

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera on a snow-covered path through a forest. The path is covered in deep snow with some tracks. The trees are bare and covered in snow. The overall tone is cold and serene.

hv1

# explore

WINTER IN THE VALLEY 2024

DION OGUST

## Cold days

*A meditation*

by Brian Hollander

Blessed are the cold days...  
When nothing moves and no one stays  
The air is clear and bites the face  
And all things sleep in winter's grace

*Continued on page 2*



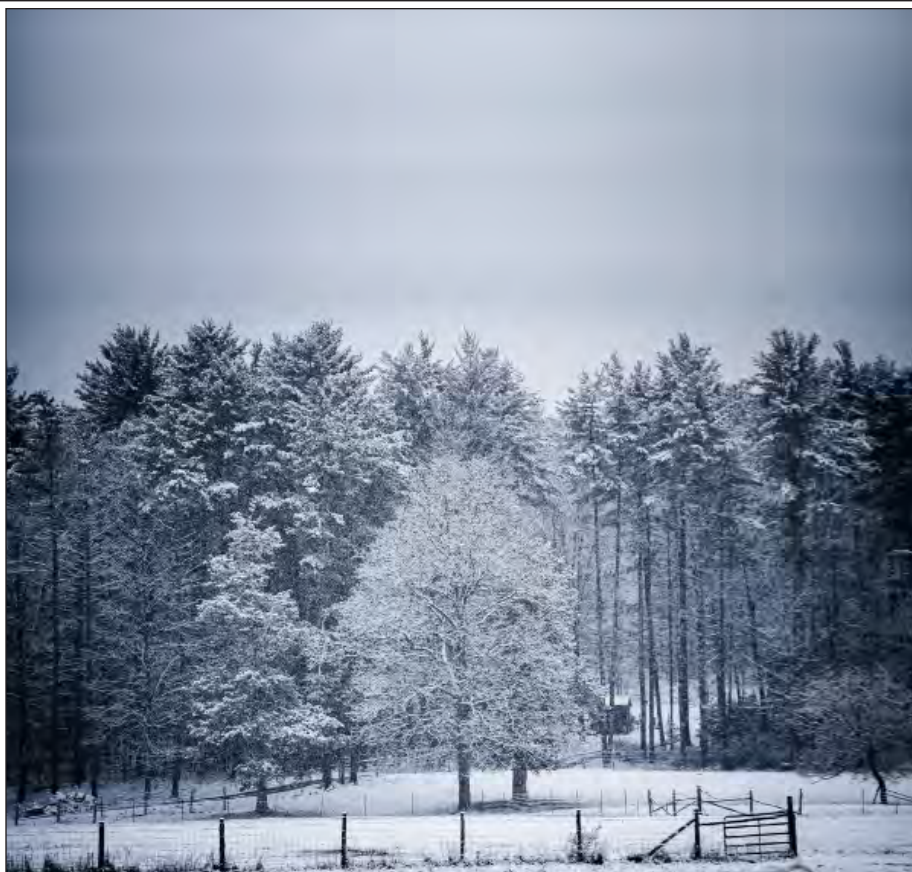
## Cold days

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Nowadays, we don't get the cold here in the Catskills and Hudson Valley as much as we used to. Maybe it's climate change or just an attitude copped by old man winter, but I can distinctly recall periods of time up to say a decade ago with a duration that could approach a week at a time where the Fahrenheit would slip below the zero mark, as far down as minus 7° or -8°.

On those auspicious days, the hearty among us might get up and get out of the house between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. and walk up Mill Hill Road into the middle of Woodstock, just stroll Tinker Street past the W.A.A., past the library, past Lasher's Funeral Home (though you hustled on through for fear you might get stuck there), down toward Bearsville — right on the double yellow line in the center of the street, just ambling down the road. Owning the territory, you might do some figure-eight loops covering the width of Route 212, reveling in the freedom of solitude, in the extreme circumstances.

*SWEET TIMES ARE THE FROZEN NIGHTS  
When all my woes turn small and slight*



PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

*We nestle warm by the oak wood fire  
while the flames kindle old desire  
oh your touch ... restores my soul  
and we stay young while we grow old*

### How cold is cold?

Well, suffice to say that the approximate minus 8 F we've enjoyed and shivered through over the years can feel like a balmy day in Denver.



Here's some very superficial investigations I made, using at least two sources for each on the web.

Turns out that the temperature has plunged to its lowest recorded on the planet, as reported by the World Meteorological Organization in 2023, when, on the East Antarctica Plateau a record of minus 144 degrees Fahrenheit was reported. NASA calls that spot "the coldest place on Earth."

That shattered the record of -128.6 degrees Fahrenheit reported in 1983 in Vostok, Antarctica that had been confirmed by the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute in Russia.

Here are several more pieces of perhaps relevant information, without going deeper than this modest meditation can handle.

There are four different scales scientists use to measure temperature: Celsius, Fahrenheit, Kelvin and Rankine. None of them can make it hotter or colder, they just assign different scales and numbers.

Then there is this measurement called Absolute Zero. Physicists call it "the coldest conceivable temperature," or "the lowest possible temperature." It's calculated to be minus 459.67°F. The web tells us that "at a temperature of absolute zero there is no motion and no heat."

And finally, as we teeter on subjects we know little about and can conceive of even less, there's the Boomerang Nebula, or a protoplanetary nebula (look it up yourself), some 5000 light years away, which, NASA says provides us with "the coldest spot in the known cosmos" at one degree Kelvin, or minus 457.87 degrees Fahrenheit.

