrant magenta fruits ripen in September. If you wear leather gloves, heavy jeans, and snake boots, you can pick enough to make a tangy jelly that glimmers like rubies and smells like a field of Texas wildflowers.”*

Not too often that I see opuntias mentioned in non-botanical contexts.

There was a corpse, that of a woman who specialized in growing poisonous plants. Because she could, apparently. Meanwhile, the local coven’s Halloween celebration was raided by the Deppity Dawgs, who thought it might be a Ku Klux Klan gathering.

Bayles and her friends sank deeper and deeper into what was not a Happy Halloween. Every time they turned around, someone had fabricated new evidence against them. Eventually Bayles found the real culprit, a trailer park couple who wanted to get rid of an inconvenient ex-wife. The holy rollers had

nothing to do with it, although the Reverend was taken down on a bigamy charge, which the police discovered by accident. All in all, a Halloween night to remember.



THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HARLOW (2014) by Kylie Logan (pseudonym of Connie Laux) is part of a cozy series about a book club called the League of Literary Ladies. The village is South Bass Island, in Lake Erie, although with its murder rate it could just as well be in Maine.

The League of Literary Ladies have chosen for their Halloween reading Washington Irving’s classic story “The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow”. It was not selected at random, because the island’s history included the sad tale of Charlie ‘Sleepy’ Harlow. He was a bootlegger during Prohibition who lost a dispute with rumrunners and was decapitated.

Harlow’s headless ghost was said to appear annually at Halloween. That legend brought the Elkhart Ghost Getters to the bed-and-breakfast of Bea Cartwright. They had been on the island before, during which they trampled a newly-planted vineyard while chasing about for ghosts. The vintner Kate Wilder still held a grudge. When the leader of the Elkhart Ghost Getters had her head bashed in, Wilder was the main suspect. The League of Literary Ladies went into action, a veritable swarm of Miss Marples.

There are lots of twists and turns in the plot, some of which connected Harlow with parents of current members of the Elkhart Ghost Getters. The group themselves were feuding bitterly. It became obvious there was no honour among them.

The Halloween night festival became vicious, until finally one of the Elkhart Ghost Getters members was exposed as the murderer. The Halloween party was a J'accuse! meeting. This novel is a steady read which stands up well when judged as a cozy mystery.

THE STITCHING HOUR (2015) by Amanda Lee is a novel from a cozy series set in the village of Tallulah Falls, Oregon, about as far away from those Maine villages as one can get and still be in the contiguous USA. The murder rate, unfortunately, was what you would expect. The protagonist was Marcy Singer, who operated an embroidery store called the Seven Year Stitch. Just what every remote village needs.

Halloween was nigh, and the store was decorated for the season, with stitching kits on sale to match. The next-door neighbours opened up a Haunted House about which Singer wasn't happy. She thought the screaming would bother her evening class students. The real bother, however, turned out to be the body of a waitress found on the sidewalk in front of the store.

Singer and the police began their separate investigations. Everyone had a past and/or something to hide. The couple operating the Haunted House were, shall we politely say, eccentric. To be fair, they did have their own logic, which didn't always match up with the rest of the villagers.

It all concluded with Singer at the mercy of the murderer, whose choice of weapons was rattlesnakes taken from the Haunted House. The motive was revenge for something that happened years ago, and was only revealed in the last few pages. No word on how the Halloween party turned out.

LORD OF THE WINGS (2015) by Donna Andrews, began with a break-in at the local Haunted House in the small Virginia town of Caerphilly. Meg Langslow, in between looking after her young children, was head of the Goblin Patrol, officially the Visitor Relations and Police Liaison committee. It was a group of citizen volunteers designed to reduce Halloween vandalism. Langslow, with so many murder mysteries solved by her during previous novels in this series, was the preferred go-to person for any Halloween problems.

She did, however, manage to avoid the two picket lines in front of the courthouse. One group, from the religious right, objected to the Halloween decorations the town put up because they celebrate a godless holiday. The local witches coven, on the other hand, protested against the stereotyping and commercialization of their most sacred holiday.

Despite its size, Caerphilly had a zoo, which unusually had been afflicted with a wave of intruders breaking in overnight. It was related to a Halloween-themed role-playing game and scavenger hunt. To advance to the next level, players had to do several tasks, most of which involved misdemeanors or criminal trespass.

For once, Langslow didn't discover the first body. A fellow member of the Goblin Patrol did. The victim was unknown and had a bullet hole in his forehead. The local police, also for once, did the actual investigating. Meanwhile, Langslow took a tour of the Haunted House, whose proprietor unloaded on her and the reader several chapters of family histories.

Everything converged at the end, when those family histories turned out to be a serious threat to someone's inheritance. Halloween became a shade bloodier but since Langslow was booked for the series, she survived to the finish. The funniest line in the book, spoken near the end of the novel is: "*We've got to start planning the Christmas festivities right away.*"

MASKING FOR TROUBLE (2016) by Diane Vallere is the second novel in a cozy series about a costume shop, although strangely it has recipes at the back as well as costume designs. The proprietor of Disguise DeLimit is Margo Tamblyn. She was preparing for the busiest season of a costumer's year, Halloween.

The store was under threat from a real estate developer named Paul Haverford, who wanted to rezone the neighbourhood for a massive commercial redevelopment that would probably ruin the store. Tamblyn had clashed repeatedly with Haverford and became the prime suspect when he was murdered.

This provided the usual excuse for the Miss Marple act, trying to clear her own name. Haverford had numerous enemies, so there were many other suspects to investigate. He had banned Disguise DeLimit costumes from the biggest glitziest Halloween party in the county, which he could do because it was a



private function. Angry words were exchanged between Tamblyn and Haverford, witnessed by others. She was the one who found his body while it was still fresh. She had been disguised in a costume. An open-and-shut case.

Her investigation revealed corruption in City Hall, egged on by Haverford to get his redevelopment plans through the planning process. Too late, Tamblyn found herself alone with the murderer, a bureaucrat who wanted to be Mayor. He had been double-crossed by Haverford and therefore took revenge.

The final battle took place at the venue where the big Halloween party was to take place. She disposed of the murderer with one of the Halloween wall decorations, a giant animated Blob (from the movie; you remember it, right?). It turned out to be a Halloween never to be forgotten.

