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Allegro Community School of the Arts

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^{*}co-founders

Words from the Warrenton Inklings Society

Christmas in the Little White Barn by Audra L. Bayes

Snow fell softly on the roof of the white barn and the white house. The little barn sheltered three ponies, much loved by their family in the white house. The ponies were snug in their stalls, kept warm by their winter blankets. Their family had decorated their barn with cheery wreaths of pine branches and berries and burlap bows. A stocking hung on the door of each stall, waiting to be filled with

apple slices, carrots, and molasses cookies for Christmas Day. A small, gray mouse scurried in from the cold, shaking snow out of her fur.

The barn cat, black and gray with one white paw, emerged from the tack room where she had been curled up asleep on a stack of saddle pads. Two old dogs, a reddish and white husky mix, who loved the cold and the snow, and a black and white lab mix left the warmth of the fire burning in the white house's



woodstove and strolled down the snow-covered trail through the pine trees to the barn. The people of the house and the two lazy house cats had already gone to bed. Usually, the two dogs would be snuggled in bed with their family, but tonight was special. Tonight, it was Christmas Eve.

The animals knew it had been a hard year for the people. They did not understand exactly what was different, but something had happened, and it was bad. Their family was home almost all the time now. The dogs heard words like "Covid" and "pandemic" and "civil unrest." They did not know what those words meant, but they understood they were not good things. Having their family home so much was wonderful for the animals (all except the house cats who preferred to be left alone during the day), but they sensed a heaviness or a sadness in their family and all the people they saw. Because of that, the animals were taking their Christmas duties extra seriously this year.

Unbeknownst to the people of the world, every year on Christmas Eve, all the animals of the world gathered wherever they lived to take their annual pledge to live harmoniously with each other and nature, to do no harm except that required to survive or protect, and to be a force for good in the world. The people had their worries, but the animals also had their own. It had not escaped them that their climate was changing. Storms were getting worse and more frequent. The temperature was never quite right at the right times. More of them were dying in large numbers. No, they did not read the news, but word spread through the community of animals. They grasped a change in the planet with a sense of foreboding. Their pledge seemed more important than ever this year.

The three ponies, the mouse, the cat, and the two dogs gathered together in the little white barn. They bowed their heads and, one by one touched each other nose to nose. They made their pledge to live harmoniously with each other and with nature. But then they knew that more would be required this year. They knew that this year the people must also make the pledge. They knew that every living being on the planet must pledge to live harmoniously with all other living things and with nature and to do no harm for the planet to survive.

The mouse hopped on the cat's back. The ponies let themselves out of their stalls with a little help from the dogs. Together, they walked up to the white house and stood at the front door. The ponies neighed. The dogs barked. The cat mewed. The mouse squeaked. Then an owl hooted. Crows squawked. Geese honked. Foxes barked. All the other creatures of the forest rose in a joyous chorus of love and harmony and the true spirit of the season. And the people awoke. The house cats stretched and yawned. The people and the house cats got up and went to the front door and out into the night to be greeted by the ponies, the dogs, the barn cat, the mouse, and the voices of the forest creatures. And they understood. They understood from the soulful looks in the ponies' eyes and the dogs and the barn cat and the mouse. They understood from the bowing of all the animals' heads, and the nuzzles from the ponies and the dogs. It was time to change. They had forgotten what it means to truly love one another. They had forgotten what it means to live responsibly and in service to others and the environment that we all share. But the animals were here now to remind them, to tell them what the animals had always tried to show them through how they lived with grace and soul and service to others. Live without malice. Live without hate. Live asking not what you can do for yourself but what you can do for others. Live every day in the true spirit of giving.

Instead of returning to their beds, the people gathered outside with the animals. They huddled together, sharing warmth and kindness. They shared the true gift of the beauty of nature. And they shared a resolve to live better lives in service to all living things and the beauty of our Earth.

Words from the Warrenton Inklings Society

Weighing In the Holidays

By C. Francesca Helms

"Can someone come help me a minute?" Barbara called out.

I was closest, so I rushed into the laundry room. Barb, thin and a little frail at 72, was holding the huge turkey, thawed but still in its plastic wrap, cradled in her arms like a baby, and attempting to mount the white bathroom scale she had apparently dragged out of the nearby guest bathroom.

"Here, let me," I rushed to take the heavy object, but she twisted away with her Butterball baby.