### Cold culture

(Recite the following as fast as you can. Sing the Hank Williams line.)

Cold beer, cold feet, cold hands, cold cuts, how can I free your doubtful mind

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DION OGUST

and melt your cold cold heart, ice cold, cold fish, cold shoulder, cold shower, cold pizza, cold rain, cold war, head cold, cold cider, cold blood, cold turkey, out cold, cold comfort, cold hard facts, Stone Cold Steve Austin, cold cream, cold sweat, cold noodles and on and on...

### Some opinions about living in cold country — hey, it ain't Minnesota!

Quote on TV: "Hey, it's New York. It's supposed to snow..."

Al, on the street: "Just give me June, July and August. You can keep the rest...."

Jamey says: "Covid taught me to like cold because the only way I could get together with friends was outdoors. So I learned to get better garments on. Once I dressed more warmly, I learned to enjoy it .... Tim loves cold weather, and it was always a big difference between us, so it was good for the marriage ...."

Tim says: "I moved up here on New Year's Day 1970. I hit the Thruway and saw these ice waterfalls along the road, and I thought, am I driving into paradise here? When I was a kid a state of bliss would come over me when it started to snow ...."

Geoff says: "When it's hot I look forward to it, when it's here, it's bring on the spring."

Tom E, musing on extreme cold: "Does anybody like that? I feel like I like it a lot less than I used to like it."

Jana says, "It's a shocker. I found a balaclava ... as long as my ears are warm, I'm okay. I took a walk this morning, I layered. It's easier when the sun is out ... I don't like being cold, but I can deal with it for a little bit. I like moderate...."

### Oh carry me back to the well

*When signs of spring begin to tell  
I lean my heart to the howling wind  
And arch my back to the grind again  
But you are here, and I'll be, too  
When the days turn cold, I'll be there  
for you*

— Song lyrics by Brian Hollander

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Kingston Library's temporary space in the Cioni Building allows for a dedicated children's area, community meeting space, computer access and many more offerings.

# Aisle be there for you

*Ulster County public libraries are the ultimate winter destination*

by Zac Shaw

**W**INTER IS A notoriously slow time for events and activities, but there is one exception: your local library.

The public perception of libraries as stodgy, boring, whisper-quiet dead zones for book geeks is all wrong. If you haven't set foot in a library in years, you honestly don't know what you've been missing. Modern public libraries are a best-kept secret in terms of free resources to entertain and educate you and your family, as well as engage with your local community.

Libraries aren't good at marketing. They

don't have budgets to advertise their offerings. Their online presence is typically rudimentary. Their social-media activity is straightforward. In a digital world, there's a sense that libraries have fallen behind. Books? They're so 20th century.

In reality, this attitude is patently incorrect. Not only have libraries adapted to the digital age, they are thriving in it. And to say that libraries are about books and not much else only means you haven't been to a library in a while.

Don't take my word for it. Just head down to your local library, sign up for a free library card and their email list, and you will soon see why the public library might just be the smartest expenditure of tax dollars in the 21st century.

If you're still unmotivated to visit, allow me fill in the marketing gap with the top six reasons to visit one of the 21 libraries in Ulster County:

## **Libraries are much more than books**

I had to put this point first because I know there are a lot of folks out there that simply don't read that many books. No judgment.

Maybe you're more of a magazine or newspaper reader. Libraries have a ton of subscriptions to both local and national publications. Each one basically contains a free newsstand. Why pay ridiculous prices for magazines that are full of paid advertisements? Spend 30 minutes at



your local library every month reading only the good stuff, and you just saved serious bank.

Oh, you prefer comics, graphic novels, manga, that sort of thing? Librarians haven't ignored the massive visual storytelling trend taking place in youth and young-adult culture. You might be surprised to find a whole comic shop's worth of releases at your local library.

Maybe you're not much of a reader at all. Well, books aren't all reading. There's cookbooks, indoor gardening guides, activities, games ... books aren't just for

cozying up to on a winter's day. Some are gateways to real-world activities that don't involve much reading at all.

The printed word may be the backbone of libraries, but their beating heart is their event calendars. The larger the library, the more events, with some offering multiple things to do every day of the week.

Our local libraries are important spaces for free public events, and you'd be surprised at how much is on offer these days: Dungeons and Dragons campaigns, guitar lessons, yoga, crafting, board games, video games, LEGOs, knitting,

tech support, meditation and networking, to name a few. Book clubs and story hours still abound, but local libraries have really gone out of their way to offer a multitude of things to do for every age group and interest.

And don't forget the DVDs and CDs. Sure, they're easy to overlook in the streaming era, but they're free! Our area libraries are stocked up on the most popular releases.

### There's an app for that

The myLIBRO app is perhaps

## camps & children's activities



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Phoenicia Rod & Gun Club, Rt. 28 Phoenicia NY  
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Rondout Valley Rod & Gun Club, 492 Samsonville Rd Kerhonkson NY 12446  
Rosendale Sportsmen's Club, Springtown Rd Tillson NY  
Ruby Rod & Gun Club, Main St Ruby NY  
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Elting Library in New Paltz offers an array of classes for kids, teens and adults.

the single most exciting innovation to happen to the local public library system in the last decade.

