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Life of a Mall Santa



Visiting Santa at Macy's in the time of of covid.

by Nina Watson

Many kids have the experience of going to their local mall during the holiday season to meet Santa, sit on his lap, and ask for their greatest Christmas wish. But many people don't know the work that goes into being a mall Santa. The job of Mr. Claus takes dedication and hard work, from going through training at specific schools for mall Santas, seeing thousands of kids every season, and dealing with nasty

parents for hours on end. It is not an easy field.

The journey of becoming Santa is different for everyone. One Santa of 8 years, who would prefer to be nameless due to his company contract, first began working in biblical productions of St. Nick for many years before moving onto photo shoots then working at a mall. There are private companies specifically for recruiting and managing professional Santas that you can enter under. Many of these companies provide their own training for the job, but there are also places such as the Charles W. Howard school (named after a former Macy's mall Santa), which is the oldest Santa school, established in 1934. There are lessons in everything from the history of Saint Nick and Santa Claus, to reindeer behavior, sled flying, appropriate costuming and makeup, and sign language.

Every Santa has a million stories to tell, some not so pleasant, others heartwarming and wholesome. The anonymous Santa tells the story of a ten-year-old boy coming into the room and immediately running and clinging onto him as hard as possible with no words being said. He noticed the mother of the boy crying and later asked his manager about the situation with the child. He found out the boy was autistic and was scared of physical touch, even from his mom, so the young boy's first hug was from Santa himself. The mother later entered a photo of Santa and her son together in a local newspaper's contest for best Christmas picture and won under the category of Christmas lights.

Not every kid is quite as excited to meet the big guy with the white beard. Tantrums, crying, and fear are not uncommon things in the Santa world, but many Santas have tactics to deal with these emotions. The same Santa says he has a special gold coin with a picture of baby Rudolph and tells the children it's "Rudolph's magic coin" because he knows how it feels to be scared too, so he put all his magic into it to help other frightened kids. Santa says it only calms them down about half the time. Oddly enough, many parents actually seek for their child to be scared, wanting a "funny" crying

baby photo, some even going as far as telling Santa to pinch their baby to make them cry for the picture.

Being a mall Santa means a long and strict work schedule for the entire holiday season. Some work from Black Friday all the way through Christmas, but others start earlier in November, working 40-50 days, with Thanksgiving as their only break. Most Santas report seeing from 4,000 to over 30,000 kids every season, depending on whether they're in a big city or small town. The most common gift requests from kids are things their parents already said no to, such as phones, gaming systems, and pets. Barbies and Legos are still on the top of many lists, which the Santa interviewed for this article says "you can never have too many of."

Every season kids across the country create special memories with Santa, memories you can hold close for years to come, a story to tell around the tree every Christmas, a moment of pure childlike joy. When you work a job as unique as Santa, you learn how important those connections are, not just for the kids but for the man in the red suit as well. As this Santa said, his job is to "let that spirit shine through me and connect to the children."

Lula Keteyian by Emma Ledesma

Lula Keteyian is a homeschooler at Different Directions, a song-writer, and a journalist for the DD Compass Monthly. Lula has been homeschooled since she was in first grade. "In August 2021 my family moved from Seattle, to Park Slope, Brooklyn. I enjoy being homeschooled, more than if I were in school. Since, I was tired of doing online classes, I thought Different Directions seemed like a good place to take in-person classes. Every Wednesday, I take chemistry and journalism classes at Different Directions." Lula's favorite subjects are English, writing, and foreign languages. She is currently taking French.

Lula discovered her passion for

song-writing when she was eleven years old. "I did a guitar class, and in the class, they asked if my classmates wanted to write a song. Some of the people wrote songs, so I tried it out. I write songs about my feelings, and I come up with different characters. I imagine I am someone else going through a different situation. I find those songs more interesting to write. I sometimes write songs based off of a movie or tv shows I watch."

Lula is the youngest in her family/ Her older brother is in college. Lula is very close to her older brother, even though he is a few years older than her. Her favorite things to do in her free time are, writing songs, taking photos with her Polaroid camera, working at playing guitar, singing, and doing art. She loves to watch movies. Her favorite movie genres are comedy, sitcoms, romantic comedy, and action. Lula's favorite tv shows are Riverdale, Parks and Recreation, and New Girl. Lula's favorite Christmas movie is Love Actually.

