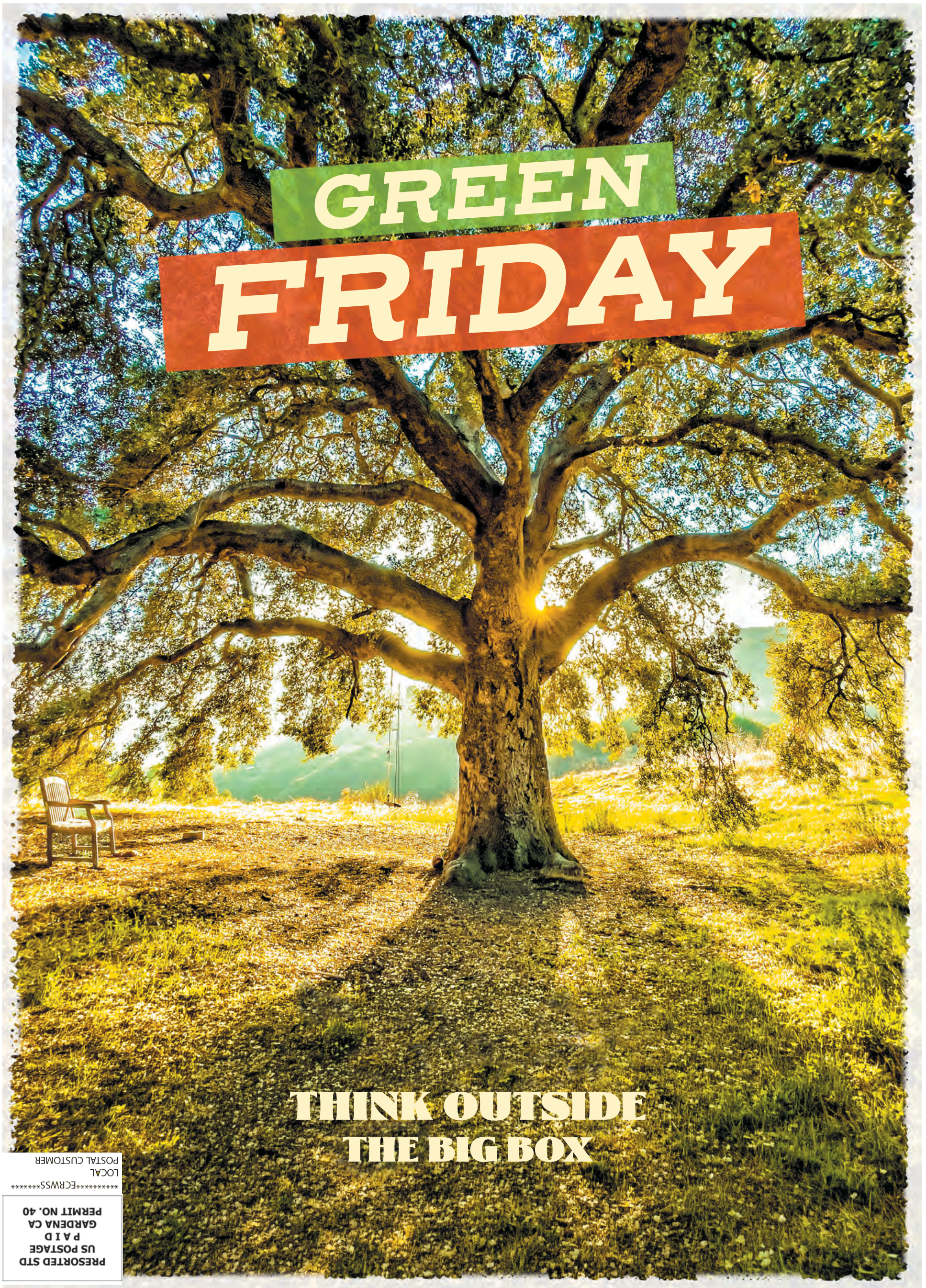
TOPANGA NEW TIMES

VOICE OF THE MOUNTAINS

November 27, 2026 Vol. 7, No. 24



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**********ECRWSS*******
LOCAL
POSTAL CUSTOMER

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ON THE COVER

More and more Americans are opting out of "Black Friday" big box retail madness and opting into alternative ways to think about giving, such as shopping at our local stores first or giving experiences and homemade items.

Our cover, however, is also an ode to an oak. This past Monday evening a gigantic oak tree fell from Hillside Drive crossing the creek where it came to rest on Rosewood directly opposite. Other than the sad loss of this majestic oak, fortunately there was minor damage. It is a reminder that with our continuing El Nino rains we will probably lose more trees like this.

Topanga residents are truly blessed by the great outdoors right outside the door. Take time to step out under the canyon's oaks, take a deep breath, and be thankful.

Cover photo by Denis M. Hannigan. Cover Art & Design by Urs Baur ■

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Topanga New Times is published bi-weekly and delivered to every address in Topanga. Copies are also available at many locations throughout the Santa Monica Mountains, from Pacific Palisades and Malibu to Calabasas and Woodland Hills.



Breaking the calm of the evening, and with a thunderous roar, the old oak fell on Hillside Drive Monday evening. *Fallen oak photo by Urs Baur.*



Big waves combined with king tides have pounded the coast this week, reminding humans of the ocean's power, but this evening was calm and beautiful—the kind of ocean sunset that fills the heart with quiet joy. *Photo by Suzanne Guldimann*

EDITORIAL

This hasn't been an easy year for many in Topanga. So many families continue to grapple with loss in the aftermath of the 2025 Palisades Fire as the two year anniversary of that disaster approaches, but there is much to be thankful for this Thanksgiving weekend. El Niño-driven weather conditions are battering the coast, but so far, the rains have been gentle in the Santa Monica Mountains, and their early arrival has helped diminish the risk of another winter firestorm like the one that changed so many lives two years ago.

A federal court jury has found Jonathan Rinderknecht, the man accused of starting the blaze that would become the Palisades Fire, guilty of one count of destruction of property by means of fire and one count of arson affecting property used in interstate commerce. Rinderknecht will face sentencing in March 2027. The resolution of the federal case may help some to find closure, but it doesn't impact the slow, steep, obstacle-strewn road to rebuilding that so many still face.

On December 2, the long awaited Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing officially opens. The local coyotes, never ones to stand on ceremony, have already given the route over the freeway a try, and seem to approve of it. This project has been a long and complex one, involving cooperation between a host of government and non government organizations that do not always work together or see eye-to-eye. For the local wildlife, and especially for the embattled mountain lion population, the bridge is a promised lifeline. For humans, it is a reminder that even the most impossible seeming goals can be achieved with persistence, and when people—and agencies—are willing to work together.

The weather in Topanga is especially beautiful as we head towards the official start of winter. The cold nights are turning the sycamore leaves, the willows and the black walnut trees to living gold, while new green grass grows beneath them. The rain-washed air is filled with the scent of wet chaparral and wet earth, and the creeks have begun to fill once more with water.

Winter has not yet officially arrived but wildflower seeds are already stirring in the soil, bringing the promise of spring.

More and more people have begun heading outdoors instead of to malls and shopping centers over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, opting out of commercialism and into nature. In Topanga that is often as easy as walking out of one's door and into the peace of a canyon trail or oak-lined road, and this year, the weather is perfect.