On the surface, it seems obvious: Why wouldn't there be an app you could use to search for and reserve books? Remember, we're talking about a publicly-funded entity here. It's no small task to digitally catalog all the books, keep track of where they are, and easily allow users to search through hundreds of thousands of titles.

Is the myLIBRO app as slick as Google? No, it's fairly rudimentary. Though it has its fair share of glitches, it works well enough to perform what feels like a magic trick: Search for a book, reserve the book, and it will be waiting for you to pick up when you next visit the library. The magic also works with digital books and resources.

Do you hear that, Dewey Decimal System? We don't need ya anymore!

### Your local library is actually over 66 libraries

The myLIBRO app fits book-in-dust jacket with the Mid-Hudson Library System (MHLS), a network of over 66 libraries across our region, all pooling their catalogs that come together like Voltron to form a mega-library to which the public has full and free access.

## Hudson Valley Explore

*Winter in the Valley*

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Geddy Sveikauskas

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The myLibro app contains a network of 66 libraries across the region creating a meg-library to which the public has full and free access.



LAUREN THOMAS

Libraries offer games as seen here. Library visitors at the Highland Library enjoying DVR gaming system.

With so many libraries at your disposal, there's a really good chance you'll find what you're looking for. The MHLS simply blew my mind when I discovered it. Why doesn't everyone know about this? Through your local Ulster County library, you can take out books from dozens of libraries across our area. This

is a game-changer.

### Libraries are a life hack for cash-strapped parents

My local library (Kingston Library) lit-

erally changed my life as a parent. With a voracious young reader in the house (and two avid adult readers), we have saved – no joke – over \$10,000 on taking books out from the public library versus buying them. Of course, I don't have that kind of money to buy books (I write articles on public libraries, after all). But the library has enabled me to act as though I can afford any and all books I want, and our child has benefited tremendously from having tens of thousands of books to choose from, with no limit.

But again, the library isn't just books. There are computers for kids to play games on and use the Internet, the aforementioned DVDs and CDs for entertainment (there's typically a whole kid's section), and plenty of special activities and events are provided.

Whether you pop in and out, saving thousands, or take an hour or two to hang out, parents should always have the local library in their boredom-fighting, life-enriching arsenal.

### Knowledge is power

What's your screen time looking like lately?

Let's address the elephant in the room: Libraries are unpopular in large part because they struggle to compete with smartphones, streaming video, and video games.

There's just one catch – knowledge of who won the latest season of Survivor is not power. Knowledge of how to defeat the final boss of a role-playing game is

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Hurley Library, one of 66 libraries throughout our region, offering books but also so much more.

not power. The kind of knowledge that equals power doesn't come exclusively in books by any means, but it is where it is concentrated.

Don't take my word for it. Most people who succeed wildly in their goals are at least in part propelled by reading books relevant to their pursuits. The simple act of focusing one's mind like a sponge to soak up information related to what you're looking to do in life – even if that's escaping into a world of fiction – has little rival to books, even in the digital

age. Artificial intelligence will increasingly challenge and ultimately usurp the ultimate power of the book to impart knowledge, but at least for now, books are perhaps the best way to access new realms of possibility within your life.

#### **You don't have to read every word**

Here's something I learned too late in life: You don't have to read a book cover to cover. In fact, most of the time it's not even a good idea, and it might be why lots of people dislike reading books.

I didn't realize this until I became a regular library user. When you're getting every book for free, suddenly the pressure is off with regard to reading it. Don't like the first few pages? Who cares? Put the book down and move on to the next one. The library will let you take out huge stacks of books.

Buy, borrow or be gifted a book and you're instantly under pressure to enjoy it. Having this freedom to acquire as many books as you want enables you to read only as much of each book as makes sense. It saves you time and allows you to experience a greater variety of authors and styles.

And if you're feeling ambitious about saving even more time, look into learning the basics of speed reading. Just by watching a few YouTube videos on the subject, you can develop skills to not just read more quickly, but to read at hyper-speed.

This is particularly great for non-fiction enthusiasts like myself who will often encounter passages that are already familiar or somewhat irrelevant. Speed-reading through those pages allows for basic comprehension of the material while advancing at ten times your normal

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# Free is real cheap

*Eight free things to do in the Hudson Valley this winter*



DION OGUST

Olana.

by Karlee Flood

## Museums

While many museums charge entry fees, there are many throughout the Hudson Valley that offer free admission. Art Omi is a free sculpture park in Ghent and offers dozens of large sculptures across 120 acres. Admission is free to the public. Olana State Historic Site sits on 250 acres and features five miles of carriage roads, a Persian-inspired house at the summit, and panoramic views of the Hudson Valley. There is a fee to get a tour into the mansion itself but the grounds,

Woodstock's Millstream Tavern offers live music.





with stunning views, are absolutely free. Also they do offer a free community day every third Thursday of the month. The New York State Museum in Albany explores New York State's natural and cultural diversity. The museum is the oldest and largest state museum in the country—established in 1836. It is absolutely free, all the time!

Hudson Valley residents receive free admission to Dia Beacon on the last Sunday of each month, "Hudson Valley Free Day." Visitors who are not Hudson Valley residents can reserve free or discounted tickets by filling out a free-admission re-

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quest on the Dia Beacon website. Beacon and Newburgh residents receive free admission to Dia Beacon every day.