"No, just help me onto the scale, please. I can't see my feet over this thing." She was teetering; her wire-framed glasses had slipped down her nose, and the large bird protruded out in front of her like an old man's bloated beer belly. We had also opened a bottle of Chardonnay earlier, and I suspected that added somewhat to her wobbliness.

"Sure, Barb, here," I offered her my arm and guided her toward the scale. "A little more. Okay, step up *now*-no, other foot!" Too late; she stumbled off the edge of the scale, both of us letting out a shriek as Turkey Baby thudded to the floor and rolled away.

"What's going on in here?" Aunt Nancy poked her head in from the kitchen. "Grandma and I can hear you two clear in here." She eyed the turkey.

"I'm trying to weigh the turkey," Barb said. "We can't do it after we cook it."

Here we go, I mused. Every year, my family had to weigh the turkey. I was twenty two, and for as long as I could remember the weight of the roasted brown fowl we put in the center of the table was, for some inexplicable reason, always a topic of Thanksgiving dinner conversation. It then progressed to comparative weights of birds of Thanksgiving past. Bird mass and heft in 1946 or 1959 were commented on and compared, over and over. I could not fathom why it mattered how many pounds (and ounces – can't forget the ounces!) the turkey we ate each year was. Nonetheless, it was a family tradition. This year, there were only four of us: Grandma, Aunt Nancy, Barb-a long-time family friend, and myself. Everyone else was either working or traveling. It changed nothing.

"Well, here, you get on the scale, and then I'll hand it to you," Aunt Nancy took command. She had been in the Navy, after all, and we were her troops. While

I helped Barbara up onto the small white scale, Nancy retrieved the towel from under the butcher block and handed it to Barb. My eyes being the youngest, I leaned over and read the tiny dial.

"One hundred and twenty seven pounds," I proclaimed. I straightened up and looked at the other two. There was a moment of silence.

I was good at math, so even with a glass of Chardonnay in me, I knew this didn't add up.

Aunt Nancy spoke up first. "So, what do you weigh these days, Barb?" After a moment of sheepish silence on Barb's part, Nancy took the heavy bird from Barb, who was starting to sag under its weight anyway, and said, "Here, I'll do it. Barb, you read the scale." Nancy started to step up onto the scale, then quickly

stepped down and handed me bird before remounting. We all laughed, then she proceeded.

was good at math, so even with a glass of Chardonnay in me, I knew this didn't add up.

"You weigh, let me see... um... er... one hundred and nineteen pounds, Captain Nancy, sir!" Barb straightened up and gave her a formal salute, like a good sailor.

"Okay, now, Francesca, hand me the turkey."

I stepped forth and presented the big bird like I was presenting a medal. "Congratulations on a job well done, Captain" I said with a salute.

Barb bent down again. Her nose nearly grazed the scale; I held her by the shoulder to keep her balanced. "One hundred and forty eight pounders, Sirrr..." Barb grinned, and I helped her up. "How much is that?"

"Well, what did we say I weighed? One hundred and eighteen pounds? That would be..." Aunt Nancy stepped off the scale, still holding the large turkey in her arms. "So you deduct the weight of the turkey from--no, wait. You deduct my weight from the hundred and eighteen pounds...no from the hundred and forty seven pounds...So, nine minus eight, carry the one..."

"Um, no, Nancy, you weighed one hundred and nineteen," I interjected. She'd had a glass of Chardonnay too; I had poured it for her.

"What'd I say? Didn't I say one hundred and nineteen?"

"No, you said one hundred eighteen."

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Words from the Warrenton Inklings Society

Weighing In the Holidays

By C. Francesca Helms

(Continued from page 7)

"Are you sure? Barb, what did you say I weighed before Francesca handed me the turkey?"

Blank stare from Barb. Then, "Heck, I can't remember that long ago. Let's do it again."

We started to take up our positons again; I guiding Nancy by the elbow toward the scale, as the big bird blocked her view of her feet, and Barb once again began the descent toward the scale dial for the readings.

"What on earth are you three doing back here for so long? You've all disappeared." Grandma stuck her head in the doorway, taking in the little scene.

"We are trying to weigh this darned bird," Aunt Nancy retorted, foot reaching blindly for the scale. "We can't do it once it's cooked."

Grandma studied us for a moment, cocked her head to one side, and said matter-of-factly, "Why don't you just set the bird on the scale?"

Absolute silence.