As for holiday shopping, there is a wealth of options right here in the canyon. Local shops are full of carefully curated treasures, things that reflect the canyon and the people who make it their home. Many can be found nowhere else, some are handmade. All of them help support local small business owners, artists, craftspeople, and designers. On Fridays the Topanga Farmers Market is also full of holiday delights, in addition to farm-to-table produce and food.

For those who prefer experiences to material gifts, there are Topanga restaurants, fitness opportunities that include yoga and Pilates, art classes, meditation, and much more. Thinking out of the box can be more rewarding than opening one.

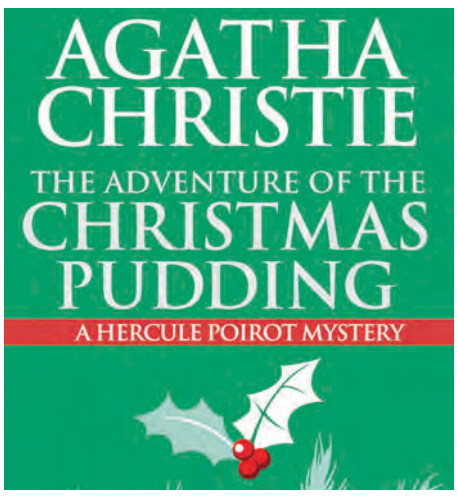
For those who love the winter holidays this is the most magical time of the year, but this can be a difficult time for those who are experiencing depression, loss, separation, or estrangement from family or friends. It's OK not only to opt out of Black Friday retail insanity but to also opt out of any or all holiday season activities. Some love to throw their hearts into the season; others prefer to withdraw. At the heart of all winter holidays—Chistmas, Hannukah, Yule, the Winter Solstice, New Years—is the beauty of light and the hope it brings returning at the darkest time of the year. The decorations, presents, and traditions are not as important as knowing that at midwinter, we are halfway to summer, and the longest, darkest nights of the year will soon be shorter.

Whatever holidays you, dear reader, celebrate this season may they be merry and bright. We are uniquely blessed in Topanga. The cold season here is mild, beautiful, and usually short—something to be savored and enjoyed.

Stay safe, be well. ■



artbeat



Topanga Actors Company presents: *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding* by Agatha Christie

On the afternoon of December 13, TAC will perform an inspired adaptation and staged reading of Christie's story to celebrate the holidays.

Agatha Christie's famous detective, Hercule Poirot, is invited to Kings Lacey for Christmas. But how may his presence at a typical English family get-together assist with finding a famous ruby that has gone missing? When Poirot receives the anonymous warning *not to eat* the Christmas pudding, the mystery only deepens... Christie has long been hailed as a great expert in the art of misdirection, and this story does not disappoint.

The large cast of talented actors shine in Topanga Actors Company's *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding* to wrap-up programming for 2026. There will be live music, and children over 10 are welcome. As usual with library productions, the afternoon is completely free, including the seasonal refreshments.

Topanga Library December 13, at 2pm. Duration: about 70 minutes. Questions? Contact TAC through *topangaactorscompany@theatercompany.org* ■

Los Angeles' Longest Running *Nutcracker* Returns

One of Southern California's most beloved holiday performances returns with New York City Ballet stars; a new artistic director who trained in its studios; and, hometown dancers in leading roles

Westside Ballet of Santa Monica's annual *Nutcracker* production returns to the Eli and Edythe Broad Stage at the Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center for eleven public performances over Thanksgiving weekend and the following weekend. The 2026 production is the first under new Artistic Director Adrian Blake Mitchelll a Westside alumnus in the year the Westside School of Ballet enters its 60th.

World Class Talent Returns to the Broad Stage

Once more New York City Ballet principals Tiler Peck and Roman Mejia return as the stars of the show during the Thanksgiving weekend. Peck (as Sugar Plum Fairy) and Mejia (as her Cavalier) starred in Westside Ballet's 2023 2024 and 2025 Nutcracker seasons and 2026 marks their fourth consecutive year.

The second weekend belongs to Westside's own. Brynlee Highway, seventeen who danced her first soloist roles only last December is the Sugar Plum Fairy for all second-weekend performances partnered by Mate Szentes.

The Nutcracker Tea Returns

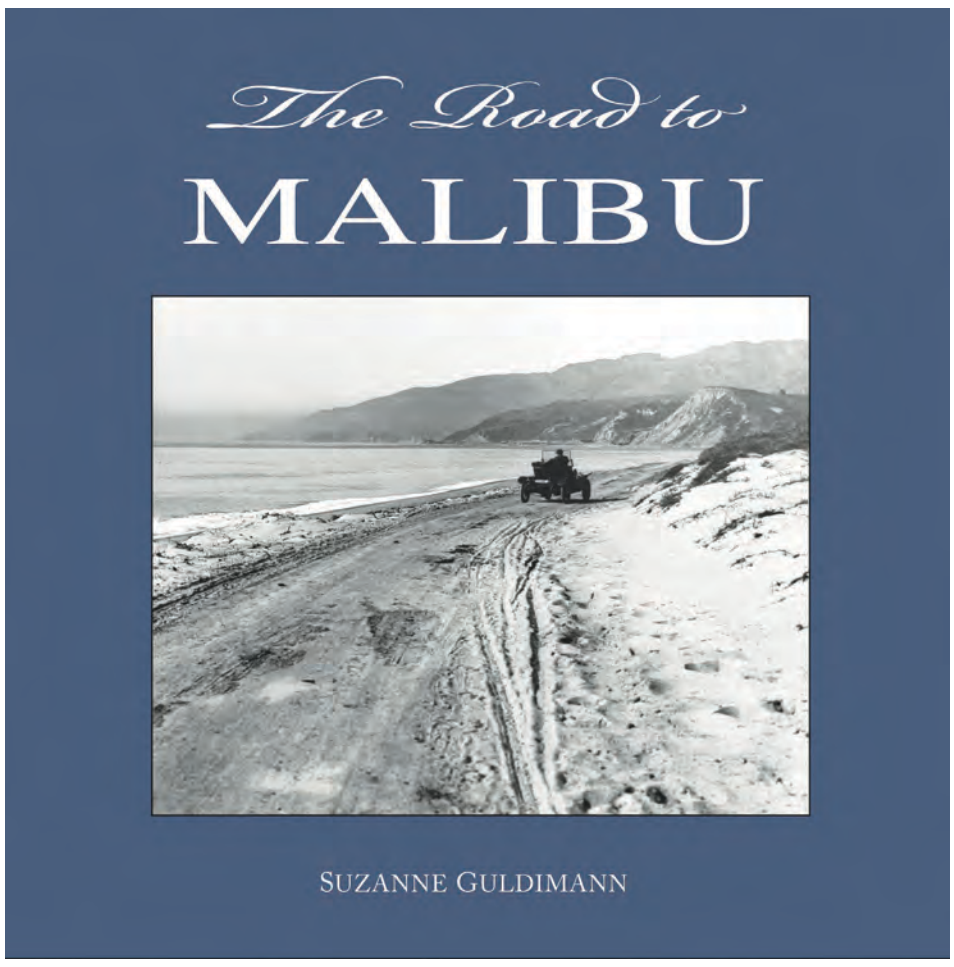
Back for lts second year is the Nutcracker Tea taking place between the matinee and evening performances on Saturday November 28th and Sunday November 29th at 3 pm. Guests enjoy all the trappings of high tea including sandwiches and sweet treats followed by a behind- the- scenes tour of the performance venue and a meet and greet with star Tiler Peck herself.