ArtPort in Kingston is always free to the general public. Closed for winter break until February, it reopens with an exhibit titled "Game On" in just a few weeks. Once a month, the Hudson River Maritime Museum on the Rondout waterfront in Kingston holds a "Bank of America Museums On Us" where bank members get free admittance to the museum. The Center for Photography Woodstock in Kingston hosts a free weekly "Meet the Artist" lecture series on Thursday evenings.

### College lectures

Events at colleges aren't just for college students. Most are not only free, but open to the public. From speaker series to concerts to film screenings, universities are a great option for lifelong learning, no matter what age they are. Some colleges to check out in the Hudson Valley include Vassar, SUNY New Paltz, Bard, Marist College, Ulster Community College, and Dutchess Community College. Look to their calendars to find event relevant to your interests or career.

### Hiking

The Hudson Valley offers some of the greatest views in the country. The Catskills Fire Tower Challenge is a great way to check out some key Hudson Valley landmarks, stay in shape, and explore new areas. If you hike to the top of each fire tower on the list, you will win a com-



High Falls Cafe hosts an open mic night.

memorative patch and be entered into a grand-prize drawing. The first 1000 finishers will also receive a one-year subscription to DEC's *Conservationist* magazine. The fire towers include Overlook Mountain in Woodstock, Hunter Mountain, Red Hill Mountain in Denning, Balsam Lake Mountain in Hardenburgh, Tremper Mountain in Shandaken, and Upper Esopus in Mount Tremper. You have until December 31 to complete the challenge.

The Walkway Over the Hudson connecting Highland and Poughkeepsie is a must-see, the world's longest elevated

pedestrian bridge. Enjoy scenic views of the mountains and the Hudson River free of cost. Also, hike the Wallkill Valley Rail-Trail and check out the Rosendale Trestle.

### Farmers' markets

Luckily, farmers' markets don't end when winter arrives. The Kingston Farmers' Market at the Old Dutch Church takes place every other Saturday from December through April. The Beacon Farmers' Market is a year-round outdoor market in the Beacon DMV lot every Sunday. The Greig Farm Market in Red Hook is open year-round, seven days a week. You can order ahead for pickup by calling the farm.

The Millerton Farmers' Market at North East Community Center in Millerton is open on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month. Taste NY at Todd Hill offers year-round, locally produced goods.

### Game nights

Game nights are a great way to relieve stress and enjoy some of the best restaurants and stores in the region.

World's End Comics in Kingston and Gunks Gaming Guild in New Paltz hold a variety of game nights for gamers of all ages, like Magic the Gathering, Commander Madness, D&D, RPGs, TCGs, wargaming and more. World's End also hosts book signings, a chess club,

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anime club, board-game nights, special movie viewings, queer gaming events, and more.

Rough Draft in Kingston offers trivia nights and game nights every month,

but make sure to get there early as their events have become a game-night staple.

Several games take place at local public libraries. For instance, the Saugerties Public Library hosts games like Eughties

Film Trivia, D&D, Scrabble, and more.

Yarn Farm in Kingston hosts trivia nights every other week. For non-gamers, they host free knit nights every Wednesday.

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Trivia takes place every Tuesday at Keegan Ales. The Station Bar & Curio recently began offering free pool Thursdays, with and beer and shot specials all night.

Kirwan's Game Store in Catskill also hosts routine game nights.

Angry Orchard Cidery in Walden has

## business & tax



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World End Comics is one of the local businesses that offers game nights in the Hudson Valley.



Lots of hiking throughout the Hudson Valley is at no cost, including the Walkway oVer the Hudson.

a board game night featuring classic games, cider, and food.

### Open mic nights

Open mics are a great opportunity to show off your skills and meet fellow musicians. The Colony in Woodstock hosts a weekly, "world-famous" open mic with a house guitar and piano available. Open Mic Bandeoake features a full backing band with generations of experience in cover bands, rock bands, blues & jazz bands at Barvino in Fishkill. Other open mics in the area include Gunks Gaming Guild in New Paltz, High Falls Cafe, the Avalon Lounge in Catskill, the Pearl Moon Open Mic in Woodstock, and occasionally at Rewind



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TOM VINETZ

Dia:Beacon offers Community Free day.

Kingston and Holding Space in Kingston. Tinker Street Tavern in Woodstock also hosts an open mic. Unison Arts in New Paltz hosts an Open Mic every third Thursday.

Freebird Kitchen & Bar in White Plains has a Sunday night jam, which showcases an eclectic mix of singers, solos, duos, jammers, full bands, covers, and

originals every Sunday evening.

### Live music

While most live music requires an entry fee, several venues throughout the Hudson Valley that offer free live music.

From rock-and-roll to Irish cover bands, Keegan Ales in Kingston averages live music five nights a week. Pearl



Moon, Millstream Tavern, and Tinker Street Tavern in Woodstock also present free live music. The Dutch in Saugerties has live music a couple of times a month. Tilda's Cafe in Kingston, specializing in up-and-coming singer-songwriters, has live music on Fridays and Saturdays.

### Government meetings

Not exercised your civic chops in a while? It's your prerogative to do so, and not enough people do. Where else do you have the opportunity to affect both your own taxes and the life of your community? It's also a great opportunity to meet and greet more of your neighbors in a relatively warm room.

Participation can be educational, exasperating, and also real fun. You're entitled to say your piece. You'll be surprised how other people will listen to what you say. They may even agree with you once in a while and suggest you consider running for office.