Aunt Nancy was the first to break it. Her breath imploded in what I could only describe as an inward atomic laugh. She lobbed Butter Baby onto the top of the dryer and collapsed in hysterical laughter onto the floor. The absurdity of our turkey endeavor struck me a split second later, and I dropped to my knees on the linoleum, laughing so hard tears ran down my face. Barb, who didn't have that far to go, joined us down there, and Grandma, who hadn't been in on the absurd process but had delivered the illumination of it, joined in laughing goodnaturedly from the doorway.

"Oh, goodness, I can't believe I didn't think of that!" Aunt Nancy gasped between breaths. "Francesca, you're the smart one. Why didn't you think of that?"

I tried to keep from peeing my pants, I was laughing so hard. "Hey, I'm not--good at--math, that's--your--department," I squeezed out between clenches. "I blame it—on--the wine." It was a weak defense, I knew, but I didn't care.

Now every year, instead of talking about how much the turkey weighs, we talk about the time it took four of us to weigh the Thanksgiving turkey, whom we nicknamed Big Bird, that special year. Ten years later, we still laugh so hard

tears roll down our faces talking about it. We go around the table, reenacting each step in the process, building up the laughter and the energy. And Grandma waits patiently for the all-important finale, and then delivers her line:

"Why don't you just put the turkey on the scale?," knowing full well at least one of us at the table will end up peeing our pants just a little bit.



JOIN THE WARRENTON INKLINGS SOCIETY

The Warrenton Inklings Society meets every Thursday from 5:30-6:30 via **Google Meet**.

Email <u>aimee@allegrocsa.org</u> to be added to the distribution list for the weekly virtual meetings. In-person meetings will resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

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STUDENT PROFILE

GRETA GLENN

By Aimée O'Grady

Twelth grader Greta is living during COVID-19 with her eyes fixed on the future. As a home-schooled student throughout her schooling years, she takes many of her classes outside of the house. Allegro Community School of the Arts fulfills coursework in the arts. Greta felt little change from pre-COVID days, aside from seeing her friends less often and having many of her classes transition to a virtual classroom. Currently, she takes piano and guitar

lessons in-person at Allegro.



Greta credits her two older brothers with sparking her interest in the arts. "My eldest brother Daniel plays the guitar and my brother Peter, used to play the violin," she says. Greta first picked up the violin when she was four years old and played it for five years. "I could get my way through a few songs," she laughs when describing her violin skills, but what it did was give her a strong foundation for when she picked up her next instrument. "I started guitar lessons about eight years ago," she says.

She takes lessons with Sam Yoder, co-founder, and instructor at Allegro. "I really like how we can change direction as my interests change," she says. Her lessons currently focus on songwriting and recording. Equipped with a commercial recording studio, Yoder has the tools readily available to teach Greta and other students about commercial recording.

Back at home, her brother keeps her inspired, "My brother will send me songs or melodies that interest him. As a senior, I'm also really aware of time and how

things will be changing for me after this school year," says Greta. She will often grab her guitar and play around with a melody that she then adds lyrics to. At her next Allegro lesson, Sam will help her refine that work

As Greta looks ahead at college, she is considering schools with strong business and art programs. "I really like accounting. It makes a lot of sense to me," says Greta, who has several female role models in her life who have been successful in business. But graphic arts equally draws her attention. "When I was young, my mother would point out illustrations when she read books to me. I was always interested in those," she says. To help develop her drawing skills, she takes classes at Creative Brush in Manassas.

Greta is grateful for her time at Allegro. "I love the teachers there. I have known them for a long time. It has become my home away from home," she says. At Allegro, Greta is free to focus on what she wants to focus on. "My teachers know what I want to learn," she adds.



Her extracurricular activities involve both graphic arts and music. In addition to these, Greta enjoys her Bible Study classes.

Having traveled during the holidays last year, she is looking forward to staying home this year and hopes to have one if not both brothers home to share the holidays with.



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THE TWELVE LIVES OF SAMUEL HAWLEY

by Hannah Tinti

BOOK REVIEW BY LARRY HOFFER

One thing about love, be it romantic, parental, filial, even platonic, is that sometimes you can't help whom you love. You find yourself loving someone despite their faults (if not even because of them). Do we turn our backs on those we love just because they may be imperfect, despite all they may have given us? These ideas and questions are at the core of *The Twelve Lives of Samuel Hawley*, Hannah Tinti's exquisite new novel.