DEATH BY PUMPKIN SPICE (2016) by Alex Erickson (pseudonym of Eric S. Moore) is a novel from a cozy series about bookstore café owner Krissy Hancock, the resident Miss Marple of Pine Hills, Ohio. She was roped in to attending a Halloween party at the mansion of the recently widowed Margaret Yarborough. More than one woman showed up dressed as Marilyn Monroe.

Hancock was carrying a truckload of emotional baggage, what with ex-boyfriends and dealing with unpleasant customers. Another item was added to the load at the party, when the body of a woman is found in a room filled with jack-o-lantern pumpkins.

The deceased was not mourned by many. The police kept everyone in the mansion, including the killer, whomever it was. Hancock did her part by circulating among the guests and fishing for information with all the subtlety of a dynamite fisherman. Doubts arose about whether or not the murdered woman was the intended target. She was wearing a Monroe costume and the killer may have mistaken her for someone else.

The hitman was arrested about four-fifths of the way through the book. We know there must be more to the story with that many pages left. The question, as Hancock pointed out, was who hired him. Miss Marple, pardon me, Hancock, dredged up an illegitimate daughter, a widow who signed a bad prenuptial that cut her out of the will, and a cuckolded husband.

There was a final confrontation in which Hancock was kind enough to let police participate. The woman who hired the hitman will be standing beside him in

front of the judge. The novel had a couple of false finishes, the better to put Hancock in harm's way more than once. They broke up the pacing of the narrative.



### Halloween In The Big City.

To be fair, big cities can be as dangerous as Maine villages. DEATH OF A NEIGHBORHOOD WITCH (2012) by Laura Levine is part of a cozy series involving Jaine (with an 'i') Austen, who lives in Beverly Hills, California. She was single, has no children, and was an advertising executive. Nonetheless, she managed to be around more murders than a Maine housewife.

Halloween was imminent, and Austen was busy stocking up on candy, most of which she would eat before the big night. (Don't we all? That is why supermarkets set up their Halloween candy displays in August.)



Other things were imminent as well, such as Victim #1, cranky neighbour Cryptessa Muldoon. She was a failed horror actress whose appearances on shows were horrors but not in the way intended. She turned into a sour old woman who wasn't mourned when someone stabbed her in the heart with a no-trespassing sign from her lawn.

A neighbour said she saw it happen. Someone in an ape costume did it. As the police quickly learned, the only ape costume within miles was rented by Austen for a Halloween party. She had taken the costume off later and left it unattended where anyone could have used it. Even worse, the murderer ditched the costume some place unknown, and now Austen was on the hook to the costume store for the replacement cost.

Since she was the main suspect, Austen began sleuthing while still busy with Halloween events. Everyone hated Muldoon for good and sufficient reason, so motive would not be the deciding clue. Austen dug up plenty of dirt on her neighbours and made everyone a suspect.

The ending had a couple of twists as to who the real murderer was. The plot was finally resolved when Austen followed cozy tradition and put herself in harm's way at the mercy of the real murderer. A mildly humourous novel, worth a read.

**The Big Uneasy.**

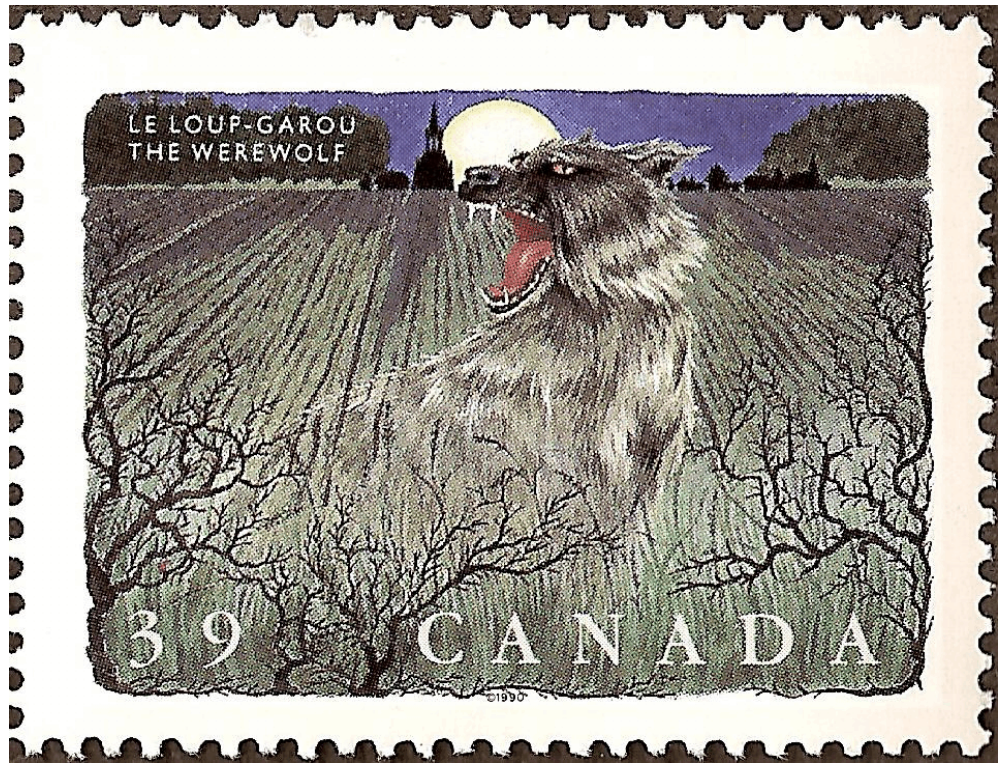
FRILL KILL (2007) by Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) is from a cozy series about scrapbookers, housewives who glue photos and decorations into albums to preserve all the memories that grandchildren will have no interest in. The protagonist is Carmela Bertrand of New Orleans. She owns the Memory Mine, a scrapbooking shop in the French Quarter.

Bertrand and her friend Ava Gruix, who owned a voodoo shop, had a Halloween party with a tarot card reader who failed to predict that Bertrand would find a body on her way home. There were teeth marks on the victim and animal hairs shed on the body, leading the gullible to fear that a werewolf was on the prowl. Or, since it is the French Quarter, a loup garou.