Even though somebody has to do it, think carefully as to whether it should be you. . Doing that may be going a little too far.

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PHYLLIS McCABE

Winter is a time when much of nature – even snakes and bears – retract, retreat.

# A winter hobby: Studying

*In heaven, the great sages study forever*

by Sparrow

**W**INTER IS A blank canvas that we, the inhabitants of the Catskills, must fill. This season is even white, like a canvas.

My friend Janet surprised me the other day by announcing: “Every winter, I

choose a new subject of study.”

“How does that work?” I asked.

“A few years ago, I decided that in the long, cold, snowy winters I would take up the study of something I was interested in, and maybe knew a little bit about,” Janet replied. “And I would try to find at least one other person who wanted to be my study partner – read stuff, and

talk about it. That never worked, because the other person always drops out, but I keep going.”

Two of her recent subjects were Taoism (in particular the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu) and the Tarot. This year Janet is investigating labyrinths.

There is a logic to Janet’s theory. Winter is a time when much of nature – even snakes and bears – retract, retreat. Deciduous trees forget photosynthesis, and shrink down to their roots.

Perhaps oak trees are studying in the dim winter light.

Someone once told me Orthodox Jews believe that in heaven great sages study forever. If it works in heaven, why not in February?

Janet convinced me, but what should

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I study?

### Varieties of humor

As I write this, it's still very late fall, and I can tell you what I've been cogitating on lately: comedy. At the Woodstock Library, I found myself drawn to *The Myron Cohen Joke Book*, which I just finished – all 408 pages of it.

I vaguely remember Mr. Cohen from my childhood. He appeared on the Ed Sullivan show 23 times. Myron was, in a sense, the most Jewish of all Jewish comedians. He was born in what's now Hrodna in Belarus, came to our nation as a child, worked as a silk salesman in the garment district, and gradually metamorphosed into a comic.

Unlike Rodney Dangerfield, who was born with the same surname, Myron bravely brandished the name of his birth. The Cohens were the priestly tribe of the Jewish people, so it is, in fact, a name to be proud of.

If I had to choose a theme of Cohen's humor, it would be "you can't win." For example:

Diner: You call this creamed lobster your special? I can find neither cream nor lobster in it.

Waiter: Yes, sir. That's what makes it special.

One of my longterm goals is to read *Larry Wilde's Complete Book of Ethnic Humor*. I know this type of joke is considered unacceptable nowadays, but I thought of a way I could put one in a newspaper:

Mr. Smith [name changed] ordered lasagna for dinner in an Italian restaurant.

winter **care care**

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### Chess! The Perfect Winter sport.

“Okay,” said the waiter, “do you prefer red or white wine?”

“It make no difference,” replied he. “I be colorblind!”

I’m not reading jokes in order to personally get funnier. I figure I’m about

as amusing as I’m ever going to be. I’m trying to understand the mechanics of humor, that mysterious transition from “setup” to “punchline.”

Why do people laugh at a joke? What does comedy accomplish?

And how does it differ from a poem? Let’s look at a poem that’s similar in length to the last joke:

*Torn from his offspring in the eve of life,  
Torn from the embraces of his tender wife,  
Sole, and all comfortless, he wastes away  
Old age, untimely posting ere his day.*

[Those four lines were chosen at random from Alexander Pope’s translation

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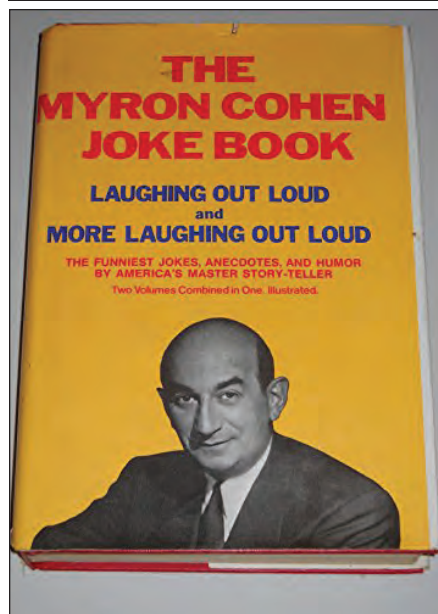
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The Myron Cohen Joke Book and understanding the mechanics of humor.

of *The Odyssey*.]

Certainly the syntax of the joke it is easier to follow than Pope's quatrain. But here's an interesting similarity: both excerpts rhyme! And both texts describe tragic situations: exile and

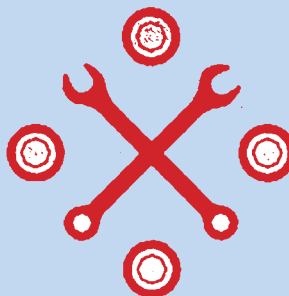
colorblindness.

I could choose another subject for winter study, perhaps an area I have no interest in, to develop whole new parts of my mind. Admittedly, I attempted this plan at Cornell University and flunked out, but the virtue of winter hobbying is that there are no grades.

### Varieties of study

Lately, when I have to sign my name on an electronic screen, I very laboriously write it out. Examining my handiwork, I realize I'm not completely satisfied with my cursive writing, which has not changed appreciably since I was ten years old. How about a season of handwriting

winter **care care**



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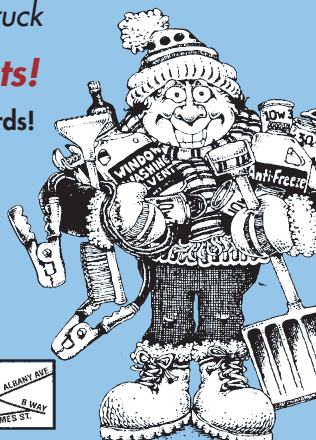
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practice?