"One of my favorite singers is Taylor Swift, because she is both incredible and amazing. My favorite band is Wallows." One day, Lula would like to become a singer. Lula's favorite Christmas movie is Love Actually. Lula is in tenth grade and is fifteen years old. She wants to be a movie maker and a world-class musician.

It's Maple Syrup Month!

by Norah Jensen

Use it as a lotion, an ice cream topping, or even to saute vegetables. Maple syrup has a variety of uses, but how does it get from the tree to your table? In springtime, when the nights are below freezing, water from the soil is absorbed into the maple tree. During the day, warmer temperatures of about 40% Fahrenheit create pressure that pushes the water back down to the bottom of the tree, making it easy to collect the precious maple sap. The sap is gathered over 4-6 weeks – usually between early March and late April– by hammering a spigot into a tree and hanging a bucket on the end. When it drips out, the sap is a clear, runny fluid that resembles water. The collection amount may vary. Some days you will collect only a small amount and other days your buckets will overflow if not emptied. After harvesting in the maple woods, the sap is transported to a sugar house where it boils down to become real maple syrup. During cooking, storage tank pipes feed sap to a long and narrow ridged pan called an evaporator. As it boils, water evaporates and becomes denser and sweeter. Sap boils until it reaches the density of maple syrup. Usually, it takes



40 gallons of sap to make 1 gallon of maple syrup. That's a lot of sap for a small container of something you put on your pancakes!

But maple syrup has a lot of uses besides being a breakfast condiment, and there are hundreds of ways to use it. Here are some ideas:

Maple Syrup Taffy. Make your next snow day even sweeter with maple syrup taffy. Put 2 cups of maple syrup into a saucepan and boil. Next, lower the heat and use a candy thermometer until the syrup is between 235 and 245 degrees fahrenheit. Pour lines of the syrup onto fresh snow, and let harden for 5 minutes.

Maple Butternut Puree. Maple butternut purees are perfect for fall and winter appetizers. Preheat oven to 400 degrees fahrenheit, and cut ends off of one butternut squash. Scoop the seeds



out and brush the surface with olive oil. Place face up on baking sheet, bake for 1 hour, and turn baking sheet around at 30 minutes. When done, scoop out the flesh and place in the food processor. Add ¼ cup of coconut milk, 2 TBSP of maple syrup, ¼ tsp of vanilla, ¼ tsp of cinnamon, a pinch of allspice, and a pinch of salt. Puree for 2-3 minutes until smooth and creamy, and serve warm.

Maple Butter One really simple recipe to use on muffins, bread, and pancakes, is maple butter. Simply blend ½ cup of butter and ¼ cup of maple syrup with a hand mixer. Cool before serving. **Maple Pops** One last recipe is fun to make, and fun to eat. Place ½ cup of butter and 1 cup of maple syrup in a saucepan and boil until the candy thermometer reads 195% fahrenheit.

Pour mixture into pan (or into moulds) and place a lollipop stick into the center. Let cool, and enjoy!