For as long she can remember, it's just been the two of them—Loo and her father, Samuel. He's a mysterious man with scars all over his body, including many from bullet wounds, but his rough exterior belies a deep sensitivity borne from the death of her mother, Lily, when she was very young. Samuel and Loo have a nomadic like existence in her childhood—just as it seems they're getting settled somewhere, suddenly one day her father will come home

and tell her they're moving away, and they pack up only the essentials and flee wherever they're living, setting out on a new course. One of the only constants she knows is the shrine of sorts her father builds for her mother wherever they go, tiny glimpses into a life she never really knew.

"The marks on her father's body had always been there. He did not show them off to Loo but he did not hide them, either. They reminded her of the craters on the moon that she studied at night with her telescope. Circles made from comets and asteroids that slammed into the cold, hard rock because it had no protective atmosphere to burn them up. Like those craters, Hawley's scars were signs of previous damage, that had impacted his life long before she was born. And like the moon, Hawley was always circling between Loo and the rest of the universe. Reflecting light at times, but only in slivers. And then, every thirty days or so, becoming the fullest and brightest object in the sky..."

In Loo's teenage years, Samuel recognizes the need for constancy, so the two move to Olympus, the New England town where her mother grew up. He finds work—and challenges—as a fisherman, while Loo tries to fit in at the local high school. But it isn't long before the characteristics that make Loo special, the behaviors that

THE AUTHOR OF THE GOOD THIEF

AUTHOR OF THE GOOD THIEF

AUTHOR OF THE GOOD THIEF

A NOVEL OF SAMUEL

HAMLEY

come from a young girl raised only by her father, that she becomes an outcast, which awakens surprising anger deep inside her, at the same time that she finds herself drawn to one particular boy.

The longer they stay in Olympus, the more entangled in the community and its quirks both become, yet the more Samuel can't seem to escape his old ways. Loo becomes more desperate to know about her mother and the secrets her father has kept hidden all her life, and being Olympus helps to unlock some of those mysteries, yet leaves her questioning just who her father is and whether the things he has kept from her all of her life were lies or simply sins of omission.

As much as this book is about Loo and Samuel's relationship, it's also Samuel's story, a chronicling of his criminal past and where each of his bullet scars came from, and the story of a love he thought would save him, a love he Allegro Community School for the Arts | Page 12

didn't nurture and care for as much as he should have. And it's also the story of a man trying desperately to tread the right path for his daughter despite his inability to keep his own demons at bay.

This was a fantastic, moving, beautifully told book. The relationship between Samuel and Loo is truly a special one. Even though he's not the best role model for his daughter, he introduces elements into her life she would have been better off without. These things give color and shape to their relationship. There are times you wonder if Loo might be happier and more adjusted without her father, but then again, what would her life be without him?

While The Twelve Lives of Samuel Hawley is essentially a two-person story (with Lily's presence a strong third element), Tinti doesn't give the supporting characters short shrift. These are fascinating, flawed, memorable individuals who are so much more complex than they first appear. Not all of these characters are likable, but they truly bring something special to the book.

You may not think that Samuel is deserving of sympathy (or empathy, for that matter), but like many a flawed character in literature, you care about him despite his flaws and for his good qualities, especially the fierceness with which he loves and protects his daughter. This is a book I won't soon forget.

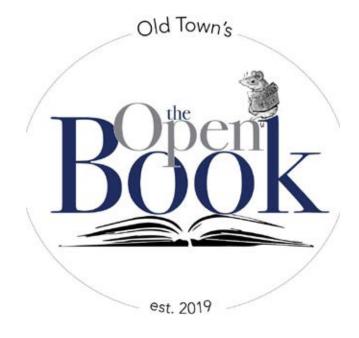


Larry Hoffer

NetGalley and Random House provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of Larry's reviews at itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com.

Purchase this book at The Old Town Open Book 104 Main Street, Warrenton. www.oldtownopenbook.com





PARENT BOOSTERS

The parent boosters are working to get Allegro more intrenched in the community-at-large, which is

Fauquier County and beyond. They are the ambassadors of Allegro.

Within Allegro, they also help to create community by forging relationships throughout all Allegro programs and activities.

Be on the look out for our parent boosters who will be managing small fundraising events like — spirit nights and promoting Friends of Allegro.

As we look forward to scheduling events, our parents will oversee concessions at performances and be available for questions at our information booths.