Performance Details Venue:The Eli and Edythe Broad Stage at the Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center 1310 11th St Santa Monica! CA 90401.

Show Dates and Times: November 27th at 7 pm November 28th and 29th at 1 pm and 5 pm December 3rd and 4th at 7 pm December 5th and 6th at 1 pm and 5 pm. Tiler Peck and Roman Mejla perform November 27th to 29th.

Tickets for each of the eleven public performances are $66. 50 and tickets for the combined performance and Nutcracker Tea are $196. 50. Tickets *westsideballet. com/NutTlx* or by calling [800) 595- 4849. For more information please visit westsideballet. com/nutcracker.

Westside Ballet of Santa Monica is one of the nation's premier pre-professional ballet training companies; the nonprofit gives promising young dancers the stage experience vital to thelr development. Based in Santa Monica! the company has more than 140 dancers ages 8 to 18. ■

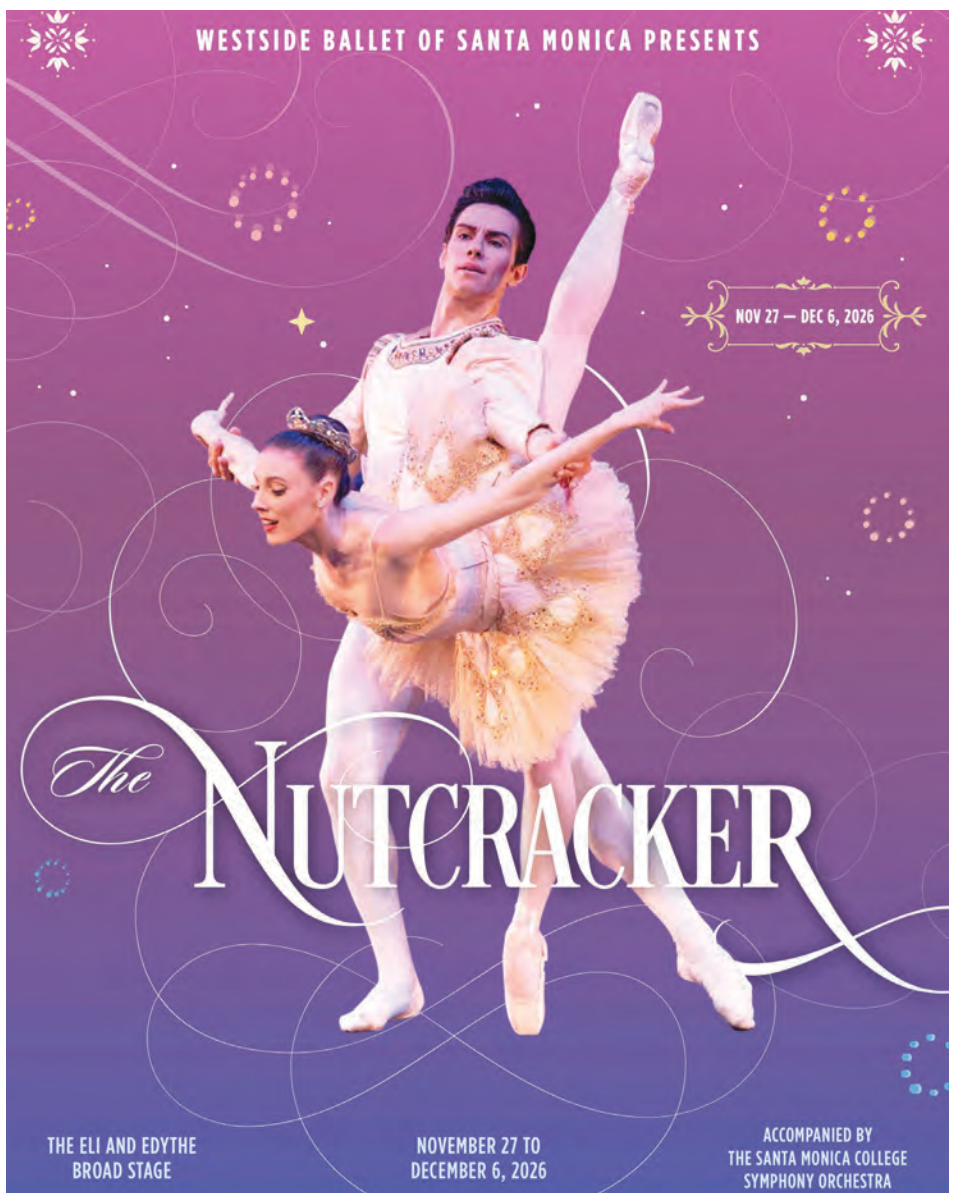


The Malibu Trilogy by Suzanne Guldimann

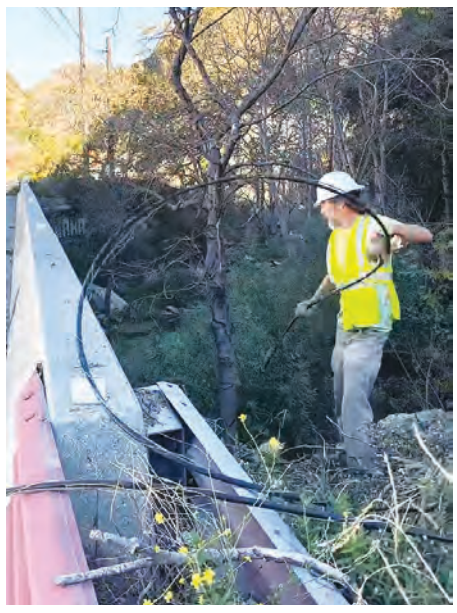
The Road to Malibu is author and Topanga New Times editor Suzanne Guldimann's third book in her Life in Malibu series.

Featuring surfers, cowboys, silent film stars, a determined heiress, a forgotten city, lost landmarks, the history of one of the world's most storied roads, and an exclusive look at life on the Malibu Rancho when it was owned by the Rindge family and off-limits to the world, The Road to Malibu is a wild ride through more than a hundred years of local history!

Available now on Amazon or from *westofthemoonbooks.com* ■



newsbeat





Chris Conway (left) and Joseph Rosendo (right) are documenting the location of the post-fire debris to make it easier for the companies to remove it and have begun removing some of it themselves. *Photos are screenshots of videos provided by Joseph Rosendo.*

Topanga Trash Warriors Reach Out to the Community

The Palisades Fire of January 2025 spared most of Topanga; however, the forested Scenic Highway from Pacific Coast Highway to the Topanga Town limits was not. The trees and bush burned to a crisp and so did most of the electric, internet, television, and cell infrastructure—wires, poles, electrical boxes and other equipment. Due to the continuing reluctance on the part of the companies to accept responsibility for the clean-up, after almost two years much of the debris remains, creating ecological hazards in the Santa Monica Mountains.

