



FOX VALLEY REVIEW

*Curating lifestyle, culture, commentary, and community
from the river's edge.*

MAGAZINE

VOLUME I
DECEMBER 1, 2025

ISSUE 5

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The journey continues as autumn's final leaves give way to themes of change, resilience, and memory, reminding us that every season of letting go also teaches us how to hold on.

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Turning the page, Miriam weaves a moving meditation on sorting through a childhood home after loss, where every ornament and keepsake stirs memory, love, and the bittersweet task of deciding what to keep, what to let go, and what will live on in the

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Winter Foods of
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Winter in the Fox Valley has a way of slowing us down. The long nights, the early sunsets, the snow that muffles everything; they make us seek out warmth wherever we can find it. Nothing warms more than a hot meal prepared with love by the hands of others.

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01 Mission & Vision



WHO WE ARE

WHAT WE DO

WHERE WE AIM TO GO

FOX VALLEY REVIEW is a regional digital magazine dedicated to curating and elevating the voices, stories, events, and cultural expressions of the towns and communities along the Fox River. We strive to inform, inspire, and connect residents through thoughtful storytelling, critical reflection, and celebration of the local from neighborhood events to regional art, food, and civic life.

We envision a more connected and culturally vibrant Fox Valley where every town and resident sees themselves reflected in the stories we tell. Through inclusive journalism, creative expression, and civic commentary, Fox Valley Review aims to become the cultural compass of the region, building bridges between communities, generations, and ideas across the river.



Welcome to the fifth issue of Fox Valley Review, a labor of love and a vision long in the making. Rooted in our river towns and curated with care, this publication amplifies the voices, stories, and spirit that make the Fox Valley not just a region but a vibrant, diverse, unmistakably alive community.

As December settles over the Fox Valley, the world takes on that familiar shimmer wreaths in shop windows, candlelight in frosted panes, and the soft hush of snow gathering on rooftops. It is the season when memory grows warm, when old traditions return like beloved guests, and when even the smallest gestures, a card

in the mailbox, a neighbor's wave, a child's laughter, feel wrapped in ribbon.

This month's issue leans into that spirit of celebration and remembrance. Our stories honor what the holidays bring into focus: the magic of childhood wonder, the tenderness of caregiving, the ache and beauty of tradition, and the joy of gathering, whether around the family table, around the fire pit, or

around the music and merriment of community events.

Each piece, from the nostalgic glow of *When the River Froze Over* in St. Charles to the soulful reflections in *Recounting Christmas*, *Remembering Home*, reminds us that the holidays are not simply dates on the calendar; they are seasons of belonging. We are especially grateful to Kim Wheaton and Alex, whose photography captures winter in the Fox Valley with grace and sparkle; and to Diane and

FROM THE DESK OF THE CHIEF EDITOR DR. BAUDELAIRE K. ULYSSE

“

*LET THIS BE
YOUR WINDOW, YOUR MIRROR,
YOUR INVITATION!*

”

Jeff, whose creativity and collaboration infused this issue with heart; and to Bobby for allowing us to host our release party at Global Brew.

A warm thank-you also to everyone who helped organize and attended our November release gathering: your cheers, conversations, and hugs were the truest ornaments of the season. You reaffirmed what this publication has always been about: connection, celebration, and community, not only

in the golden days of summer, but in the quiet, glowing days of winter as well.

As you unwrap the month ahead, the twinkle lights, the late-night baking, the shopping bags and secret surprises, the church bells and the concerts, the quiet moments after guests leave, may these pages accompany you with gentleness. May they make you feel seen, held, and celebrated.

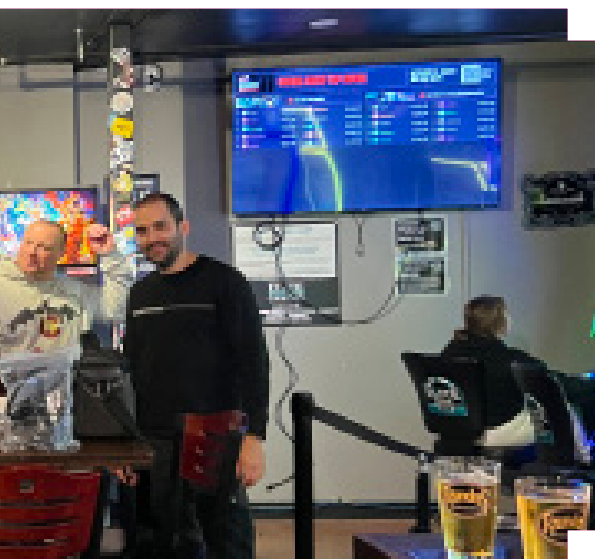
GLOBAL BREW, ST. CHARLES

A lively night at Global Brew in St. Charles as the community gathered to celebrate the Fox Valley Review's November release.