On to more pressing matters. Bertrand promised to model clothing for a friend's costume shop, plus deliver pumpkins for someone else. She did a bit of sleuthing but it turned out to be pointless. The case broke open on Halloween

night when Bertrand gave herself away to the killer because she couldn't keep her big fat mouth shut. Fortunately during the foot chase, the murderer forgot what all of us learned from our mothers; don't run with scissors.

After he fell and died, not on his sword but the scissors, the epilogue wrapped up the motive. Embezzlement and insurance fraud, not previously mentioned before. Other than that, it was a good Halloween party.



FIBER AND BRIMSTONE (2010) continued the bloody scrapbooking in New Orleans. It began with Bertrand and friend Ava Gruix building a giant monster puppet for the Halloween Monsters and Mayhem Torchlight Parade. During the set-up, they overheard an argument between Jekyl Hardy and Brett Fowler. Moments later, they found Fowler's body. Hardy was the obvious suspect, because Fowler owed him and others large sums of money from a failed Ponzi scheme.

The funeral was a messy one, as Hardy's wife got into a catfight with his mistress, the two accusing each other of his murder. Bertrand and Gruix tried to forget their woes at a performance of "Ballet Dracula", exactly as it sounds.



They were foolishly invited to the cast party, as a result of which there was a second corpse. Bertrand went into full Miss Marple mode, annoying both the NOPD and the Securities Commission, which was investigating Fowler’s fraud. The deceased was a rival of Hardy, which now made him doubly suspect.

The cumulation was a showdown with the killer, not in an isolated place but right in the middle of the Halloween parade. If you’re going to be a masked murderer, there is no better place than in the middle of hundreds of costumed people who think the whole thing is an act.

The motive was that Fowler had been using his Ponzi money to buy art masterpieces which turned out to be forged. Ha ha on him. That touched off a concatenation of events, enough to keep a half-dozen Miss Marples busy.



A later installment in the series taking place in October is GOSSAMER GHOST (2014). Another bloody Halloween for Carmela Bertrand. This time she found the freshly murdered body of Marcus Joubert in his antiques shop adjacent to her scrapbooking store. The motive seemed to have been the theft of an antique, specifically Napoleon’s death mask.

Bertrand, and let’s not forget the police, began investigating. The mask had been stolen three weeks earlier from a private collector in Texas. The body was still cooling when the landlord leased the shop to a pretentious woman who wanted to sell high-end jewelry.

In the meantime, Halloween was fast approaching. Bertrand was teaching a course on how to make decorations from gossamer cloth, the kind used for shrouds. Chapter 6 is mostly an infodump about making ghost ornaments with cloth, cotton batting, and thread. Not related to scrapbooking but what the hey.

Bertrand didn’t do much sleuthing at the start, but she went on a date with the police detective in charge. They attended a theatre production of FRANKENSTEIN. She kept busy, what with the Pumpkins and Bumpkins Ball, the Ghost Train, and the Zombie Crawl. There’s never a dull moment in New Orleans.

She resumed running her store and doing some sleuthing. The latter consisted of Google searches, which demonstrated that she was an up-to-date Miss Marple. She learned of several art dealers, including Joubert, who were involved in inter-related shenanigans. They all had connections with fencing stolen property and forgeries.

The climax was on the Ghost Train, where a costume party became one of the more exciting events of the season. Bertrand went about shouting “*And you’re the killer!*” at various people until she finally lighted on the real murderer by the process of elimination. It’s a wonder she didn’t have multiple slander actions filed against her.

REBEL WITHOUT A CAKE (2014) by Jacklyn Brady featured Rita Lucero and her ex-mother-in-law Miss Frankie (it’s complicated), who operated the Zydeco Cakes bakery in New Orleans. No mention if it was near a scrapbooking shop. This novel opened with their neighbour seeing the ghost of her uncle, a moonshiner who vanished in the swamps fifteen years ago. Then her cousin disappeared in the same swamp.

It was the Halloween season, and Lucero had to temper her amateur sleuthing with customer orders, such as a mini-pumpkin carved as a jack-o-lantern, filled with chocolate, and then placed on a three-tier cake. A voodoo lady barged into the investigation. Lucero found the first body, to no one's surprise.

The action shifted to a bayou called Baie Rebelle, where most of the action and further casualties took place. Lucero was an outlander and therefore seriously resented by some folks there, but on the other hand, she could dish it out as good as she got it. Her investigation revealed the root cause of the murder was a disputed inheritance.

She made it back to New Orleans in time for the Halloween costume party. Lucero dressed for it as a cheerleader, which took gall for someone her age. The party was one to remember. Her friends staged a serious intervention to stop her from any further Miss Marple activities. It was interrupted by a gravid woman dressed as a pumpkin. She broke water and went into labour.

The novel wrapped up with a selection of Cajun recipes. One of them required alligator meat, so you'll have to book a special order with your butcher.



**Food For Horrible Thoughts.**

BEDEVILED EGGS (2010) by Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) is a novel from a food cozy series featuring not one, but three Miss Marples. Suzanne, Toni, and Petra are middle-aged women who lost their husbands to death, divorce, or Alzheimer's. They operate the Cackleberry Café in Kindred, Louisiana, which specializes in egg recipes.

Halloween is nigh. The ladies were carving jack-o-lanterns and baking pumpkin bread. Death wasn't just nigh, it barged right in. Mayoral candidate Chuck Peebler was shot dead by a crossbow arrow on the grounds of the Café. The good news was that after the news spread through the county, business picked up as rubberneckers decided to satisfy their curiosity and appetites at the same time.

The murder might have been dirty politics in the extreme, or it might have been a family feud. The next murder was that of a Deputy Sheriff, a premeditated execution, not a line-of-duty incident. The excitement continued with a prison break nearby that threw the county into an uproar.

None of that slowed down planning for the big Halloween party at the Cackleberry Club. Since the party didn't begin until Chapter 29, the reader has an inkling that it will be a barnburner. The pumpkins were hung with care, and chestnuts were roasting on an open fire. Somewhere among the revelers was a masked murderer.

He almost escaped, but Suzanne brought him down with a well-lobbed jack-o-lantern while riding on a horse. You can't get more Halloweenish than that. He had been stealing antiques and reselling them elsewhere. The dead men were investigating him, hence the murders. And so to the egg recipes.

PUMPKIN ROLL (2011) by Josi S. Kilpack is a novel in a food cozy series about Sadie Hoffmiller, whose food offerings always stirred up trouble and not because of indigestion. In this episode, she and her boyfriend Pete Cunningham were staying in Boston, Massachusetts, to babysit his grandchildren while the parents were traveling in Texas.