Top 10 Christmas Movies

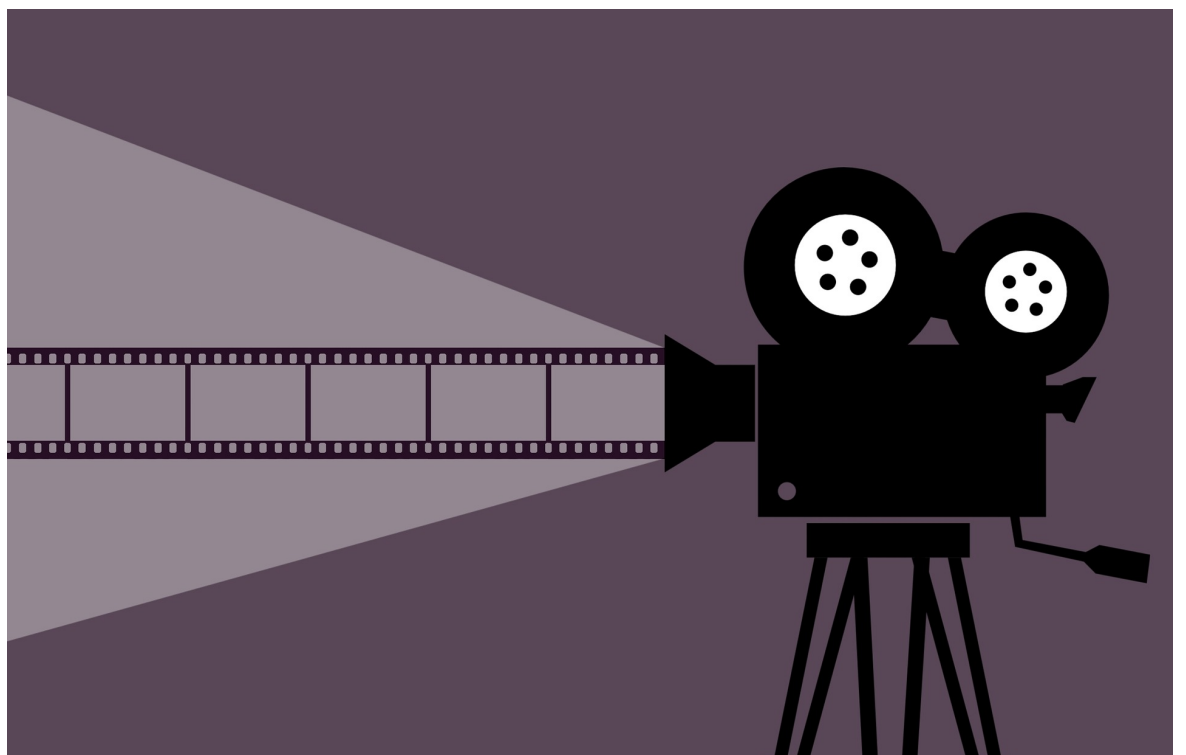
by Emma Ledesma and Lula Keteyian

1. This classic Christmas movie created in 1990 is a joy to all ages. Home Alone is a hilarious comedy all about Kevin Macalister, a witty eight-year-old who realizes wishes can come true. When his family accidentally leaves him on their Christmas vacation to Paris, France, Kevin is ecstatic! No annoying parents or siblings to boss him around! When the notorious Wet Bandits come to rob his home for Christmas, it is up to Kevin to protect himself and his home. In the end, he realizes to respect his family more, and the joy of Christmas! The movie is rated PG due to some inappropriate references and some violence. One of the robbers is hit by a paint can, and his head is set on fire. This movie is a hilarious family film the whole family will enjoy! If you love Home Alone, you might enjoy Home Alone 2, Lost in New York. Kevin is left alone again, but this time in the Big Apple where he is living in a hotel room. The Wet Bandits also return, and it is up to Kevin to save the day again! This movie is just as hilarious as the first. You can see both Home Alone movies on Disney+ or another streaming platform.



2. Disney's A Christmas Carol is my favorite movie based off the classic book by Charles Dickens. Meet Ebenezer Scrooge, a greedy, cold, cruel, villain whose only pleaser is to make others suffer. In this movie, you will feel hate and love for Scrooge from the beginning to the end. The animation is life-like and makes you feel like you are transported into Scrooge's world. The movie is rated PG, and it might be scary for younger viewers because of the ghosts Scrooge meets. This movie is also found on Disney+. This is a wonderful classic Christmas movie about how a man's past changes his future forever.

3. The Star is a perfect interpretation of the Christian Christmas story. The Star is a heart-warming tale of a little donkey named Bo and his dream of participating in the royal caravan. Later, he is adopted by



Mary, the mother of the baby Jesus. Through the animal's adorable dialogues and beautiful music, viewers will learn the true meaning of Christmas. You can purchase the dvd or see it online. The movie is rated PG.

4. Noelle is a more recent Christmas movie created by Disney+ in 2019. The movie is all about Santa's daughter Noelle, and how she wants to fill the place of her brother and become Santa. Since Noelle's brother Nick does not want the position of Santa, Noelle tells him to take a vacation for a few days to think his decision over. Little does she know, her kind thought causes chaos at the North Pole. Her father Santa is worried, because Nick hasn't returned and it is almost time for the Christmas Eve present delivery! This comedic, light hearted, and fun Christmas movie will be sure to make you laugh and keep you in suspense. This movie is rated PG and also on Disney+.