NOVEMBER RELEASE PARTY | GLOBAL BREW



Thank you for reading, supporting,
and believing in the Fox Valley Review.
From our creative family to yours, may
this December be filled with warmth,
joy, wonder, and light.

Dr. Baudelaire K. Ulysse
Chief Editor
Fox Valley Review



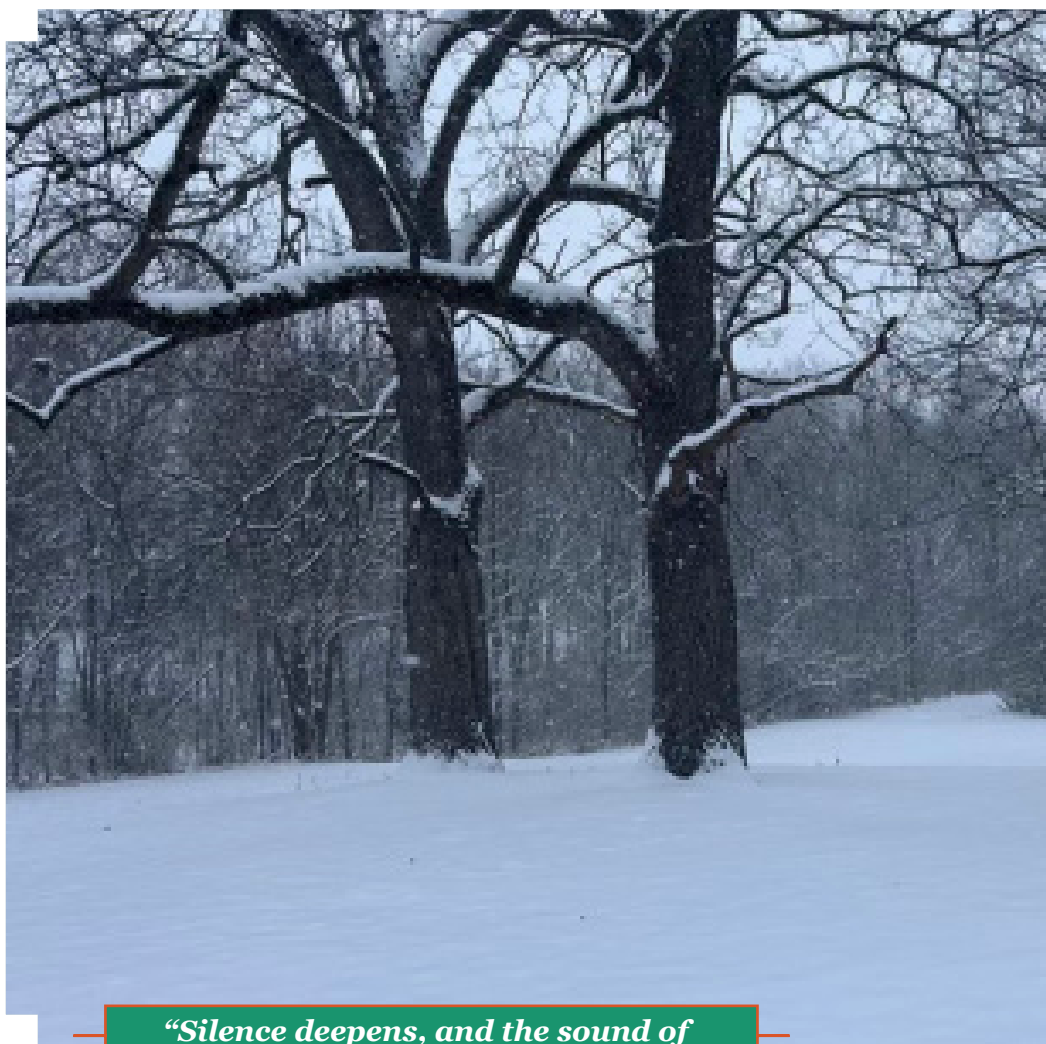
Adieu Fall; Hello Winter!