The kids seemed to think Mrs Wapple across the street was a witch. Nonsense of course. Hoffmiller tried to make friends with Wapple. Since Halloween was nigh, she baked some pumpkin roll cookies and took them over.



It didn't go well, and there followed strange occurrences which aroused the spirit of Miss Marple in Hoffmiller. Wapple was tetch and off her medications. As the narrative progressed, pausing only for recipes every second chapter, there were suspicious goings-on.

Not just Wapple. Hoffmiller is dismayed to discover that Cunningham has a past as well. (Hint: Google your boyfriend's name before cohabiting with him.)

About halfway through the novel, Wapple was brutally attacked but survived because Hoffmiller found her in time. Most of the suspects were sociopaths or psychopaths. Hoffmiller and Cunningham have an extended discussion about the definitions of those terms and how to diagnose such people.

The ending was the usual mad struggle of cozies, but all ended well with a recipe for pot roast and Yorkshire pudding. The novel was tedious in some of its middle stretches, with too much psychoanalytical work. All told, not really worth reading.



TRICK OR DEADLY TREAT (2014) by Livia J. Washburn is part of a food cozy series, with recipes at the back of the novel. Phyllis Newsom is the Miss Marple, who runs a boarding house in small-town Texas. She and her three boarders are all retired teachers, one of whom, Sam Fletcher, is a tenant with benefits.

Another tenant, Carolyn Wilbarger, paired up with Newsom to enter a cooking contest, helping pad out the novel. Fletcher entered his dog in a Halloween costume contest for pets, staged by the local veterinarian Dr Henry Baxter.

All that having been set up, the murders can duly proceed. Baxter's wife was the first victim. The police arrived at his Halloween party and arrested him before the costume judging began. He'll get his own judging before a grand jury. Newsom was present, of course, as all Miss Marples are when corpses litter the ground.

Wilbarger commented on that: *Carolyn moved over beside Phyllis and said: "I don't believe it. I just don't believe it. It's a Halloween party with pets, for goodness' sake. And the police show up and arrest someone for murder." She gave Phyllis a meaningful look and added, "But I suppose it was inevitable."*

Before Newsom could begin investigating, it was Halloween night. The boarding house was a popular stop for trick-or-treaters. Nobody died, strangely. Once the treats were dispensed, it was time for the tenants to discuss what is to be done. Newsom began detecting and turned up two lines of evidence, one suggesting a romantic liaison, and the other revenge by a dog breeder whose prize stud was condemned by Baxter after it was infected by a disease.

The ending was resolved without too much delay. Newsom naturally put herself in front of the murderer's gun but fortunately the police arrived in time. Not as many clichés as usual for a cozy, and a steady read. The recipes at the back include Pumpkin Dog Biscuits, although I'm uncertain whether they are for dogs or humans. The Pumpkin Vanilla Chip Cookies seem a safer risk.

A CATERED HALLOWEEN (2008) by Isis Crawford is part of a cozy series about sisters Bernadette and Libby Simmons, who operate a catering business in the village of Longely, upstate New York. Halloween was being celebrated by turning the old Peabody School into a Haunted House. The Simmons sisters had the catering contract, but where they go, death followed or even anticipated them. Since this is a food cozy, recipes also follow.

The school was said to be genuinely haunted by the ghost of Bessie Osgood, a student who died decades ago when she fell out of a window. Many said she was pushed. In the present day, the murder victim was Amethyst Applegate, who was despised by a multitude of local citizens for good and sufficient reasons.

The prologue of this novel revealed that Applegate murdered Osgood when they were schoolgirls together, so that immediately removed most of the novel's mystery. The Simmons sisters discovered Applegate's decapitated body in the Haunted House. Once the forensic techies had finished, it was decided that the exhibit will stay open.

A murder (two if you count Osgood) was good for business, not to mention food sales, as their father Sean pointed out: *“And money always wins”, Sean said after he’d taken another bite of his pumpkin bar. “You better bake some more of these. The more gruesome the crime, the more people want to see where it took place and the hungrier they are after they’ve seen it.”*

The middle of the novel was devoted to scattering suspicion around on anyone who walked past the sisters. The reader, however, had already been tipped off by the prologue, so it was just a matter of wading through the pages until the denouement.

A more contrived ending I haven't read in years. The Haunted House was where Applegate's murderer met his demise at the hands of Osgood's ghost. In the epilogue, he and Osgood were together in the next plane of existence, calmly discussing what awaited in the afterworld. Not a good finish to the novel.



Crawford returned to Peabody School with A CATERED COSTUME PARTY (2017). The building had been renovated into a co-op apartment called the Berkshire Arms.

One would think that by now the citizens of Longely would avoid the Simmons sisters on sight, but there is always someone who never read the memo. Based on the previous books, there should be three ghosts roaming the building.

Darius Witherspoon was a tenant in the Berkshire Arms. He was allegedly heartbroken over the disappearance of his wife Penelope, but not so much as to cancel the Halloween party. Catering was by the Simmons sisters, as demanded by the plot, otherwise there couldn't be any murders. In the midst of the Halloween celebrations, Darius's body was discovered dangling from a noose. That's one Halloween party with realistic decorations.

Crawford didn't just scatter forebodings through her novels. She used flare guns, semaphores, fireworks, and cue cards to make certain the reader could see the plot coming five pages before it got there. The hanging was the highlight of Chapter 8. From there, the narrative veered back and forth, and brought the missing Penelope back for revenge.

Just to keep the pot boiling, there was a hunt for treasure left by ancient Norsemen, who apparently sailed up the Hudson River and hid their loot where the Peabody School qua Berkshire Arms was now. In the epilogue, the characters seemed more interested in the Nordic treasures than the murders. Probably because murders were a dime a dozen in Longely, but how often did anyone find Norgeld in their backyard?

**Old-Time Radio.**

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY was one of the standards of old-time radio, a sitcom that went for decades and spawned a spin-off called THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE. Jim and Marian Jordan played Fibber McGee and his wife Molly. The shows were written by Don Quinn, who was an equal partner in the series and got a one-third share of the money. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).)