5. A Charlie Brown Christmas is one classic movie that is a favorite of mine! Charlie Brown and his friends are trying to create a Christmas pageant, but Charlie Brown's little Christmas tree disappoints his friends. This movie is rated G and can be purchased on DVD or on streaming platforms.

6. Love Actually (2003)
Love Actually is an incredibly complicated story about Christmas and love. The movie miraculously tells nine separate (but connected) stories in two hours, and features every successful British actor (of 2003). It manages to be funny and heartwarming without sacrificing emotional depth. All of the stories are compelling, but my personal favorite features Hugh Grant as the British prime minister. Love Actually actually is the definitive holiday rom-com, an epic Christmas movie of the 21st century that has yet to be topped. Rated R for language and nudity. Available to rent and playing in several movie theaters during the holiday season.

7. Die Hard (1988)
I wouldn't be a true film bro if I didn't include Die Hard on this list of Christmas movies. What better way to celebrate the holiday season than with the world's best (and possibly only) Christmas action movie. It starts a Bruce Willis so young that he still has - get this - a full head of hair! Basically the plot of this movie is that Alan Rickman takes an entire building hostage and Bruce Willis has to save literally everyone in the entire building,



including the attendees of an (obviously disastrous) office Christmas party. The two reasons to watch Die Hard are its truly classic action sequences and Bruce Willis, entertaining as always. Rated R for violence. Streaming with ads on Amazon Prime and available to rent.

8. A Muppet Christmas Carol (1992)
A Muppet Christmas Carol is, in short, a delight. Beloved by Muppets fans, this movie takes the classic Dickensian tale, transforms it into a musical, and casts Muppets in all of the roles. A brilliant idea, if you ask me. This is a holiday classic that you have to see to believe. Rated G, possibly creepy to extremely young children. Streaming on Disney+ and available to rent.

9. Carol (2015)
Are most Christmas movies too cheesy for your highbrow tastes? Experience true cinema this holiday season with Carol, the movie nominated for every possible award. Rooney Mara stars as Therese, a shy aspiring photographer who meets Carol (played by Cate Blanchett), an elegant woman in the middle of a divorce. The movie begins in the Christmas of 1952 (see, it is a Christmas movie!) and features one of

the greatest road trips in cinematic history. The love story between Carol and Therese is dramatic and touching. This movie truly shows how great fashion was in the 1950s and how terrible everything else was. Rated R for sex. Available to rent.

10. White Christmas (1954)
This is the movie to watch if you're looking for an old-timey holiday classic. It's a 1954 musical starring big names Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney, among others. It has a loose, old-timey plot that's constructed to allow two gals and two guys to dance and sing through a post-war Christmas. The movie features such classic songs as "White Christmas", "Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)", and "Gee, I Wish I Was Back In The Army". Unrated, suitable for a younger audience. Streaming on Netflix and available to rent.

The Yule Lads of Iceland

by Xander Heisler-Martin

Here in the United States, we have many traditions for holidays, ranging from presents on Christmas morning, to chocolate coins and dreidels during Hanukkah. But many other countries have their own traditions and fun activities during the holidays, and this Icelandic tradition might just be one of my favorites.

In Iceland, there are 13 trolls named the Yule Lads, and every night from the 12th of December to Christmas Eve, they go to the houses of children all throughout Iceland and if the children leave their shoes on their windowsill and put out small snacks for the Yule



Lads, they will receive a small gift from each one.

The Yule Lads originated as scary monsters in old stories and folktales, but in Iceland during the 18th century, parents were banned from disciplining their children with scary stories like the Yule Lads, and they became much friendlier, and their appearance changed from monsters to friendly old men who engage in mischief. Originally there were as many as 82 evil spirits in the original stories but they shrunk down to 13, corresponding to the 13 days before Christmas.