Crystals on Parched Leaves

WRITER: Beau

PH: Staff

A dieu, Fall
 your coppered leaves still
 whisper against the mind,
 a rustling memory of warmth and
 gathering.
 You leave without apology,
 teaching again the solemn lesson of
 departure:
 the world turns,
 and so must we.
 Now Winter approaches,
 slow and pale as a thought unspoken.
 The sky grows stern;
 the wind rehearses its monologue
 across the fields.
 Silence deepens,
 and the sound of loneliness becomes
 deafening,
 hollow,
 and strangely without meaning.
 Yet solitude is not loneliness.
 To be alone is to face oneself,



“Silence deepens, and the sound of

loneliness becomes deafening, hollow,

and strangely without meaning.”

*“We are human beings; shaped for communion,
warmed by the nearness of others,
made whole by the gentle architecture of connection.”*



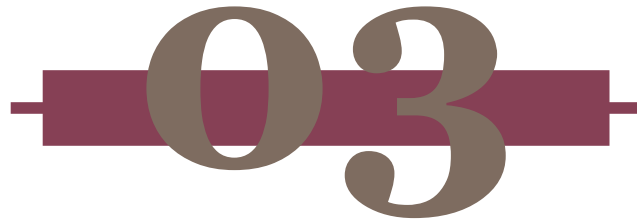
to rest in the mirror of one's own
spirit,
and not tremble.
To discover that the heart continues
even when the room does not echo in
return.
The soul needs this,
as the birch needs stillness
to bear its weight of snow.
But loneliness;
loneliness strips the self from the self,
dims the lamp of personhood,
erodes memory of our belonging to
one another.
We are human beings;
shaped for communion,
warmed by the nearness of others,
made whole by the gentle architecture
of connection.
A life lived only in solitude
is a life dimmed,
half-lived,
half-felt.
As winter dawns,
the cold will urge us indoors,
into burrows of habit,
screens glowing like false hearths,
algorithms calling us by our names.
We will be tempted
to make the virtual our village,

and the television our companion.
But we are not meant to hibernate
from one another.
So let us be intentional;
brave the frost for a walk,
invite a friend to coffee,
sit in a library among strangers
whose silence is still a fellowship.
Let us watch the breath of our conver-
sations
rise like steam in the cold air,
proof that we are alive,
together.
Let winter come,
with its trials,
its starkness,
its long and thoughtful nights,
but let it not take from us
our humanity.
Fall departs,
Winter enters.
Let us greet the season like an open
door:
Adieu, Fall; hello, Winter.
Teach us to be alone without beco-
ming lonely,
to hold solitude without forsaking
connection,
to carry warmth into the cold.

~Beau

*Image by Alex: “Winter settles gently over Leroy Oakes:
quiet, still, and beautifully untouched.”*

“As Grief slips in quietly, arriving like a draft beneath the door, soft but unmistakable.”



Grief in Ordinary Time

Grieving What Does Not Exist, Part II

PROCESSING GRIEF

WRITER: Emma

PH: Staff

Grief doesn't always arrive with sirens. Most days, it slips in quietly, like a draft under the door, ordinary, almost forgettable. I can be washing dishes, answering emails, or scrolling mindlessly when something catches in my chest. A

pinch, a pulse, a sudden heaviness. And I realize: oh. It's happening again.

Sometimes the trigger is biological, an ovulation window that should mean possibility but instead feels like a monthly reminder of what didn't happen,

“

*To feel fertile while knowing the story
ends the same way each month is like being
handed the prologue to a book
that will never be written.*

”

instinct, a rhythm older than language, as if it still believes in a future, it cannot produce.

There's a certain cruelty in that. To feel fertile while knowing the story ends the same way each month is like being handed

again. The body moves forward on the prologue of a book that will never be written.

Other times, the trigger is social. A cousin's pregnancy announcement. A baby shower invite. A blurry ultrasound on Facebook captioned with joy and hashtags. These moments aren't malicious. They're not meant to wound. But grief is its own animal; it reacts whether I give permission or not.

What hurts most is not the announcement itself; it's the split second between seeing it and composing myself. The millisecond when my body reacts before my brain can offer explanations or rationalizations or even kindness. That flash is pure grief, unfiltered and

hard and shift into celebration mode because love and pain can occupy the same seat. I can be genuinely happy for someone else while mourning the story I do not get to tell.

And then there's the algorithm, unmanageable. Then I swallow its uncanny ability to smell longing like blood in the water. I linger on one baby video too long, and suddenly my feed turns into a curated museum of things I never asked for: nursery tours, gender reveals, tips for "natural conception at 40+," and TikTok moms whispering poetry about the miracle of motherhood. I want to scream at my phone: This isn't for me. You don't know me. Stop assuming.