This spring, parent boosters will host and plan the Awards Banquet at the end of the school year.

The group is led by Nicole Jones, Leanne Petty, and Dusty Morlier. We are grateful for our parent booster leaders who are creating the sense of belonging and community among our parents.



"Heart of the Arts," Allegro's 2020 entry in Families 4 Fauquier's Scarecrows on Main Street Contest

You may have seen their first project, the scarecrow on Main during Halloween!

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INSTRUCTOR PROFILE:

MELISSA PIEJA

By Aimée O'Grady

The arts course through the veins of Melissa Pieja. "My aunt was a firm fixture in the arts and my grandmother was the best stage mom," says Melissa of her early years in the arts. "My aunt was only 16 years older than I was and I would tag along to her auditions." Melissa can remember her kindergarten talent show. "I was Shirley Temple in The Good Ship Lollipop. My grandmother choreographed the routine. I was the only student who sang the song and didn't lip sync. At the end of the recording, you can hear me asking my grandmother if she thought I had done well," she recalls.

In high school, her grandmother would find the shows and help her audition. "As a freshman, I auditioned for the lead role. My mother tried to set my expectations by telling me no freshman had ever gotten the lead. I got the lead," she said with a smile.



As Reno Sweeney in Anything Goes, 2020

For Melissa, the arts have always been the pathway to her mental health and wellness. Melissa knew that making it in the theatre would be hard and made sure to have a back-up. "My seventh-grade high school biology teacher was amazing. A lot of his students of went on to study science," she said. Melissa was one of them. "I never wanted the arts to become something I hated by making it my career. It was always my outlet and helped me remain sane."



As Boy in Fagan's Gang in Oliver, 1995 (pictured with sister)

Melissa applied to a college with a strong art program. "Instead of taking a physical education class, I took dance," she said of swapping all her electives at Desales University in Pennsylvania for art classes.

While at Desales, Melissa took classes to become a Physician's Assistant. During this time, she volunteered at a hospital, and it was then that she realized medicine wasn't for her.

After college, Melissa found a full-time job at a bank where she had worked part time throughout high school. After a few years, she decided to dust off her degree and look for careers in science. She was lucky to find work at a food micro lab testing manufacturer food products.

Her creative aspirations were fulfilled through community the-

atre. "I was part of the community theatre and volunteered on their board of directors. I have always enjoyed becoming part of something," she said of her position on the board.

Not long after, Melissa's significant other found work in New York City. "I was involved with community theatre and had a job using my degree when all of sudden I was uprooting myself to move to New York City." Even the

thespian in Melissa had reserves. "The talent is so impressive in New York City, I was hesitant to step up even to do karaoke," she recalls. "We lived on Roosevelt Island for a few months before I had the courage to move into

Manhattan." Melissa would ride the subway and see if she could find her way home to acquaint herself with the city. She lived there for six years, and all the while, the arts would lay dormant. "The talent was so impressive in New York that there was no room for an amateur," she says.

In 2011 she relocated to Virginia in a new relationship and gave birth to a daughter in 2012. "I auditioned at my step-sons' school while I was pregnant," she recalls. It was then that her passion for theatre and the arts were reignited. "I was so rusty. I just didn't realize that my voice was a muscle that I hadn't exercised for so long."

"When I auditioned for Allegro's Ariel in 2018, it was a dream come true," she says. Melissa has been with Allegro Community School of the Arts ever since. Today she serves on the Board of Directors. She works as an instructor while working full time as the Manager of Quality Control and Lab Testing at a biological materials resource and standards organization.



At Allegro, she teaches Broadway Kids (ages 3-7) and beginning tap

As Reno Sweeney in Anything Goes, 2020 (ages 6-9). She also choreographs the theatre program. Of her ca-

reer decision to pursue science rather than the arts, "I do have regrets and moments of 'What If?' But life is pulling me in different directions now. I have had to turn things down because of my family and those are choices you just have to make."

Melissa remains grateful for Allegro and its positive environment. "All of Allegro's teachers have their own unique stories and paths to share. It is a diverse group of people. I am grateful to be part of a group that offers so many benefits from public speaking to problem solving and quick thinking. The arts build character and I am proud to be a part of that."

Meet Melissa at Allegro Community School for the Arts



As Laurey in Oklanhoma, 1997

As Peggy Sawyer in 42nd Street, 2017



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