“Gildy's Halloween Party” was first aired just before Halloween in 1935. The McGees had been invited to a Halloween party at their neighbour's house, that of Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve. He was pretentious and pompous, but to



balance the scales, Fibber was a boor and a blowhard. McGee blustered his way through the party while Molly tried to keep him in check.

Fibber decided to pull a Halloween prank by letting the air out of the tires on Gildersleeve's car. He snuck out to the garage and did so, although not without trouble because it was a moonless night and the garage was unlit. After the party was over and he and Molly have returned home, he learned that good neighbour Gildersleeve thought the McGee car might be vulnerable to vandalism, so he put it in the garage. McGee flattened his own tires.

The episode, like the hundreds of others in the series, is domestic and thoroughly non-avant garde. They used the same cast of supporting characters for years, who made their appearances, did their gags, and then made way for the next character.

To be fair to Quinn, over the lifetime of the series he wrote hundreds of episodes, back when a season was 44 episodes, not 13 like today's television shows. It is difficult to be original once you have written the first hundred shows. The audience liked the familiarity of the show, and responded with good laughter, although I have my suspicions that the producer was over-miking the audience.

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY was a short-lived fantasy OTR series from 1945 to 1946, aimed at the juvenile market. The genial announcer introduced each story and told it to a group of children, who interrupted him from time to time with questions. The series was sponsored by Post Toasties breakfast cereal, whose commercials were integrated into the show and ran at great length.

"The Ghost Who Forgot Halloween" was a 1945 episode, no writer credited. It took a while to get going, as first the announcer described all the Halloween decorations around his radio station. This was followed by a recipe using Post Toasties. Then a lengthy history of how the Halloween holiday developed. Not until the 9m30s mark did the actual story begin.

The ghost was named Wilbur, who was narcoleptic, always falling asleep in school. Instead of moaning, he yawned. For Halloween, he was assigned to haunt a particular cemetery and scare any humans in the neighbourhood. He was not good at it. An owl frightened him but he recovered.

Wilbur decided to take a nap to build his strength for the midnight hour. The

title of this episode gave away the denouement. He didn't wake up until sunrise. He got a lecture from his teacher, but before any listeners could worry about that, it was on to another lengthy commercial for Post Toasties.

QUIET PLEASE was a 1947 to 1949 OTR weird fiction and mystery series written and directed by Wyllis Cooper. The scripts were well done in general, and it is a shame that the series didn't have the same lifespan as other mystery shows.

"Don't Tell Me About Halloween" is a 1947 episode narrated by a man named Craig, who in 1694 met and married a witch named Candace in Salem, Massachusetts. The catch was that she only appeared to him one day a year on Halloween, sometimes taking animal form. It did give him eternal youth but a man's a man for all that, and the other 364 days were frustrating.

His dalliances with other women came to an abrupt halt after she turned his last mistress into a squirrel (where did the missing mass go?) when the woman showed up at Craig's place on Halloween night just as Candace also appeared.

Several Halloweens further down the century, Craig decided to kill Candace, who chose to appear that year as a giant death's head moth (where did the missing mass go?). He squashed her to death, and in doing so, signed his own death warrant. In the epilogue, a forest ranger reported finding a freshly squashed moth under a human skeleton.



*Safeway Halloween display in Calgary at their Marda Loop store*

# BWAH HA! HA!: PART 10

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 9 appeared in OPUNTIA #371, 372, 378, 388, 391, 393, 397, 409, and 422.]

## Frankenstein: The Original.

The very archetype of mad scientists is Herr Doctor Victor Frankenstein. I reviewed a number of Frankensteinian stories and movies in OPUNTIA #391, and herewith are some more.

But first this. Few people have read the original novel by Mary W. Shelley, and most have in mind the movie monster that stumbled about mutely terrorizing the village. The novel is still in print, or you can download it for free, as I did from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

The book can be tough sledding at times, for it was written and later revised in the early 1800s when literature was more verbose and Latinate than it is today. Authors were accustomed to taking the scenic route as it were, and the pacing was much slower than today's novels.

The movies have, as per usual in Hollywood, taken considerable liberties with the text. The original story was set in the late 1700s, but movies generally put it in the Victorian era. In the novel, the monster, never named, was well spoken. In fact, he narrated much of the story. He argued with his creator:

*Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due.*

*Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.*

In the movies, the creature usually says things like “Aaargh!” and walks stiff-legged, even though the monster states (as above) that he is more supple than his

creator. Boris Karloff had a magnificent voice, and if his lines had included the above text, he would have done them great justice.

The novel is well worth reading, although I doubt many people could finish it in one sitting. It is remarkable that after two centuries it is still a tale well calculated to keep you in suspense.

## Frankenstein: Pastiches.

“Black As The Pit, From Pole To Pole” by Howard Waldrop and Steven Utley is from the 1977 anthology NEW DIMENSIONS #7, edited by Robert Silverberg. It carried on the story of Frankenstein's monster after it had been chased to the North Pole. The authors noted a curious coincidence that about the time the original novel was in print, John Cleves Symmes was propounding his Hollow Earth theory, with its entrance at the North Pole.

What better way to extend a pastiche beyond the original novel than by having the monster stumble through the entrance and down into the centre of Earth. It descended into an Edgar Rice Burroughs setting and had many adventures therein. A nice mashup.

## Frankenstein: Variations On A Theme.

“Dreams” by F. Paul Wilson (from his 2009 collection AFTERSHOCK AND OTHERS) is a riff on the movie Frankenstein version. The monster was on the loose, terrorizing the village. Soon revealed was that the brain transplanted into the cut-and-paste cadaver was a woman's brain.

Her confusion on finding herself in a man's body became anger directed to revenge against her lover. With his other girlfriend, he had framed her for the murder of his rich uncle, from whom he inherited the estate. She was executed for the murder, and her remains used for medical research. Now it's payback time. The story reads well, although there is no suspense in it since the ending was telegraphed. More of a character study vignette.

## Frankenstein: Humour.

Hollywood has produced a number of comedic versions of the Frankenstein story, sometimes inadvertently. A deliberate comedy was the 1996 movie TRANSYLVANIA 6-5000, written and directed by Rudy DeLuca. It began



with two yellow-sheet tabloid reporters sent to Transylvania to find the Frankenstein monster. That the monster was fictional didn't perturb the editor, who never let facts get in the way of a good story.