The all-volunteer Topanga Canyon Trash Warriors that cleans reportedly more than two tons of trash each year from 11-miles of the highway each Sunday and has done so for the last 15 years, has stepped in. For the last few Sundays Chris Conway and Joseph Rosendo have documented the location of the debris to make it easier for the companies to remove it and have begun removing some of it themselves. The following Youtube channel links illustrate the efforts and progress handling the debris including removing polluting wires from Topanga Creek, the home to our endangered Steel-Head Trout.

https://youtube.com/shorts/0P9xMZDi73Q?si=PXZ9-_oG9PF8MOtG

https://youtube.com/shorts/4QhlqlZFGsg?si=72BA28UKsuARig3-

Read more about this Topanga "eco-hero" group and their efforts to preserve our Scenic Corridor and cWWonsider joining their ranks. *https://topanganewtimes.com/2020/09/25/a-community-of-eco-heroes-and-environmentalists/ (scroll down to the middle of the article)* ■

Theatricum Holds Its Annual Holiday Fair

Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum's spectacular outdoor venue in Topanga transforms into a winter wonderland for the company's sixth annual Holiday Family Faire, where carolers, singing madrigals, and other performers will roam the grounds. Theatricum company members will tell winter holiday stories from a variety of traditions; Santa and Mrs. Claus will be available to take family photos; an artisan marketplace will offer holiday gifts and crafts; and festive food and drink will be available for purchase. A special performance of *It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* by Joe Landry, performed in the tradition of a 1940s live radio broadcast complete with Foley sound effects created live on stage and unforgettable performances by Theatricum's company and special guests, will begin at 5 PM, immediately following the Faire (add-on ticket required for admission).

Saturday Dec. 12

Holiday Family Faire: 11am - 5pm

It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play by Joe Landry: 5pm

Get tickets at: *https://theatricum.com/holiday-family-faire/* ■



History of Cheney Canyon, Potluck & Dance

Sunday, December 13, 2026, 6–9 PM, at The Mountain Mermaid. There will be no parking at the venue or on the street. Park at the Theatricum Botanicum, 1419 Topanga Canyon Blvd. and board a shuttle, starting at 5:30 PM.

Speakers: Mike Cheney, Michael Klock, Antonia Bath, and more!

Become a member of Topanga Historical Society and get your $20 ticket now at: www.topangahistoricalsociety.org.

Mike Cheney grew up on the ranch that his family homesteaded in 1891. He is the great-great-grandson of Columbus Callon Cheney and Lucy Cheney, who were among the first settlers in Topanga. The family's roots here include Mike's great-great-grandfather George Henry Melcher, great-grandfather George Cheney, grandfather Callon Cheney, and father Gary Cheney. Melcher became Topanga's first honorary mayor in 1955. His mayor gavel and his paintings will be on display. Michael Klock and Antonia Bath are the current owners of the old Cheney Ranch, where they provide musical education to Topanga's youth. They will perform live with the band Kummerspeck

Learn more about Topanga in the Historical Society's books and archive: *www.topangahistoricalsociety.org.* Support THS by becoming a Member for $20/year for Individuals or $30/year for Families. ■



'The Greatest Gift' is used by permission of The Greatest Gift Corporation
IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY (SHORT VERSION) is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Dramatists Play Service. www.concordtheatricals.com.

BOOKS & SUCH

The Gift of Reading VII

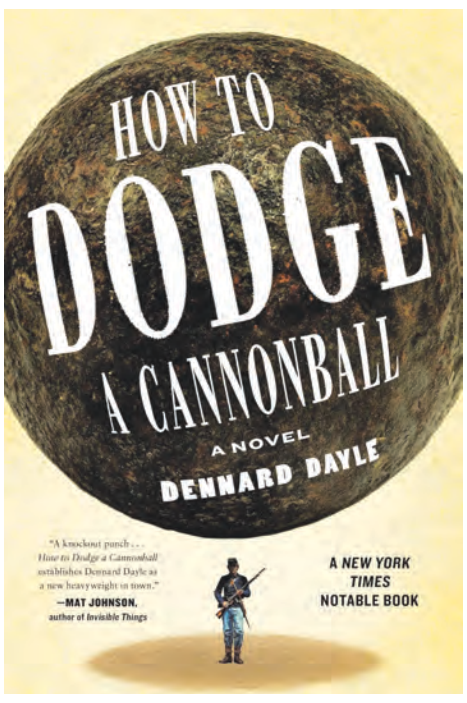
by Jimmy P. Morgan



I've read some rather quirky books this year; the sort requiring a bit of marinating before the ruminating.

In *Man Overboard!* (2026) by Kathleen Rooney, a former college swimmer, tellingly named Patrick "Kick" Kilpatrick, "disembarks" from a cruise ship while the ship is still at sea. While the splashdown sobered him up quickly, the free-flowing alcohol on adventures such as these seems to have left Kick not quite understanding exactly how it came to be that he ended up in the water. His initial despondency suggests, though, that suicide was at least on his mind while the more time he spends staying afloat, the more he convinces himself that life is maybe worth living after all.

It is no coincidence that the story is set during a Thanksgiving cruise, a time of year when many of us interact with family members that this holiday seems to require. As Kick ponders his brother-in-law, his father and mother, and an old girlfriend, his musings slowly develop into a treatise on the modern world's isolationist tendencies, both political and social. As the wry humor belies Kick's predicament, the familial commentary strikes home for those of us with burdensome relationships in our lives...meaning all of us.



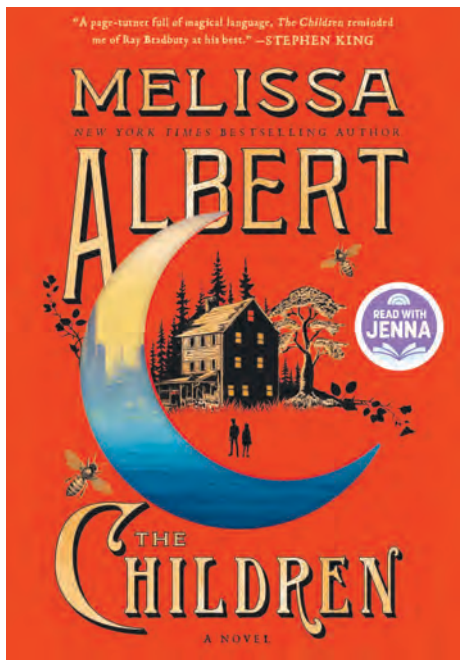
If a man floating in the ocean paddling for his life seems an odd situation to provoke hilarity, and you are the type of person that tends to laugh in the face of adversity, check out *How to Dodge a Cannonball* (2025) by Dennard Dale. The laughs in this one come directly from the battlefields of the American Civil War.

To get away from his abusive mother, a white teenager named Anders enlists in the Union Army as a flag-twirler. After surviving a battle and then being captured by the Confederacy, Anders plots his escape by taking on the identity of a Confederate soldier. Fighting under Robert E. Lee at the savagely chaotic Battle of Gettysburg, Anders once again switches sides, this time by donning the uniform of a fallen Black soldier in an all-Black regiment. In this new role, and as racial commentary, Anders claims that he is an octoroon, one-eighth Black which, in the eyes of the larger society, as Black as he needs to be to be Black.

Perhaps the largest question of *How to Dodge a Cannonball* swirls around the idea of loyalty to a flag. As Anders finds himself on one side and then the other and then back again—only passing for Black now—interacting with some of the pronounced figures of the era, seeing the war through many eyes, black and white, blue and gray; readers examine the conflagration of civil war through many eyes and ears.

Questions along the way jar patriotic sensibilities: What does it mean to die for your country? What does it mean to salute a flag? What does it mean to kill a stranger who salutes a flag not your own? Many of the answers reveal the critically damaging mistakes that our nation has inflicted upon itself; blood and treasure sacrificed in the incoming assault of an eight pound ball of iron.