Each of the Yule Lads has their own distinct personality and story to them. The first one is named Stekkjastaur (meaning "Sheep-Cote-Clod"), and he is said to drink the milk from sheep and have two wooden legs. The second one is named Giljagaur (meaning "Gully Gawk"), and he is said to hide inside barns and steal the milk froth from buckets of milk! The third one is named Stúfur (meaning "Stubby") and is known for being very short and stealing cooking pans to eat leftover food off of the pans. The fourth one is named Þvörusleikir (meaning "Spoon-Licker") and he is known for being very tall, thin, and also for stealing wooden spoons to lick off food remnants! The fifth one is named Pottaskefill (meaning "Pot-Licker") and is known for stealing leftover food from pots. The sixth one is named Askasleikir (meaning "Bowl-Licker") and he is known for stealing plates and bowls and eating any scraps left from whoever ate from them! The seventh one is named Hurðaskellir (meaning "Door-Slammer") and is known for being very loud and slamming doors, especially late at night. The eighth one is named Skyrgámur (meaning "Skyr-Gobbler") and is known for being obsessed with Icelandic yogurt (named "Skyr"). The ninth one is named Bjúgnakrækir (meaning "Sausage-Swiper") and is known for hiding in rafters and stealing sausages that were being cooked! The tenth one is named Gluggagægir (meaning "Window-Peeper") and is

known for looking inside people's windows to look for anything to steal from them. The eleventh one is named Gáttapefur (meaning "Doorway-Sniffer") and is known for having an extremely long nose and an extremely good sense of smell. The twelfth one is named Ketkrókur (meaning "Meat-Hook") and is known for using his metal hook to steal meat! The thirteenth and final one is named Kertasníkir (meaning "Candle-Sniffer") and is known for stealing and eating candles! (At least, back when they were edible and made out of animal fat.) All the Yule Lads will occasionally engage in their passions/traditions such as taking scraps of food from pots and prefer when a snack related to their personality is put out if possible.

I think this Icelandic tradition seems like a fun one, but I am definitely glad they were changed from being scary monsters to friendly men giving gifts. I imagine the kids in Iceland always look forward to the holidays because they know that they'll be getting gifts from all the different Yule Lads in addition to the gifts they get from Santa and their parents. What an amazing tradition for the holidays and the winter season.