On arrival at the village high in the Transylvanian Alps, the reporters found out that the locals aren't yokels. Their search for Frankenstein caused much merriment among the villagers. The Mayor, however, was delighted to see them because he had invested in a tourist resort themed on Dracula, who really did exist. He was hoping they would plug his development in their newspaper.

There are characters of the greatest eccentricity, including an Igor who wants to be a standup comedian and a voluptuous female vampire. Dr Malavaqua was the village physician who was only a mad scientist when he was in his laboratory and perfectly sane outside it.

One of the reporters courted a fellow tourist, a single young mum with a preschool daughter who went missing in the forest. Frankenstein's monster, or more correctly, Malavaqua's monster, rescued the little girl but was misunderstood. It is the modern age but all the villagers still have torches and pitchforks handy, and aren't afraid to use them. Nor was the auto-de-fe extinct.

It all worked out in the end, it being a comedy and not a tragedy. Everyone, monsters and humans alike, closed out the movie with traditional dancing in the village square. A funny movie, worth watching.

"The Bride Of Frankenstein" (2012) by Mike Resnick, is from his collection THE INCARCERATION OF CAPTAIN NEBULA AND OTHER LOST FUTURES. The story is the diary of Mrs Frankenstein, the Baron's wife. She married Victor because she wanted a title. In exchange for becoming Baroness von Frankenstein, she supplied her fortune to help him do his research.

It was not a happy marriage. She didn't like living in a cold drafty castle with no electricity. Igor was an insolent servant who didn't bathe as often as he should.

The creature, which had no name, is uppity. He liked to read romance novels. Because of his looks, any love he has for a woman would definitely be unrequited. The Baroness solved the problem by having Victor build a mate. In the process, she reconciled with Victor. As the story closed, they will soon have another Frankenstein, this one by natural processes.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Arranz-Otaegui, A., et al (2018) **Archaeobotanical evidence reveals the origins of bread 14,400 years ago in northeastern Jordan.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:7925-7930

Authors' abstract: *Despite being one of the most important foodstuffs consumed in the modern world, the origins of bread are still largely unknown. Here we report the earliest empirical evidence for the preparation of bread-like products by Natufian hunter-gatherers, 4,000 years before the emergence of the Neolithic agricultural way of life.*

*The discovery of charred food remains has allowed for the reconstruction of the chaîne opératoire for the early production of bread-like products. Our results suggest the use of the wild ancestors of domesticated cereals (e.g. wild einkorn) and club-rush tubers to produce flat bread-like products. Cereal-based meals such as bread probably become staples when Neolithic farmers started to rely on the cultivation of domesticated cereal species for their subsistence.*

*In this study we analyze a total of 24 charred food remains from Shubayqa 1, a Natufian hunter-gatherer site located in northeastern Jordan and dated to 14.6–11.6 ka cal BP. Our finds provide empirical data to demonstrate that the preparation and consumption of bread-like products predated the emergence of agriculture by at least 4,000 years.*

*The interdisciplinary analyses indicate the use of some of the founder crops of southwest Asian agriculture (e.g., Triticum boeoticum, wild einkorn) and root foods (e.g., Bolboschoenus glaucus, club-rush tubers) to produce flat bread-like products. The available archaeobotanical evidence for the Natufian period indicates that cereal exploitation was not common during this time, and it is most likely that cereal-based meals like bread become staples only when agriculture was firmly established.*

Snoeck, C., et al (2018) **Strontium isotope analysis on cremated human remains from Stonehenge support links with west Wales.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 8:10790

Authors' abstract: *Cremated human remains from Stonehenge provide direct evidence on the life of those few select individuals buried at this iconic Neolithic*

monument. The practice of cremation has, however, precluded the application of strontium isotope analysis of tooth enamel as the standard chemical approach to study their origin. New developments in strontium isotopic analysis of cremated bone reveal that at least 10 of the 25 cremated individuals analysed did not spend their lives on the Wessex chalk on which the monument is found.

Combined with the archaeological evidence, we suggest that their most plausible origin lies in west Wales, the source of the bluestones erected in the early stage of the monument's construction. These results emphasise the importance of interregional connections involving the movement of both materials and people in the construction and use of Stonehenge.

Freeman, J., et al (2018) **Synchronization of energy consumption by human societies throughout the Holocene.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:9962-9967

Authors' abstract: *We report coincident changes in the consumption of energy by human populations over the last 10,000 years (synchrony) and document patterns consistent with the contemporary process of globalization operating in the past.*

*Our results suggest that the process of globalization may display great antiquity among our species, and this knowledge provides an entry point for integrating insights from archaeological research into discussions on the long-term consequences of globalization for building sustainable societies. Our results demonstrate the potential for archaeological radiocarbon records to serve as a basis for millennial-scale comparisons of human energy dynamics and provide a baseline for further cross-cultural research on the long-term growth and decline trajectories of human societies.*

*When populations synchronize, adverse changes in ecosystems and social systems may cascade from society to society. Thus, to develop policies that favor the sustained use of resources, we must understand the processes that cause the synchrony of human populations. To date, it is not clear whether human societies display long-term synchrony or, if they do, the potential causes.*

*Our analysis begins to fill this knowledge gap by quantifying the long-term synchrony of human societies, and we hypothesize that the synchrony of human populations results from*

*(i) the creation of social ties that couple populations over smaller scales and (ii) much larger scale, globally convergent trajectories of cultural evolution toward more energy-consuming political economies with higher carrying capacities.*

*Our results suggest that the process of globalization is a natural consequence of evolutionary trajectories that increase the carrying capacities of human societies.*

Dehghan, M., et al (2018) **Associations of fats and carbohydrate intake with cardiovascular disease and mortality in 18 countries from five continents (PURE): a prospective cohort study.** THE LANCET 390: 2050-2062

Authors' abstract: *The relationship between macronutrients and cardiovascular disease and mortality is controversial. Most available data are from European and North American populations where nutrition excess is more likely, so their applicability to other populations is unclear.*

*The Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study is a large, epidemiological cohort study of individuals aged 35 to 70 years (enrolled between Jan 1, 2003, and March 31, 2013) in 18 countries with a median followup of 7.4 years (IQR 5.3–9.3). Dietary intake of 135,335 individuals was recorded using validated food frequency questionnaires. The primary outcomes were total mortality and major cardiovascular events (fatal cardiovascular disease, non-fatal myocardial infarction, stroke, and heart failure).*