The very thing that allows the humor to break through in Dale's insightful book is, on its face, the simple absurdity of settling our differences with so much carnage. This is satirical social commentary at its finest, albeit with the dark undertones of an era whose echoes reverberate so loudly today.

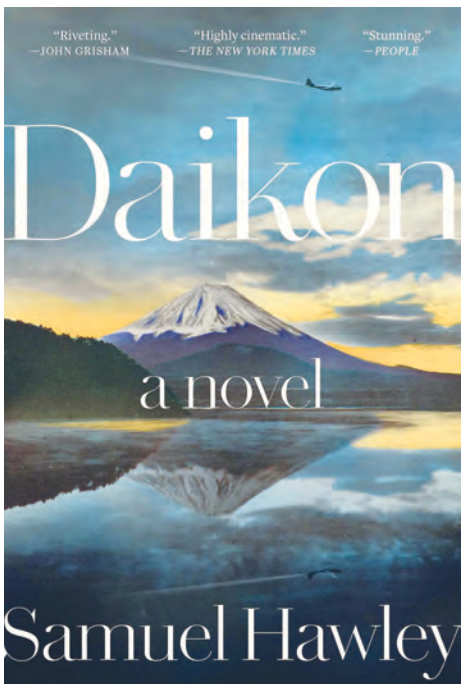


In *The Children* (2026), renowned children's author Melissa Gilbert has written her first novel intended for adults; a story about a children's author named Edith whose main characters—from a five-part series called *The Ninth City*—are the author's own children, Guinevere and Ennis. The story unfolds along three timelines; 1998-2004 or so, when the children are growing up in an isolated wood where their only friends are each other and where their popularity turns the isolated "Farmhouse" into a pilgrimage destination for a wide collection of bohemians, artists, writers, painters, and more.

During the modern day timeline, we discover that growing up celebrities—as inked by their mother's pen—seems to have arrested Guinevere and Ennis' development. In these moments we also discover that something horrible has happened which alienated the once inseparable children. The third track includes a variety of in-between moments that slowly tease their way into the broader story.

Also creeping into the narrative are the magical elements of the fictional *Ninth City* series; although frequent dream and sleep sequences mysteriously fog over what is real and what is not. This is not the type of book I usually read but I could not have been more pleased with giving it a go. You see, I didn't really become an avid reader until high school and my interest developed around books for grown-ups; which means I skipped over the time in my life when children's books may have appealed to me. After reading *The Children*, I am now, for the first time in my life, wondering just what it was that I missed.

Letting us know early on that this one contains a shadowy side, Albert closes Chapter One of *The Children* by reminding that each and every one of us was once a child, while the circumstances of our lives dictate what becomes of that younger self. As the best-selling author writes, "[t]he children who grew up on [*The Ninth City*] books and reread them later often say the same thing: These are darker than I remember. Crueler, stranger, more haunted by longing and loss. All good children's books are." Yes, I most certainly missed something.

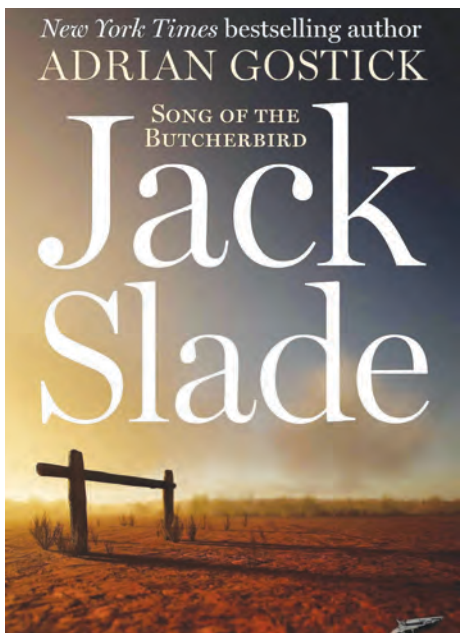


Two other books I really enjoyed this year fall into that category I often favor most: historical fiction where the history far outweighs the fiction; an appreciation I first developed with James Michener's *Hawaii* (1959) in the high school days I mentioned above.

The first is *Daikon: A Novel (2025)* by Samuel Hawley. Set primarily in post-World War II Japan, this one includes some devastating descriptions of Tokyo. Often eclipsed by the horror of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the fire-bombing of Tokyo through

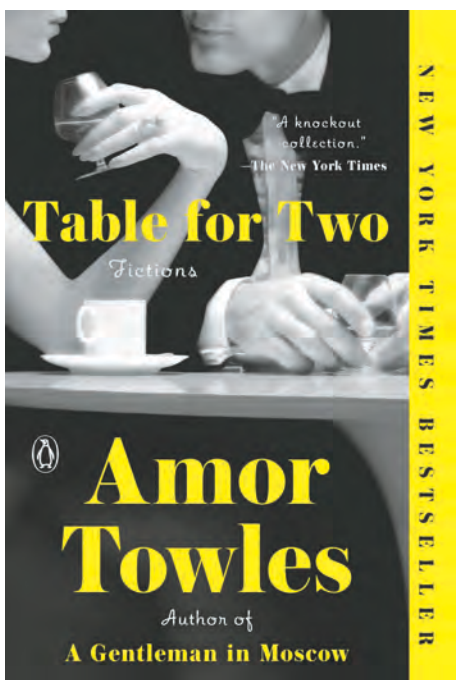
several months of 1945 led to more casualties than were wreaked by those A-Bombs.

The fictional premise in *Daikon* is that the US sent three atom bombs to Japan instead of only two; and the third falls into the hands of the Japanese. The existential nature of defeat held by the Imperial Japanese Army leads to some terrifying potential outcomes if the United States doesn't back off.



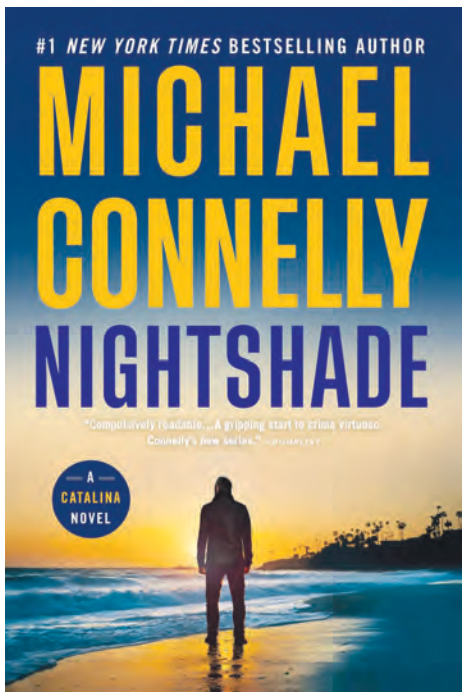
In *Jack Slade: Song of the Butcherbird* (2026) by Adrian Gostick, the historical and titular Slade turns the traditional mid-nineteenth century Western on its head. The trope of many Western stories has the lone bad guy in a black hat - along with a few nefarious companions—terrorizing the good-hearted people of a remote Western settlement. In Gostick's more realistic telling, the fiercely individualistic characteristics needed to survive the travails of the frontier are those same characteristics that lead to greed and selfishness. The result is that one of only a few white hats in *Jack Slade* is the one on Slade's head; enforcing the law in the early 1860s as the country becomes connected east to west through the Pony Express, years before the transcontinental railroad.