I have some extra empty journals lying around. I can fill them full of handwriting exercises.

But what should I write? Inspiring quotations? A novel?

Imagine, if, by April, my script is flawless! (Plus I'll have a brand-new novella.)

Which brings me to another point. The key is not to be intimidated by the word "study," which implies long hours in the library. Education is different for each person. One student might compose a 1300-word exegesis; another might write five keywords on a brown paper bag. Who can say which one learns more?

### Chess versus baseball

The other day I was in Washington Square Park, and I passed the chess boards, where professional chess players stand, calling: "Game of chess? Game of chess?" to passersby. (They will play a game with anyone, for a donation.)

Chess! The perfect winter sport, if one defines "sport" broadly! To sit by a roaring fire – or even a whispering fire – contemplating a chessboard has to be the most salutary wintry pastime. And

The study of flawless script will fill those winter hours.

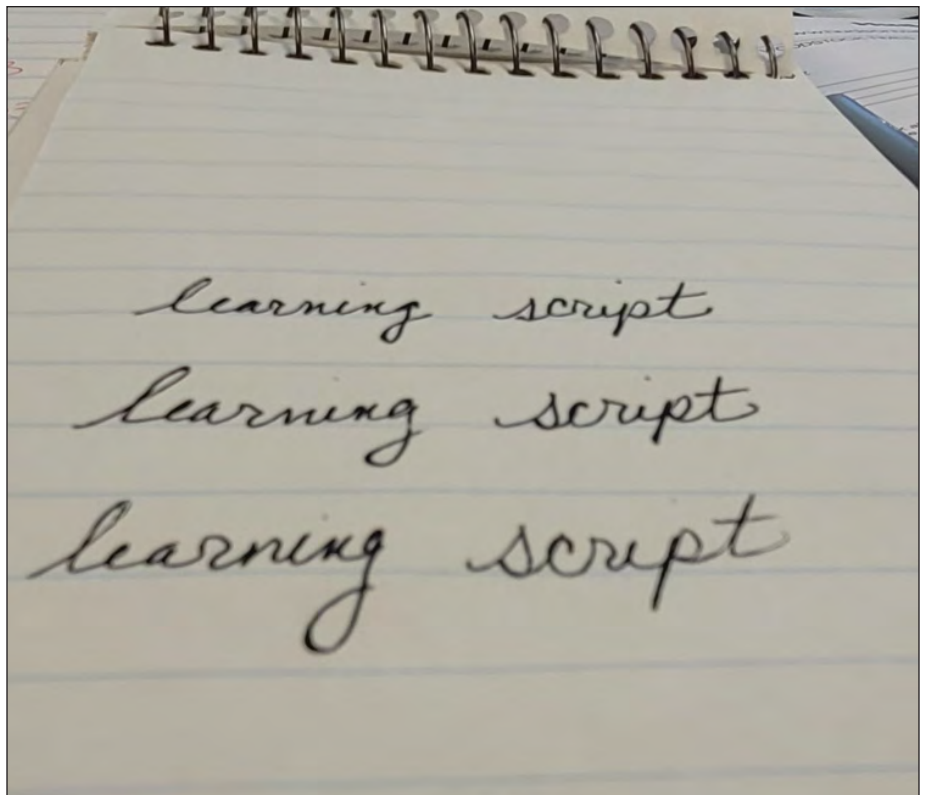
it's a mutual contemplation, two persons forging a bond of educated silence.

Do I have friends I can play chess with? I can't think of any. Maybe I should place a notice on the Shandaken page of Facebook?

I don't think I'll ever be very good in this ancient game. My two weaknesses as a chess player are that I have no strategy, and that I'm extremely impulsive. These are major deficiencies. But by springtime, all this could change!

I've become a big baseball fan in the last few years. Most everyone complains about how boring baseball is, but that's what I enjoy: the stillness, the waiting, the mesmerizing lulls. But there's also a tension between the batter and pitcher, a subtle aggression.

Chess has both elements, the quietude and the unspoken war. The white side and the black side are silently guessing each other's strategy, like pitcher and bat-wielder. Chess is winter baseball.






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# A musician's musician

*Pat Metheny never stands in one spot*



by John Burdick

I NEVER TRAVELED FAR to hear the great Pat Metheny perform. I never had to. The damn guy, that slack-jawed Midwestern jazz yokel in his striped shirts and his running shoes, kept coming to watch me listen. And if you check the records of the theaters and clubs near everywhere you've ever lived, you will probably find he's been stalking you, too,

for the better part of five decades.

Pat Metheny performs at the Bardavon Theater on April 13 at 8 p.m.

When I went away to SUNY Brockport, it was the 80/81 band in the campus ballroom: Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden, Paul Motian. The music was a little over the head of this 18-year-old. When I transferred to SUNY Oswego, it was the (ah!) classic Pat Metheny Group (PMG) in the nearby Landmark Theater in Syracuse.

That was the one time I met him. I made a joke, and he laughed.