Celebrating Winter Solstice

by Zoe Goncalves

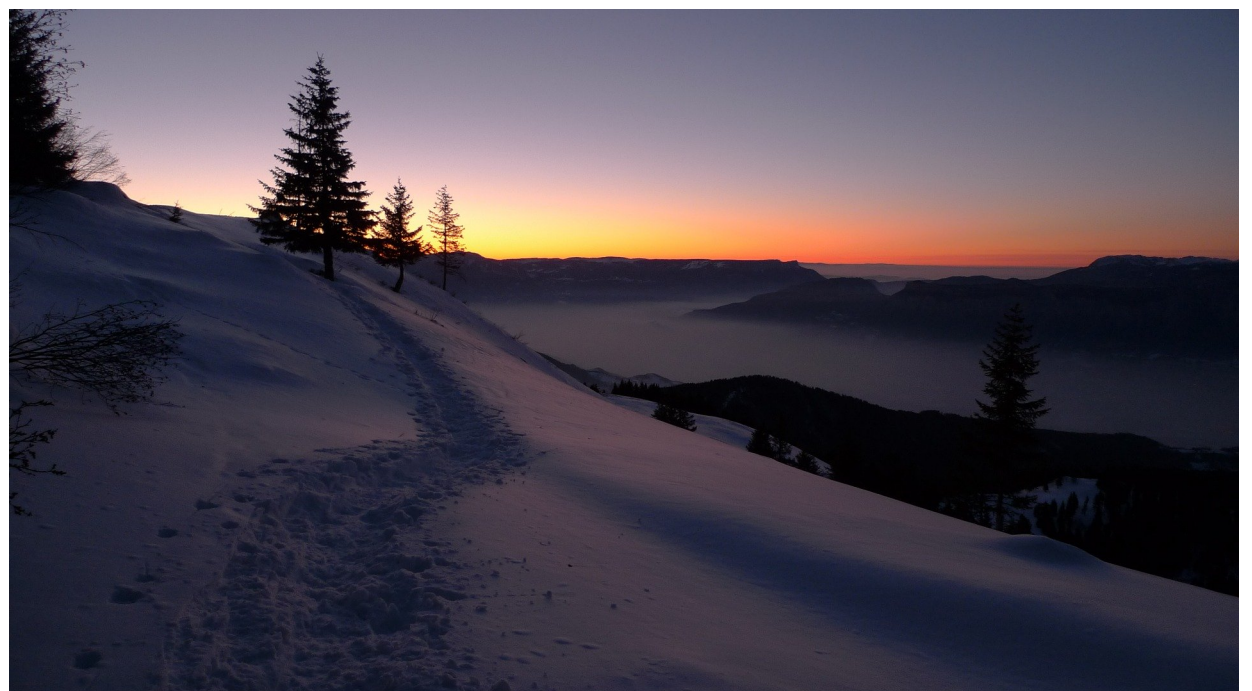
Celebrating Winter Solstice

The exact definition of solstice is the

standing still of the sun. It is an event that occurs semiannually, around June 21 and December 21. At the winter solstice, the sun travels the shortest path through the sky, resulting in the day of the year with the least sunlight, and therefore, the longest night. Astronomically, the winter solstice marks the end of fall and beginning of winter, and solstice traditions were created to celebrate the "Birth of the Sun". Some of these traditions include brewing up mulled cider, lighting lanterns, and setting intentions for the season ahead. Some people even have parties. I spoke to local homeschool parents David and Catherine to learn more about Solstice parties.

Dave says the festivities began in 1979, when he was 18 years old. He mentioned that it has ties to the meaning of solstice, the celebration of the sun coming back and warming us up again. It was originally held in a park called Tibbit's Brook Park in Yonkers where he grew up. Holding this event in a park meant they had a lot of room to throw a frisbee and fly kites. There are risks with having parties in public such as police showing up. David said, "Well, sometimes, they would just want to check and see if everything was okay and then sometimes, they didn't want it to be okay and they would throw us out of the park". After a while, the celebration was moved to private locations.

When David and the love of his life





moved in together, they hosted at their place. It started with 20-25 people and sometimes there were even more than that. In 1999 there were about 100 people. All in all, the tradition still lives on, and now that more and more people are getting vaccinated against COVID-19, he is looking forward to having it again this year.

Catherine was not there for the original party. When she got involved, the party had already been going on for about 10 years. Catherine hosted her first Solstice party with David in their apartment. In years prior, Catherine had an affinity for the winter solstice. She loved to do little celebrations around it –nothing as large as what David did, but still a celebration. Not knowing that David had had many Solstice parties, she remembers her and one of her good friends deciding it would be a great idea to throw a solstice party. She made chili and had a potluck. It was a great success, everyone seemed to love her cooking. She has decided to retire from the kitchen and order out for this year's solstice party.

Solstice is a celebration of the sun. As David says, "It's about the tribal feeling of gathering with friends". Stay safe and have a Happy Solstice!

The Pandemic of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD)

by Lenny Jelisavcic

The Start of the RHD pandemic:

You know how we are living in the COVID-19 pandemic? Well rabbits are actually living in their own pandemic, though their virus has no effect on humans. This virus, called RHD (Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease), started spreading rapidly in 1984, in Jiangsu Province, China (just like the COVID outbreak was said to have begun in

China). First, it killed Angora rabbits being raised commercially for wool, and then it killed pet rabbits, and reached rabbits farmed for meat, all of which are members of the same species, commonly known as the European, or domestic, rabbit, according to the New Yorker Magazine: The Rabbit Pandemic (November 2020). RHD, once inside the rabbit, attacks its internal organs, like the liver, causing internal bleeding. During the initial outbreak in China, some hundred and forty million rabbits were killed by the virus. The disease soon spread rapidly to rabbit populations in Asia, and then in Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Middle East, said the New Yorker.



The Virus Reaches the U.S.

Cases of RHD have appeared in the U.S starting in Iowa in 2000, and then reached other states like Illinois, New York, Utah, Indiana, Maryland, and Minnesota from 2001- 2010. I asked Steven Rivetti (a Utah-based rabbit breeder) if he vaccinated his rabbits against RHD. He said; "No I have not because I'm not sure that disease is prevalent in Utah. But it is something that I have thought about."

RHD eventually evolved into a different strain called RHDV2 which is even more contagious and easily spread (just like the COVID delta variant). If a rabbit gets it, it has a 70-100% chance of death. It is very difficult to test for and it is great at contaminating things for long periods of time (since it is cold-resistant for instance) like animal paws, cloth with no host, food, dead rabbits, and fly legs. It is so deadly that people have referred to it as the "Rabbit Ebola",

said the New Yorker, and VIN News (Veterinary Information Service).