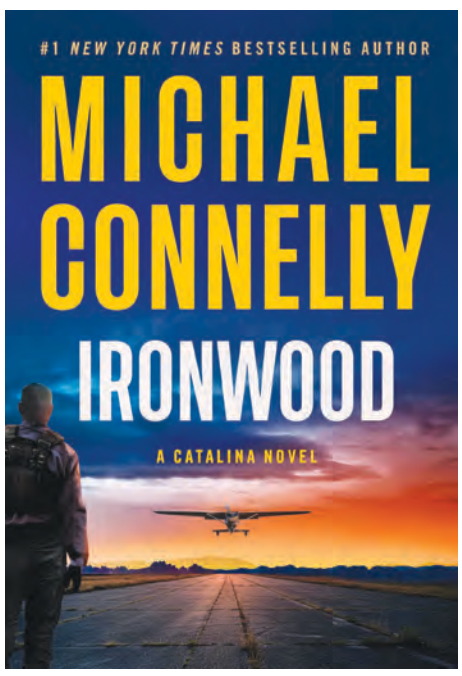
Jack Slade's reputation as a gunfighter is built upon a myth as well. The stories of his exploits were largely the fabrications of a people hungry for adventure, or at least a bit of proximity to it. Being seen as a brutal gunslinger didn't hurt, either, especially when the bullets really began to fly. In one instance, Slade is ambushed, shot several times, and then miraculously survives; this kind of thing doesn't hurt one's reputation either.



I also enjoyed *Table for Two: Fictions* (2024) by Amor Towles. Regular readers might recall my comments from 2022 on three novels written by Towles, *Rules of Civility* (2011), *A Gentleman in Moscow* (2016), and *The Lincoln Highway* (2021).*

I enjoyed the lyrical prose from *Table for Two* so much that I was inspired, as I am typically not prone, to read Towles' three novels a second time. I was not disappointed; the stories remained fresh and entertaining.





Finally, I've written several times about my love for the LAPD Detective Harry Bosch universe of books so I was delighted to discover Michael Connelly's newest creation, LA Sheriff's Detective Sergeant Stilwell, based upon a real-life friend of Connelly's.

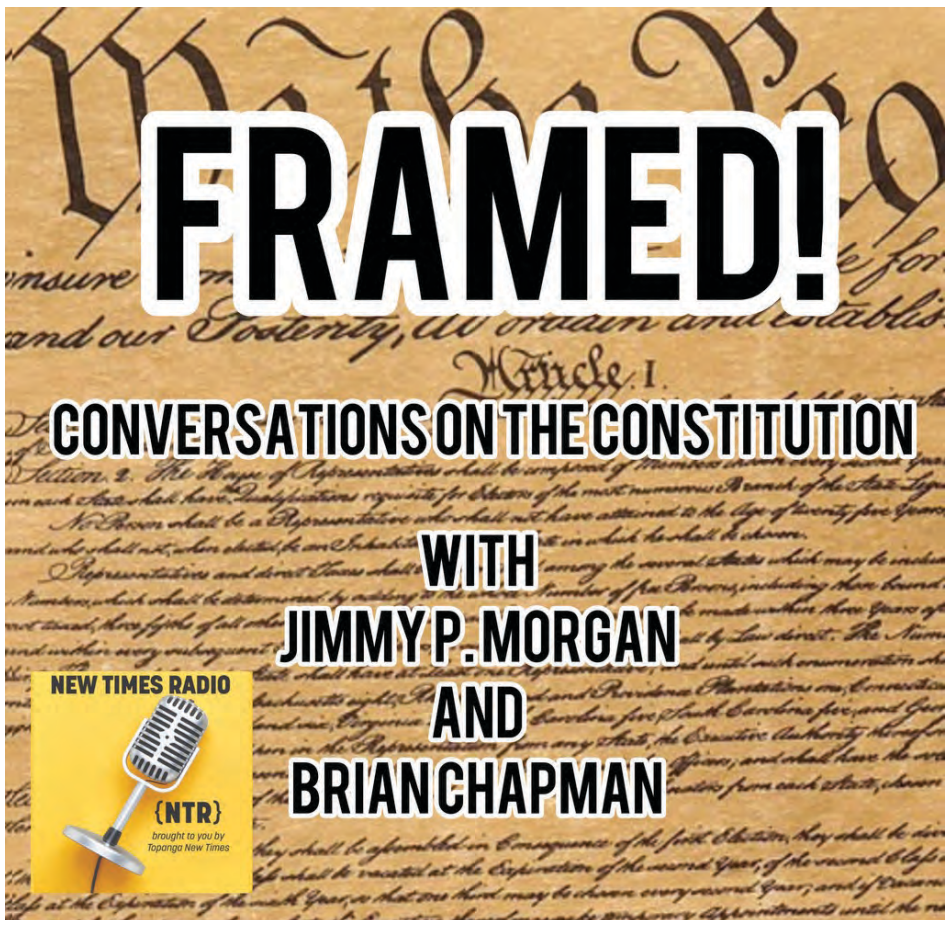
This fresh take has Stilwell stationed on Catalina Island, which is the LA Sheriff's Department island of misfit toys. All the deputies stationed here have a big screw-up in their past although the various backstories are revealed hesitantly. *Nightshade* (2025) and *Ironwood* (2026) remind me of the early Harry Bosch books which began with *Black Echo* (1992). If this is your first word of Michael Connelly, I envy you the adventures that await you; and the gripping, often flawed characters you have yet to meet.

I would love to hear from you if any of these captivating books make it to your gift list or maybe even become your book club's next selection.

Happy Dayz! ■

**https://topanganewtimes.com/2022/01/28/amor-towles/*

Jimmy P. Morgan is a retired American History Teacher who writes about Politics, Social Justice, the US Constitution, Culture, Education, Baseball, Books, and more. You can find him on his deck reading or just go to his Substack for more of his musings: JimmyPMorgandayz.substack.com or email JimmyPMorganDayz@gmail.com





GOODLIVING

Almond Cookie Rum Balls

by Nathalie Krull



Homemade rum balls are a traditional holiday treat for many. This gluten-free version substitutes homemade almond cookies for the store-bought ones the classic recipe calls for. This version is versatile, easy to make, just as delicious as the original, and maybe a smidgeon more healthful. *Photos by Nathalie Krull*

If you love classic holiday rum balls but want to skip the processed vanilla wafers and corn syrup, these almond flour cookie rum balls are about to be your new favorite treat. Instead of relying on store bought crumbs, this recipe starts with a quick homemade almond flour cookie base that bakes up golden and tender before getting crumbled into the mix. Once those nutty cookie crumbs soak up rum, and mix with rich cocoa, you end up with a rich fudgy dough with cozy festive flavor, all in a bite sized package. You still get that nostalgic, boozy, melt in your mouth goodness everyone expects, with a wholesome gluten free twist that feels lighter, and a pinch better for you. These are customizable, of course...use the toasted nuts of your choice pecans, walnuts, hazelnuts, or pistachios, add unsweetened shredded coconut, drizzle with melted chocolate, add fresh grated orange zest, espresso powder, or add any









other additions you can think up. You can make the almond flour cookie base with coconut oil, or vegan butter and a flax egg to make it vegan if you choose. To make a flax egg: Mix 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed with 3 tablespoons water. Set aside for about 5 minutes until it thickens into a gel like consistency. This will act as a binder in the recipe. These are a great make ahead treat for holiday gatherings that improve after a day or two of sitting in the fridge. Try them, pass them around, and enjoy the smiles.