*Secondary outcomes were all myocardial infarctions, stroke, cardiovascular disease mortality, and non-cardiovascular disease mortality. Participants were categorised into quintiles of nutrient intake (carbohydrate, fats, and protein) based on percentage of energy provided by nutrients. We assessed the associations between consumption of carbohydrate, total fat, and each type of fat with cardiovascular disease and total mortality.*

*High carbohydrate intake was associated with higher risk of total mortality, whereas total fat and individual types of fat were related to lower total mortality. Total fat and types of fat were not associated with cardiovascular disease, myocardial infarction, or cardiovascular disease mortality, whereas saturated fat had an inverse association with stroke. Global dietary guidelines should be reconsidered in light of these findings.*



Hout, Michael (2018) **Americans’ occupational status reflects the status of both of their parents.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1802508115

Author’s abstract: *Occupational status persists across generations in the United States to a degree incompatible with the popular theme of “land of opportunity”. Data from 1994 to 2016 show that median occupational status rose 0.5 point for every one-point increase in parents’ status (somewhat less if the father was absent).*

*Intergenerational persistence did not change during these years, but overall mobility declined from two-thirds of people born in the 1940s to half of those born in the 1980s. This substantial decline in absolute mobility reflects the changing distribution of occupational opportunities in the American labor market, not intergenerational persistence.*

*American workers’ occupational status strongly reflects the status of their parents. Men and women who grew up in a two-earner or father-breadwinner family achieved occupations that rose 0.5 point for every one-point increase in their parents’ statuses (less if their father was absent).*

*Gender differences were small in two-earner families and mother-only families, but men’s status persisted more when the father was the sole breadwinner. Intergenerational persistence did not change in the time the data cover (1994 to 2016). Absolute mobility declined for recent birth cohorts; barely half the men and women born in the 1980s were upwardly mobile compared with two-thirds of those born in the 1940s.*

Jalal, H., et al (2018) **Changing dynamics of the drug overdose epidemic in the United States from 1979 through 2016.** SCIENCE 361:doi.org/10.1126/science.aau1184

Authors’ abstract: *We focused on deaths from overdoses as a relatively reliable metric of the epidemic because all deaths are required to be reported in all U.S. states and territories using the standardized International Classification of Diseases. In an effort to understand the epidemic dynamics and perhaps predict its future course, we analyzed records of 599,255 deaths from 1979 through 2016 from the National Vital Statistics System where unintentional drug poisoning was identified as the main cause of death.*

*The overall mortality rate for unintentional drug poisonings in the United States grew exponentially from 1979 through 2016. ... By contrast, the trajectories of mortality rates from individual drugs have not tracked along exponential trajectories. Cocaine was a leading cause in 2005–2006, which was overtaken successively by prescription opioids, then heroin, and then synthetic opioids such as fentanyl.*

*The demographic patterns of deaths due to each drug have also shown substantial variability over time. Until 2010, most deaths were in 40- to 50-year-old persons, from cocaine and increasingly from prescription drugs. Deaths from heroin and then fentanyl have subsequently predominated, affecting younger persons, ages 20 to 40. Mortality rates for males have exceeded those for females for all drugs. Rates for whites exceeded those for blacks for all opioids, but rates were much greater among blacks for cocaine.*

*Death rates for prescription drugs were greater for rural than urban populations. The geographic patterns of deaths also vary by drug. Prescription opioid deaths are widespread across the United States, whereas heroin and fentanyl deaths are predominantly located in the northeastern United States and methamphetamine deaths in the southwestern United States. Cocaine deaths tend to be associated with urban centers.*

Balcells, L., and G. Torrats-Espinosa (2018) **Using a natural experiment to estimate the electoral consequences of terrorist attacks.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1800302115

Authors’ abstract: *Does terrorism turn voters against governments, or do citizens “rally around the flag”? Understanding the relationship between terrorist attacks and electoral behavior is key to comprehending how terrorism impacts democracies. We estimate the causal effect of terrorist violence on electoral behavior by leveraging data from nationally and regionally representative surveys that were being fielded when Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) perpetrated terrorist attacks in Spain.*

*We find that attacks are likely to increase individuals’ intent to participate in democratic elections but not to change their vote choice as reported in the surveys. These results are relevant because they imply that terrorists may have less leverage on electoral results than previously thought.*

*This study investigates the consequences of terrorist attacks for political behavior by leveraging a natural experiment in Spain. We study eight attacks against civilians, members of the military, and police officers perpetrated between 1989 and 1997 by Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), a Basque terrorist organization that was active between 1958 and 2011.*

*We use nationally and regionally representative surveys that were being fielded when the attacks occurred to estimate the causal effect of terrorist violence on individuals' intent to participate in democratic elections as well as on professed support for the incumbent party.*

*We find that both lethal and nonlethal terrorist attacks significantly increase individuals' intent to participate in a future democratic election. The magnitude of this impact is larger when attacks are directed against civilians than when directed against members of the military or the police.*

*We find no evidence that the attacks change support for the incumbent party. These results suggest that terrorist attacks enhance political engagement of citizens.*

Jain, M.J., and K.J. Mavani (2017) **A comprehensive study of worldwide selfie-related accidental mortality: a growing problem of the modern society.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INJURY CONTROL AND SAFETY PROMOTION 24:544-549

Authors' abstract: *Since Oxford dictionary has described 'Selfie', selfie deaths have received a fair amount of coverage but the extent of the problem and the data behind it have not been appropriately explored.*

*The aim of our study is to obtain epidemiological characteristics of selfie-related mortality worldwide with the objective of providing an insight to 'Why selfie', 'Why risky', 'Psychological basis' and 'measures of control.'*

*Despite thousands of web pages, very few scientific articles are available in medical journals. So, we went online via Google search engine compiling every reported instance after confirming it and verifying the information in Wikipedia. Non-fatal injuries and non-selfie type of photography-related deaths were excluded from the study.*

*From 2014 to mid-2016, 75 people have died while attempting selfie in 52 incidents worldwide. Mean age of the victims was 23.3 and 82% were male. India is the most affected country and Russia and US being second. Fall from height, drowning and rail accidents are the top three modes of death.*

*Large-scale use of cell phone worldwide and underlying risk in selfie behaviour seems the culprit. Inability to compare selfie with non-selfie photography due to lack of data is definitely a limitation. Worldwide initiatives are being taken like 'NO SELFIE ZONES' but still a multifactorial approach is required before it gets too late.*