The Variant:

The subtype RHDV2 was first identified in France in 2010. It then spread widely among captive and wild rabbits in Europe. It has also reached Australia, as well as Canada. The first documented cases of RHDV2 in the U.S. occurred among domestic rabbits in rural Ohio, on a farm south of Cleveland, in September 2018. As of November 3rd 2021, RHDV2 is now spreading rapidly from rabbit to rabbit in the U.S: including New York, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, California, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Oregon, and Florida. And now, according to the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), hares can actually get this new strain. All this is according to VIN News.

The Vaccine:

There is a vaccine for RHD and RHDV2 in Europe, but other countries have very little access to it. There are 2 vaccines for RHDV2: Filivac which is effective against RHD and RHDV2, and Eravac which is just effective against RHDV2. The reason many countries have little access to the vaccine is because the vaccine contains a live virus, making it difficult to transport safely and effectively. Other reasons are that the U.S.D.A claimed that vaccinating some rabbits would make it difficult to tell between sick rabbits and those with antibodies. Part of what makes RHD difficult to diagnose is that bunnies can hide symptoms as a defense mechanism. Eventually, the U.S.D.A agreed to give the U.S limited amounts of the vaccine from Europe, but first the individual states had to send their own requests to the U.S.D.A for the vaccine, according to the New Yorker.

The New Vaccine:

Now, 43 out of 50 states including Washington D.C, New York and New Jersey, have access to the RHDV2 vaccine from Medgene labs, a vaccine provider based in Brookings, South Dakota. The vaccine has been available to the states since October 2021, when the U.S.D.A authorized the Medgene Lab's vaccine for emergency use. It's easier to obtain because it's in the country: South Dakota. The difference between Medgene's and Europe's is that Medgene's does not contain a live virus, and that it consists of 2 doses (just like the Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccine), according to Medgene Lab's website. It works by using protein sequences from the RHDV2 virus to build immunity, making it impossible for rabbits to spread the virus to other rabbits. Like the Moderna vaccine for COVID-19, this RHDV2 vaccine tricks the rabbit's body into thinking it has the virus so it's immune system readies itself in case the rabbit actually comes in contact with the virus. This information came from Medgene Lab's website. I interviewed the center for Avian and Exotic Medicine in NYC, and they said: "We have had one outbreak in New York at our clinic (March 2020). We have begun vaccinating rabbits with the American made vaccine as the European vaccine is no longer allowed for import. We have vaccinated approximately 60 rabbits."

Christmas Eve Traditions

by Jeremiah Drummond

Christmas is a beautiful time that resonates with almost every person's soul, as it has the potential to invoke positive childhood memories and pleasant emotions. My family of six are sipping our hot chocolate gathered around the Christmas tree, with the smell of chocolate and peppermint sneaking into my nose. We all very chaotically sing Twelve Days of Christmas. There's love in the air, as we hear kids outside playing in the snow. Every family has different Christmas Eve traditions. My family and I eat lots of treats, cookies, and cakes. My mom also goes to the bakery and buys hot chocolate bombs. Hot chocolate



bombs are balls of hot cocoa powder encased in a ball of thick milk chocolate. What makes them so fun is you put them in a cup and pour hot milk over them and watch as they pop open and then you can enjoy great hot cocoa. We then end the night with singing and my siblings and I have a huge slumber party in the living room.

Christmas Eve traditions don't need to be elaborate to be special and to draw families together. Lula Keteyian, homeschooled tenth grader, said, "For Christmas Eve we get take-out pizza and sometimes watch Christmas movies."

"On Christmas Eve we have a huge seafood dinner and sometimes invite friends over," said Zoe Goncalves, homeschooled twelfth grader.

Some people bake cookies or make taffy. Creating something together can be a very good bonding time for family. People might go caroling in their neighborhoods. Another really fun thing would be to go have a snowball fight if there is snow outside.

However your family does it, Christmas Eve deserves its own special observance. Merry Christmas Eve!