Ingredients:

For the Almond Flour Cookies:
1 cup almond flour
3 tablespoons softened butter or vegan butter
1/4 sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon salt

Rum Balls:
1 cup finely chopped toasted pecans or nuts of choice
3 tablespoons cocoa powder
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 teaspoons of maple syrup
2-3 tablespoons dark rum or spiced rum
1/3 cup powdered sugar plus additional sugar for rolling
1 tablespoon coconut flour - optional if batter is too wet

Cookie time:

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Beat butter and sugar together in a medium sized bowl for 2 minutes until well combined. I mixed by hand, but you can use a handheld mixer if preferred. Add the vanilla extract and continue to mix for an additional 1-2 minutes. It should be smooth and soft. Next, add almond flour, baking powder, and salt to the butter mixture. Continue to mix until it forms a soft dough and everything is well incorporated. Form the batter into 15 small balls and place them on a cookie sheet. Lightly flatten them with your fingers. Place the cookie sheet in the oven for 10-12 minutes or until the edges are golden brown. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.





Let's roll these babies up...

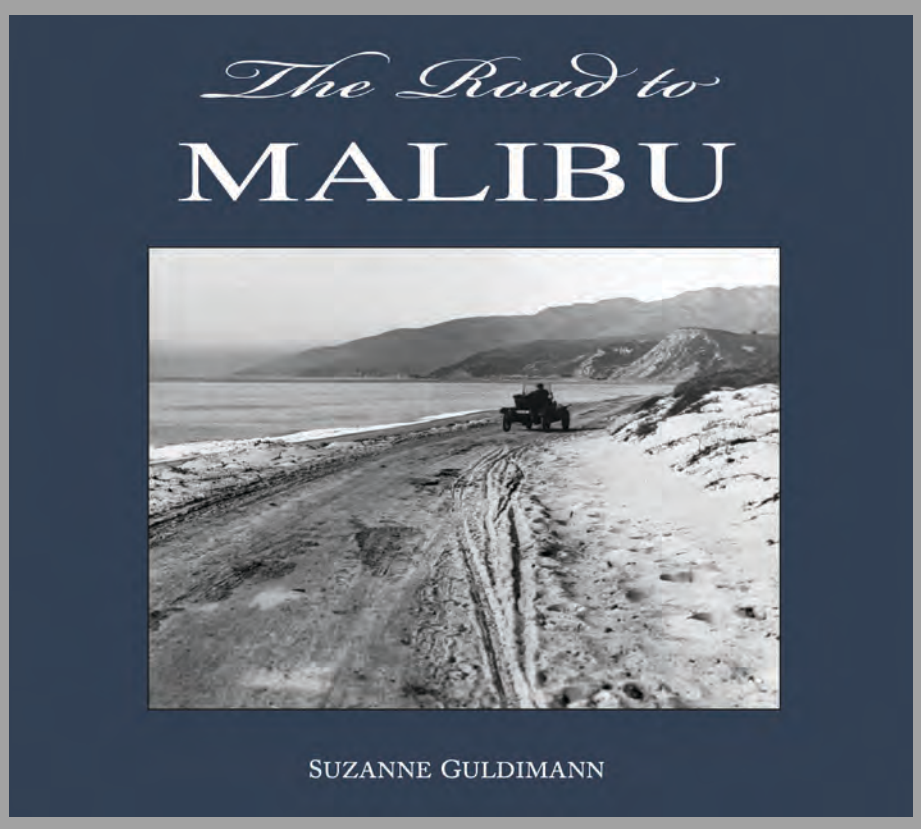
Crush up the cooled almond flour cookies into a medium sized bowl. Add the toasted chopped nuts, cocoa powder, powdered sugar, vanilla extract, and maple syrup, mix until well combined. Gradually add rum, 1 tablespoon at a time until the mixture comes together. It should be wet enough that it can be shaped into balls, but not too wet. If it seems too wet, add additional cocoa powder or a tablespoon of coconut flour to help soak up the extra moisture. Transfer the bowl to the fridge and let it chill for 30 minutes.

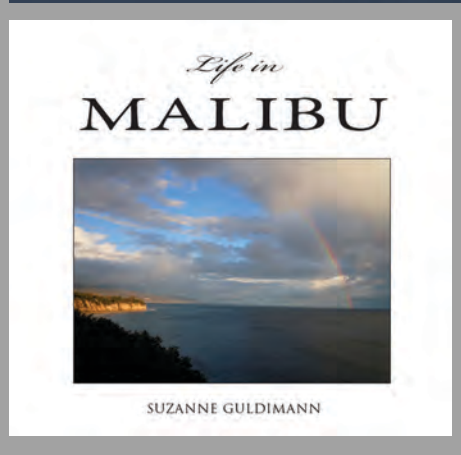
Pour a small amount of powdered sugar out into a small bowl. Using your hands, roll the dough into small 1-inch balls, and roll them through the sugar to coat the outside. Place the sugar coated balls onto a plate and put them in the fridge for approximately 2 hours before transferring them to a sealed container that can be stored in the fridge for up to 1 week. NOTE: If you are serving them to guests, the powdered sugar tends to absorb into the rum ball if stored in the fridge. You could bypass the rolling into powdered sugar step until right before you plan to serve them. Just remove them from the fridge, roll them in powdered sugar, and serve them.

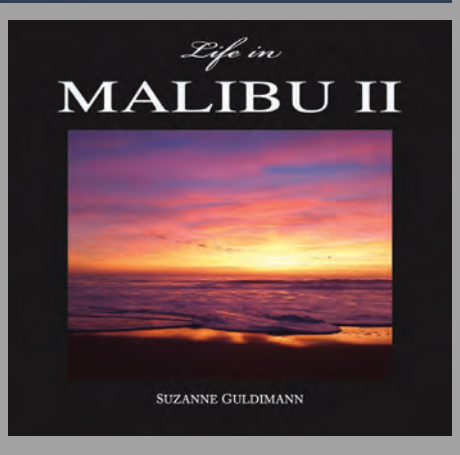
Whether you are hosting a holiday gathering or looking for a thoughtful homemade gift, these almond flour cookie rum balls bring classic seasonal warmth without the processed food guilt. Store them in the fridge for easy to grab and go sweets, that you can put out for a surprise visit from guests on the fly. Serve them with coffee or tea for a sophisticated holiday treat. Who doesn't love a rum ball? They will only get better as they marinate in the fridge too. Try them on day two and prepare to be swept away. Wishing you good health and good luck on all of your cooking adventures. ■

Nathalie Krull homeschooled her children with other families in Topanga and has built her reputation over the years as a skilled and adventurous kitchen wizard. She is a holistic health coach, certified by the Institute of Integrated Nutrition. She approaches food as one part of a whole system approach to wellness. Reach her at nathalie@groundedwellness.net

The Road to Malibu is author and Topanga New Times editor Suzanne Guldimann's third book in her *Life in Malibu* series. Featuring surfers, cowboys, silent film stars, a determined heiress, a forgotten city, lost landmarks, the history of one of the world's most storied roads, and an exclusive look at life on the Malibu Rancho when it was owned by the Rindge family and off-limits to the world, *The Road to Malibu* is a wild ride through more than a hundred years of local history!