Over intercession, it was version 1.5 of the PMG (the transitional *Of a Frampleneup*) in the dimly lit and darkly reverberant Vassar Chapel. When I graduated and returned to the Hudson Valley, it was the fully formed v.2 of the PMG (Rodby/Wertico/Aznar, for those keeping score) at The Chance of all places, making that notoriously difficult room sound like Bayreuth.

Over the years, several visits to the Bardavon followed, including an especially memorable quartet show with the Brad Mehldau trio.

And I'll be at the Bardavon when Pat brings his true solo guitar tour to town. One guitar in a 900-seat theater? I am unconcerned. As a provider of a live music experience, Metheny never disappoints.

It all started between us in the late Seventies in what is now called the Studley Theater at SUNY New Paltz, a five-minute walk — via grassy shortcuts and private

driveways — from my uptown New Paltz home. I was a teenager whose ears were just beginning to open to jazz and fusion. That first PMG record — the *White Album*, the other *White Album* — was at that precise moment my very favorite thing in the world, a game-changing,

luminous record that levitated off the jazz charts and into the Billboard top 50 (perhaps following the rather shocking commercial success of his ECM label-mate Keith Jarrett's *The Koln Concert*).

Those perfect-storm alignments are rare: going to see the artist himself perform the music that is already

playing involuntarily in your head throughout the day and in your young, wet brain's vibrant dreaming at night. That Studley Theater show lives on for me as a preserved — nay, an illumined memory — brighter

## He embraced a rock theatricality that many austere jazz artists, mainstream and avant, abjure.

than life, due in part to one of the many ways in which Pat Metheny departed from jazz customs. He embraced a rock theatricality that many austere jazz artists, mainstream and avant, abjure, favoring the default jazz visuals and values of the smoky club or the black-

tie concert-hall setting. Metheny took the transportative, world-making part of concerts seriously, even as he dressed jazz, down to striped shirts and running shoes.

It was nothing far outside jazz's time-honored performance traditions. No inflatable pigs, just well-coordinated lighting, long hair, and stage manners as physical as the demands of the music would allow (for example, Pat and the late/great Lyle Mays both thrusting their right arms high in the air during the famous glissandos in "San Lorenzo"). There were the occasional moments of pure theater. One time, the band entered through the aisles, playing marching music like the ragtag remnants of a defeated colonial fife-and-drum corps. Part of Metheny's genius, a small but important part, was for marketing, branding spin.

As to the other parts of his genius, where even to begin? Has anyone ever so effectively balanced crossover appeal with serious jazz practice and advancement? Looking across his career, it sometimes seems that whenever his commercial success would cross a certain threshold, it would trigger a spate of serious, challenging jazz records meant for the knowing jazz crowd and not so much for you and me. For every *White Album* or *American Garage* or David Bowie collab, there would be two or three like *80/81*, *Song X* with Ornette Coleman, the exceptional *Question and Answer* with Dave Holland and Roy Haynes, or — heaven forefend! — *Zero Tolerance for Silence*, the noisy, dissonant solo-guitar record that had his fans

## The story of Pat is, Just keep learning.

questioning whether it was a contractual obligation F.U. to David Geffen, some kind of cruel joke, or perhaps evidence of a mental breakdown. It has since emerged as a significant avant-garde work, famously cited as an influence by Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth.

These days, he's just Pat Metheny and say no more. He's checked every box, and so has to keep inventing new ones. He has revolutionized the art and the sound of his instrument, brought seri-



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Marsalis and the very few other titans in that position, he has done his part to define an inclusive jazz canon. With his collaboration with the late, divisive avant-garde guitarist Derek Bailey, Pat drew a map of the canonical jazz terrain so wide and welcoming and weird that he probably outraged more than half his core audience. But he is Pat Metheny, so say no more.

~ Intermission ~

LOOK, MANY JAZZ MUSICIANS HAVE this special way of making sure that the rest of us understand that we don't really understand. Sometimes, it ain't pretty. Nobody owns music, and someone should remind them of that. Other

times, however, for me at least, it is necessary medicine, tough love. When I stray too far outside my lanes of authority, I am the one who needs the reminder that maybe I don't fully understand the gravity and the inner workings of America's premiere contribution to serious music. I love it, but am I qualified to speak for it?

So I hereby welcome a few of our own Hudson Valley jazz guitarists to this swollen and intemperant: Ken McGloin, an exceedingly clever and iconoclastic guitarist and mu-

sic educator who has been enlivening the mid-Hudson music scene for decades; Matt Finck, a straight virtuoso guitarist to my ears who is also a wonderful tune writer (check out the Finck-Ball project);

and headlining is my older brother, Dave Burdick, a Berklee-schooled guitarist and University of Texas-trained composer, recently retired professor of music and founder of the commercial music

program at Millikin University, studio owner, and mentor to hundreds if not thousands, starting of course with me.

What stories -- in their own words -- do these three have to say about the influence of Metheny on them?

"IN 1974," SAYS KEN MCGLOIN, "I TRADED my Gary Burton album (featuring Mick Goodrick and Pat Metheny on guitar) for Jeff Beck's *Wired* without realizing what I had given away. A few years later, after becoming a jazz enthusiast and attending the University of Miami, I discovered that Metheny and Jaco had left their mark on that jazz department.

"My guitar teacher, Peter Harris, was a friend of Pat's and showed me how to hold the pick like he did, but it never felt right. I eventually learned that you have to find a way that works best for you. During my first lesson with Peter, he had me play 'Donna Lee,' only picking the upbeats and slurring all the downbeats. Then he had me solo using the arpeggios of the song and connecting lines with half-steps. This exercise is similar to one that I believe Pat uses to this day.