New Year's Resolutions

by Norah Jensen

Learn a new language. Read 100 books. Run a marathon. Learn to play an instrument. As the new year approaches, many people are thinking of ways in which they'd like to improve themselves. But we aren't the first generation to do so. Not by a long shot. The ancient Babylonians are said to have been the first people to make New Year's resolutions, some 4,000 years ago. They were also the first to hold recorded celebrations in honor of the new year—though for them the year began not in January but in mid-March, when the crops were planted. A similar practice occurred in ancient Rome, after the reform-minded emperor Julius Caesar tinkered with the calendar and established January 1 as the beginning of the new year

Almost every ancient culture has some type of religious tradition or holiday that relates to the beginning of the new year. Ancient New Year's resolutions involved making promises and sacrifices to gods, praying for fruitful harvests, and swearing to repay debts in hopes that spiritual figures would bless people with good fortune.

But how did New Year's resolutions evolve into what we know today? Most of the resolutions of the ancient people were usually religious, but as time went

on, our resolutions evolved into more secular goals. And although these two things are different, they are both hopes for a better future for oneself. By 1802, the tradition of making (and failing to keep) New Year's resolutions was common enough that people all around the globe kept up the practice. One thing that is basically a tradition every year is the fact that almost no one keeps their resolutions. In fact, according to discoverhappyhabits.com, less than 9% of people every year actually stick to their New Year's resolutions. How can you avoid being part of the 91% who don't? A popular acronym for guiding goal-setting is



SMART. Use it to set goals you will achieve. Smart goals have these characteristics:

Specific. Instead of making a resolution to “run more” in the new year, come up with a plan for how far, how frequently, and when you will run. Maybe set a specific distance goal.

Measurable. Instead of making a goal to “read more,” specify a number of books that you will read during the year. Then break it down into manageable chunks, like 2 books per week.

Achievable. Be realistic. If you set goals that are too ambitious, you will only be setting yourself up for disappointment.

Relevant. Make sure your resolutions fit into your broader goals. Why do they matter? Ensuring this will help you stay motivated and on track.

Time-bound. Vaguely saying you want to achieve something makes it easy to

let time pass while your goal slips away as well. Set a deadline. Or even better, set several deadlines along the way to check in with yourself on your progress. Tell someone. This is a bonus. When you keep your resolutions a secret, no one will check up on you to see if you are following through. So maybe share your plans for the new year with your friends and family. In that way, you will have more of a promise to keep to yourself as well as your friends. Whether you are planning to eat healthier this coming year, or you have sworn to run every day, remember that you are using a practice that began in the Bronze Age, and that with each successful resolution, you can get closer to achieving your life-time goals.

Book Review: Courtney Changes the Game

by Emma Ledesma

Have you ever wondered what life would be like if you lived in 1986? Trendy fashion, amazing music, going to the arcade, playing PAC-MAN at the mall, and totally tubular vocabulary! Meet Courtney, a third grader who lives in 1986.

“Wockwockwockwockwockwockwockwock. Nonstop electronic sounds pelted Courtney Moore’s ears as she leaned into the PAC-MAN arcade game she was playing.” (page 1) She loves Smiley’s Arcade at Orange Valley Mall. She had beaten nine levels of PAC-MAN, and she almost beat level ten. Her older stepsister Tina caused Courtney to loose. “‘Courtney!’ someone called sharply. . Tina put her hand on her hip. ‘We need to go, like now.’ she said.” (page 3)

Courtney Changes the Game was written by Kellen Hertz in 2020 and published by American Girl. The book is historical fiction and contains 110 pages. Cortney loves going to the arcade, but one day she learns that only a few games contain girl characters. Later, Courtney’s teacher Mr. Garcia creates the Dream Big project where each student is allowed to create a presentation about their dream. For her presentation, Courtney creates a posterboard of her dream video game.

Finally, the long-awaited day arrives, and Courtney gets to present her game for the

Dream Big Project. “This is Crystal Starshooter,” Courtney began, gesturing at the drawing in the center of the board. Courtney had drawn Crystal holding her space helmet and gazing into the distance, her expression fearless. “Crystal Starshooter is the hero of my video game. She’s a space explorer... The tools she finds will give her points and different superpowers.” (page 100)

Courtney Changes the Game is an exciting book for children of any age. The main themes are kindness, female empowerment, endurance, and family bonds. You can purchase this book on the American Girl website or rent it at your local library! I hope you decide to read this book and travel back to the 1980s with Courtney in Courtney Changes the Game!