But the algorithm knows only patterns, not pain. So, I click "Not Interested," over and over, training my digital world the way one might train a dog not to jump. Social media hygiene becomes its own act of self-protection, curating distance, blocking triggers,

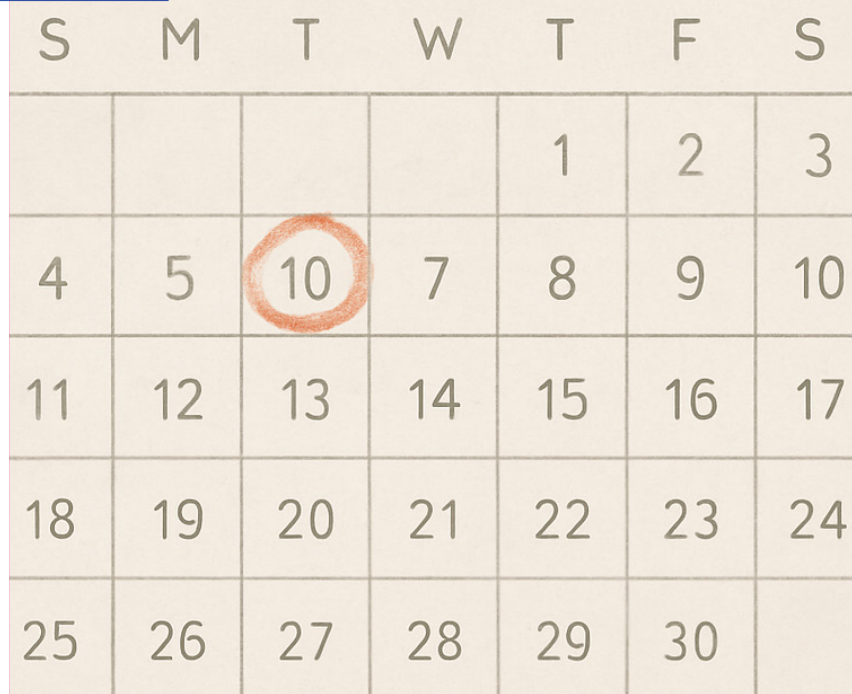
cheeks and matching pajamas. It feels petty some days. Necessary on others. Within all of this lies the strange, aching category called ambiguous loss.

The grief of something that never fully existed.

unfollowing people with soft baby There is no body to bury, no object to hold, no clear moment of goodbye. It's a shadow grief, real enough to feel, invisible enough that people forget it exists. When loss has no form, people assume it has no weight. But ambiguous loss is dense. It accumulates. It lingers without resolution because there is no story completion, no ritual of closure.

It is the grief of potential, the ghost of a future self who once lived comfortably in my imagination. She had a diaper bag, a car seat installed months early, a name chosen because it felt like destiny.

She had a softness to her eyes that I



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sometimes see in my reflection on Days when grief feels like a distant echo. And then there are days when it sits beside me like an uninvited guest: quiet but heavy, refusing to be ignored.

Still, ordinary time has its own mercy. Moments of gentleness. The cup of tea I make myself after an emotional ambush. The breath I take before reentering the world.

The reminder that though grief arrives unpredictably, it also passes. Like waves. Like weather. Like the algorithm that eventually learns, through persistence or exhaustion, not to send me reminders of what I've lost.

Some days, the softest victory **is** simply this: I made it through another trigger, another wave, another moment when grief tried to claim the whole day. I survived the ordinary. And sometimes, that is enough.

~Emma

"One quiet circle on the calendar, another month of hope, and another reminder of what didn't happen."

I used to think grief meant moving on. Now I know grief means moving with. Carrying. Adjusting. Learning the landscape of myself again and again.

There are days when I feel strong, grounded, whole. tired days. She is not here, and yet she is everywhere.

What I've learned is that grief isn't linear. It does not progress in straight lines or clean stages. It circles, loops, spirals.

It recedes, only to surge again like an unanticipated tide.

I can be perfectly fine for weeks, and then one day, bam, a baby's laugh in a grocery store aisle and I'm fighting back tears next to the cereal boxes.



“An empty cradle in the light; a mother and child in the shadow, grieving the future that lived only in imagination.”



WOVEN QUILT SERIES

WHEN THE RIVER FROZE OVER IN ST. CHARLES

“

*THE TEA'S STEEPING,**AND SO IS**THIS TALE OF FROZEN FUN.*

”

WRITER: GRANNY
PH: STAFF

04

They don't make winters quite like they used to. Back when I was a child, the Fox River would freeze over so thick you'd think it had grown a crusty white coat. It turned into our playground, our skating rink, and, truth be told, a kind of town square; just a frosty one.