"In February 1980, I was on the second floor of the practice rooms. There was talk that Metheny would be visiting that day, as he was promoting *American Garage* in Miami that weekend. The hallways were pretty empty when he suddenly appeared, peering into practice rooms, and then entering one.

"I rushed to the door he went into, and there was a student guarding it like a bouncer. He let me in, and there were four of us in the small practice room. Pat and a student guitarist were just starting 'Autumn Leaves' in E minor. To my surprise, as I thought I was going to be

## Words seem to fail me when I try to describe the world of Pat Metheny.

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blown away by millions of notes, Pat utilized the guitar by playing open strings, harmonics, double stops, and creating a texture over the song. His touch was light but deliberate. This experience changed the way I looked at playing jazz."

MATT FINCK'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE guitar was not originally sparked by Metheny.

"I came to his music later in my life," he says. "A close friend, Bob Margolis, invited me to a Pat Metheny performance at SUNY Purchase sometime in the early 2000's. The energy and interaction of Pat and his band were eye-opening and mind-altering. Like seeing a professional sporting event live for the first time, the scope of what I was hearing and seeing was realized on a different level than if I were to just be listening to an audio recording.

"The second time I saw Pat, I believe, was the tour in support of *The Way Up*, in 2005. The concert was at The Egg in Albany and it was there that I fully realized Pat's extraordinary musical brilliance. He began with a 45-minute solo guitar set that displayed an entirely different side of his touch. The sound he created on the Linda Manzer acoustic guitar was so earthy. His pillowy plucks coupled with his soulful voice-led chordal displays were poetry in motion.

"The rest of the band joined Pat on

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stage and proceeded to perform *The Way Up* suite in its entirety. The final hour of the concert featured Pat breaking off into different duo, trio, and quartet configurations spotlighting Antonio Sanchez, Lyle Mays, and Christian McBride. By the end of the three-hour performance I had come to realize the breadth and brilliance of Pat as a composer, guitarist, bandmate and performer.

"I have yet to listen to every Metheny recording, but I plan to. The two I've listened to the most would be *Trio 99-00* album release followed up by a two-CD live release the following year with Larry Grenadier and Bill Stewart. Words seem to fail me when I try to describe the world of Pat Metheny or its effect on me."

DAVE BURDICK SPEAKS TO METHENY'S impact on him.

"I know I am speaking for a ton of other guys like me," he says. "When I was young. I was really into the Brit blues guys. Those of us who were very young in the Sixties and Seventies and learning guitar, at least growing up in a white middle-class town like we did, we didn't know who the real blues cats were. I got it from the Brits, but the Brits would always say, 'Oh, you gotta check out Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and Willie Dixon and B.B. King and Albert King and Freddie King.'"

"But at that same time, as you know, we were getting a dose of very serious music from Dad. In our house, J.S. Bach and Charlie Parker reigned supreme as the intellectual giants of linear melody. That has been a beautiful thing over the course of my life, understanding that a black bebopper and an 18th-century German were on an equal pedestal. And we were surrounded by the music of Bill Evans and Jim Hall.

"So there I was, like everyone else who had discovered jazz and wanted to find a way to navigate harmony and improvisation. Where's my path through this? I can't deny that I love blues and rock and say, 'Oh, I am through with that and am only going to play jazz now.' And into that comes Pat, and he did it so far out of left field, no one saw it coming. It was beautiful, it was clean, it wasn't angsty and filled with distorted, fast fusion playing. When I first heard Pat, it practically broke my heart.

"The drag is that, probably like a bunch



of other guys, I started losing myself in Pat's thing. In fact I completely lost myself. When I came back from Berklee, I didn't know who I was any more, and I put my jazz guitar under the bed and grabbed a Stratocaster and said, 'I'm just going to worry about making a living with a guitar.' I never renounced Pat; I just couldn't try to play like that any more. Until I was 30 and change I felt like I just couldn't get out from under his influence.

"Fast forward a lifetime, and I think Pat would smile if he heard me say this: he is the template for what a real, ever-forward musician should be. I stopped thinking about his guitar playing. I started thinking, man, this guy never stands in one spot. He keeps moving, like all the great ones. He's a composer, arranger, producer, a shrewd businessman. He keeps learning new languages so he can play with new people. The story of Pat is, Just keep learning.

"The coda to the story is that, in the very recent past, I developed some tremor issues in my right hand and so my picking went to hell, so I started playing a lot with my thumb, and it was like, now I know who I am, I found my voice — flesh on steel. A physical limitation helped me find my own voice. The lesson of Pat is, One, learn your damn instrument. But when you've done that, now what? Who are you serving, what are you serving? And that's where he is a luminary to me.

"I went to the International Association of Jazz Educators conference in Manhattan once, and Pat was the keynote speaker. So he came out into this big hotel conference of people who teach jazz at universities and high schools, and, almost in as many words, said, 'Hey, you guys are not the gatekeepers. You don't get to say what jazz is. It is those 13-and-14-year-olds out there right now. They get to say what jazz is.' And half the people in the room, you could feel them puckering up. And the other half stood up and applauded.

"He said, 'When you see that kid out in the hall with headphones on, making beats on his computer, send one your good jazz players from your big band out to work with this kid and see what they come up with.'"

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