Bansal, A., and A. Pakhare (2018) **Selfies: A boon or bane?** JOURNAL OF FAMILY MEDICINE AND PRIMARY CARE 7:doi.org/10.4103/jfmmpc.jfmmpc\_109\_18

Authors' abstract: *Background Selfie deaths have become an emerging problem and we performed this study to assess the epidemiology of selfie-related deaths across the globe. Subject and Methods We performed a comprehensive search for keywords such as "selfie deaths; selfie accidents; selfie mortality; self photography deaths; koolfie deaths; mobile death/accidents" from news reports to gather information regarding selfie deaths.*

*From October 2011 to November 2017, there have been 259 deaths while clicking selfies in 137 incidents. The mean age was 22.94 years. About 72.5% of the total deaths occurred in males and 27.5% in females. The highest number of incidents and selfie-deaths has been reported in India followed by Russia, United States, and Pakistan. Drowning, transport, and fall form the topmost reasons for deaths caused by selfies.*

*We also classified reasons for deaths due to selfie as risky behavior or non-risky behavior. Risky behavior caused more deaths and incidents due to selfies than non-risky behavior. The number of deaths in females is less due to risky behavior than non-risky behavior while it is approximately three times in males.*

*Conclusion "No selfie zones" areas should be declared across tourist areas especially places such as water bodies, mountain peaks, and over tall buildings to decrease the incidence of selfie-related deaths.*



Christakis, D.A., et al (2018) **How early media exposure may affect cognitive function: A review of results from observations in humans and experiments in mice.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:9851-9858

Authors' abstract: *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is now among the most commonly diagnosed chronic psychological dysfunctions of childhood. By varying estimates, it has increased by 30% in the past 20 years. Environmental factors that might explain this increase have been explored.*

*One such factor may be audiovisual media exposure during early childhood. Observational studies in humans have linked exposure to fast-paced television in the first 3 years of life with subsequent attentional deficits in later childhood. Although longitudinal and well controlled, the observational nature of these studies precludes definitive conclusions regarding a causal relationship.*

*As experimental studies in humans are neither ethical nor practical, mouse models of excessive sensory stimulation (ESS) during childhood, akin to the enrichment studies that have previously shown benefits of stimulation in rodents, have been developed. Experimental studies using this model have corroborated that ESS leads to cognitive and behavioral deficits, some of which may be potentially detrimental. Given the ubiquity of media during childhood, these findings in humans and rodents perhaps have important implications for public health.*

Prescott, A.T., et al (2018) **Metaanalysis of the relationship between violent video game play and physical aggression over time.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:9882-9888

Authors' abstract: *To clarify and quantify the influence of video game violence (VGV) on aggressive behavior, we conducted a metaanalysis of all prospective studies to date that assessed the relation between exposure to VGV and subsequent overt physical aggression. The search strategy identified 24 studies with over 17,000 participants and time lags ranging from 3 months to 4 years. The samples comprised various nationalities and ethnicities with mean ages from 9 to 19 years.*

*For each study we obtained the standardized regression coefficient for the prospective effect of VGV on subsequent aggression, controlling for baseline*

*aggression. VGV was related to aggression using both fixed and random effects models. When all available covariates were included, the size of the effect remained significant for both models. No evidence of publication bias was found.*

*Ethnicity was a statistically significant moderator for the fixed-effects models but not for the random-effects models. Stratified analyses indicated the effect was largest among Whites, intermediate among Asians, and nonsignificant among Hispanics.*

Nyffeler, M., et al (2018) **Insectivorous birds consume an estimated 400 to 500 million tons of prey annually.** SCIENCE OF NATURE 105:doi.org/10.1007/s00114-018-1571-z

Authors' abstract: *In this paper, we present an estimate of the predation impact of the global population of insectivorous birds based on 103 (for the most part) published studies of prey consumption (kg ha<sup>-1</sup> season<sup>-1</sup>) of insectivorous birds in seven biome types. By extrapolation, taking into account the global land cover of the various biomes, an estimate of the annual prey consumption of the world's insectivorous birds was obtained.*

*We estimate the prey biomass consumed by the world's insectivorous birds to be somewhere between 400 and 500 million metric tons year<sup>-1</sup>, but most likely at the lower end of this range (corresponding to an energy consumption of about  $2.7 \times 10^{18}$  J year<sup>-1</sup> or about 0.15% of the global terrestrial net primary production). Birds in forests account for >70% of the global annual prey consumption of insectivorous birds (= 300 million tons year<sup>-1</sup>), whereas birds in other biomes (savannas and grasslands, croplands, deserts, and Arctic tundra) are less significant contributors (= 100 million tons year<sup>-1</sup>).*

*Especially during the breeding season, when adult birds feed their nestlings protein-rich prey, large numbers of herbivorous insects (i.e., primarily in the orders Coleoptera, Diptera, Hemiptera, Hymenoptera, Lepidoptera, and Orthoptera) supplemented by spiders are captured. The estimates presented in this paper emphasize the ecological and economic importance of insectivorous birds in suppressing potentially harmful insect pests on a global scale, especially in forested areas.*

**LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES**  
photos by Dale Speirs

In 2009, Todd Bol of Hudson, Wisconsin, built a glass-fronted box, set it on a pole in his front yard, and invented the concept of the Little Free Library when he invited passersby to take a book, leave a book. That concept spread like wildfire and today there are 75,000 or more LFLs around the world. Alas, the news came that Bol died on October 18 of cancer. If you would seek his monument, look around you.



Calgary has hundreds of LFLs. I illustrated a few in OPUNTIA #378 and have been photographing them for several years. Since no one else in my family is interested in physical books, I have been disposing of them through LFLs rather than have my heirs toss them in the recycle bin.

A few more photos, taken in the summer of 2018. In the Sunnyside district of central Calgary at 7 Avenue NW and 3 Street, I found this double LFL by a condominium townhouse.





I passed through the hamlet of Mossleigh, about an hour's drive southeast of Calgary, and saw a LFL adjacent to postal cluster boxes. The hamlet is in Vulcan County.





A snapshot with a smartphone as I meandered about Calgary in October. I was walking along the Bow River Promenade past Prince's Island when I saw this rainbow in the lagoon.