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Seeing the Light

Celebrating Diwalli in Topanga

by Claire Fordham

Celebrating the Diwali Festival of light in Topanga. Guests at the Diwali celebration mingled with Topanga neighbors, ate delicious Indian food and drank Chai tea. *Photos by Claire Fordham*

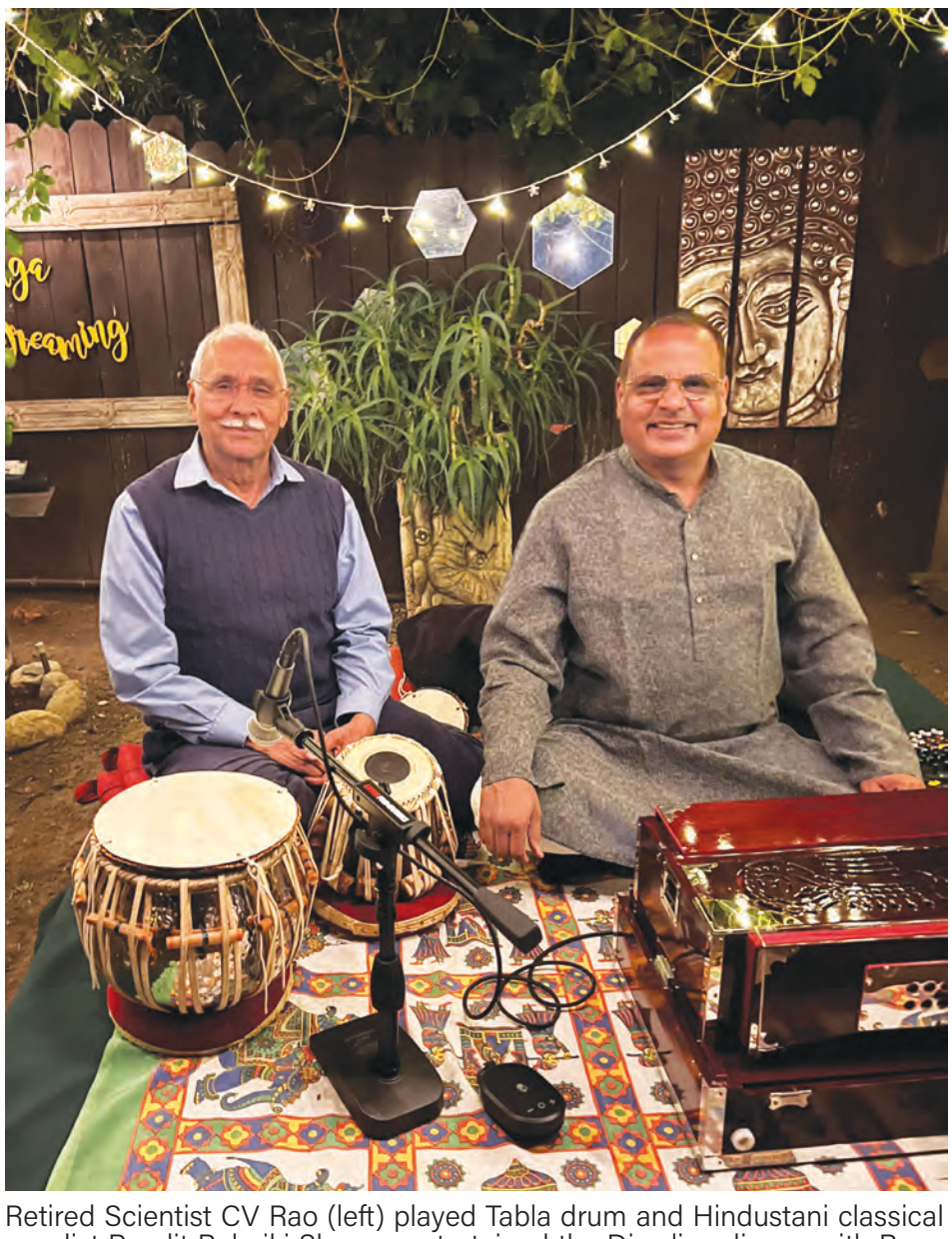
One of the many things to appreciate about Topanga is that the community embraces diversity and different cultures. Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, was celebrated in the canyon this year. Organized by Prabhakar Prasad, also known as Chai Guy, this gathering was attended by the Indian community here and other locals keen to learn more about this ancient festival.

"I'm originally from Barh, a small town in Bihar, India," said Prabhakar. "As an Indian kid, I had to check the boxes first, so I earned degrees in computer science engineering and an MBA. Then I moved to Los Angeles to follow my dream of acting.

"Instead of chasing Hollywood producers, I decided to tell my own story through a character named Chai Guy. Today



Prabhakar (Chai Guy) Prasad organized a Diwali celebration in Topanga.



Retired Scientist CV Rao (left) played Tabla drum and Hindustani classical vocalist Pandit Balmiki Sharma entertained the Diwali audience with Raga music.



Guests at the Diwali celebration mingled with Topanga neighbors, ate delicious Indian food and drank Chai tea.



Prabhakar Prasad pictured with Samiksha Singh who cooked the delicious Indian food.

I serve chai at farmers markets across Los Angeles. Every Friday I'm in Topanga at the Farmers Market. Each sip is a pitch of my story. I miss home, so I'm building a home away from home here, communities around culture and chai, with raga music and festivals like Diwali."

Diwali comes from Sanskrit and means "row of lights" or "row of clay lamps". It's a major five-day festival celebrated across Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and some Buddhist traditions.

At its core, Diwali symbolizes the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.

The Diwali event—held in the yard of a stunning private home in Topanga—included delicious Indian food cooked by Samiksha Singh, extraordinary Raga music, words of wisdom from Pandit Balmiki Sharma, stunning saris, and delicious chai tea made and donated by Prabhakar, and—of course—lights.

Pandit Balmiki Sharma, a Hindustani classical vocalist and realized master said, "This festival of lights is celebrated to make us remember that we have to find out where the real light is. This kind of realization is going on everywhere. Once you are realized and see the light within you, you are realized for good."

Prabhakar said, "Growing up in India, I looked forward to Diwali every year. Now my life is in the United States, and many of my friends here have become my family, so I love creating that same experience for myself and for them. But more than anything, I celebrate Diwali to remind myself that no matter how dark it seems outside, there is a light within each of us that is always shining. All we have to do is go closer to the Source." ■

Claire Fordham is a British Transplant to Topanga. She has worked for the BBC, ITN and SKY News as a reporter, and wrote a weekly column for Britain's biggest selling newspaper, The Sun. Claire has written and published two books and helps other people write their memoirs. Claire is delighted to come full circle and write for her local publication. Telling other peoples' stories is her favorite way to write.





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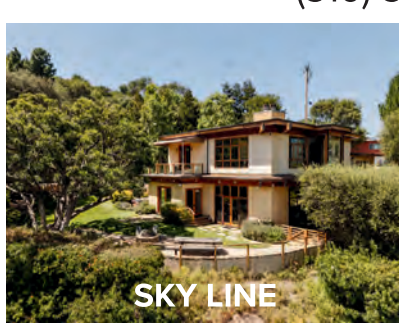
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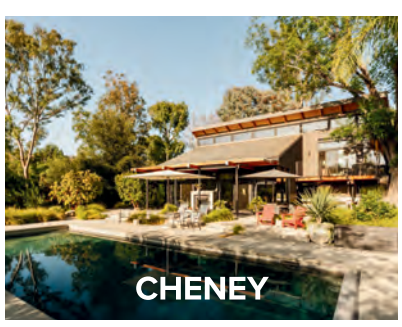
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