Come December, all the neighborhood kids would test the ice with tentative footsteps. If it held under Charlie Barnes, the tallest boy in our class, we'd declare it open for adventure. We'd bundle up in woolen scarves and puffy jackets, strap on our hand-me-

down skates, and glide like little snow sprites, laughing and twirling under the gray-blue sky.

Our cheeks glowed pink, and our fingers stung a bit despite our mittens, but we didn't care. The town would hum with cheer. Folks would sled down the riverbanks near Pottawatomie Park, and you'd hear the hoots and hollers echo between the pines.

Parents would set up folding tables with thermoses of cider and cocoa. My mama always packed molasses cookies in a tin with a green ribbon.



Someone brought a portable record player one year and played carols till the batteries gave out.

When twilight fell, and the sun painted the ice gold and mauve, we'd reluctantly unlace our skates and trudge home, bellies warm and hearts warmer. There were no smartphones back then; just memories etched in frost and firelight.

So when folks today say winter's too harsh, I chuckle and say, "Only if you don't know how to enjoy it." You see, the river doesn't just freeze; it pauses. And in that pause, we found magic.

~Granny



"We didn't fear the cold; we made a playground out of it."



“Thermoses steaming, molasses cookies in a tin: the river-bank was our kitchen, and winter our celebration.”

Stay tuned for the next story from Granny’s Woven Quilt Series. It’s coming up in the January Issue.



Winter Walk along the Fox River

We keep walking into the seasons of our life, shaped by everything and everyone who came before.



*"Strength isn't measured in reps alone, but in showing up
year after year."*

05

WRITER: Staff

PH: Staff

-Leafman Season Looms- PART III

Don sat down beside me after his last set, breathing heavy but smiling now, the weight of memory still on his shoulders.

"You know," he said, "sometimes I look back and think the sixties at Illinois State in Carbondale were the best years of my life.

Hitchhiking to parties, Halloween on campus, the Leafman character running wild; those days were messy, loud, and alive. I had no idea back then that \$500 could carry me through an entire semester."

"Nobody tells you about the empty hours. It's like you've been training your whole life for a race, and then the whistle blows and suddenly there's no track."



*“Where holiday memories once rolled
across the fairway, echoes of laughter linger
long after the last round.”*

He shook his head, almost laughing at himself.

“Now I’ve got more money in the bank than I did then, but less to do with it. Funny how life works.” He paused, staring off at nothing in particular.

“Retirement isn’t just about missing work; it’s about missing purpose. You spend decades thinking about the next paycheck, the next project, the next dream.

Then you wake up and the calendar’s blank. That’s when you start asking yourself, What now?” I nodded, but he wasn’t looking for an answer.

“Maybe,” he said slowly, “the trick is to stop chasing what’s gone. Maybe it’s about finding small reasons like coming to this gym, talking to people like you. Reminds me I’m still here. Still got



Pheasant Run at Christmas-time where the holidays once felt endless, warm, and full of possibility.

something to give.”

His eyes lit up then, just for a moment.

“Besides,” he grinned, “I might not be a chef at Pheasant Run, but I can still cook one hell of a meal.”

We both laughed, the sound bouncing off the gym walls. And for that instant, Don didn’t seem bored, or restless, or lost.

He seemed exactly what he was: a man with a past worth telling, and a present still worth living.

~Staff Writer

MAGICAL MEMORIES

WRITER: **Jeff weisman**

PH: **Staff**

Santa Isn't Real



*“Some moments are so full of magic,
we forget they’re already memories.”*

“Honestly, I think part of my innocence died that day, not hers.”



The truth is, I always wondered how I would tell my daughter that Santa isn't real. I knew that at some point she would need to know, and I imagined she might start asking questions, but I never imagined that the real challenge about Santa would be me.

As corny as it sounds, I like Christmas. It's a fantastical time of year when it's okay to believe in the impossible. Life is hard; there are endless challenges, but for that one stretch of the year, it feels acceptable to be a romantic. I like that. And I tried to create that sense of magic for my daughter. Sure, I knew I was perpetuating a falsehood (and I certainly don't love the commercialization of Christmas), but I wanted her to have a pocket of childhood where she could believe that someone out there was doing something nice for her simply because she was good.

What's the harm in that?

So when she was little, I made sure we put out cookies for Santa. She would help arrange them on a plate, adding a handwritten note, and I always wrapped a present for her and signed it "Santa." She would look for it immediately.

"Did Santa bring me a present, Dad?"

she'd ask as we sat around the tree in our living room, still in pajamas, searching through the small pile of gifts.

"I don't know. You have to see. But I bet he did; he ate the cookies."

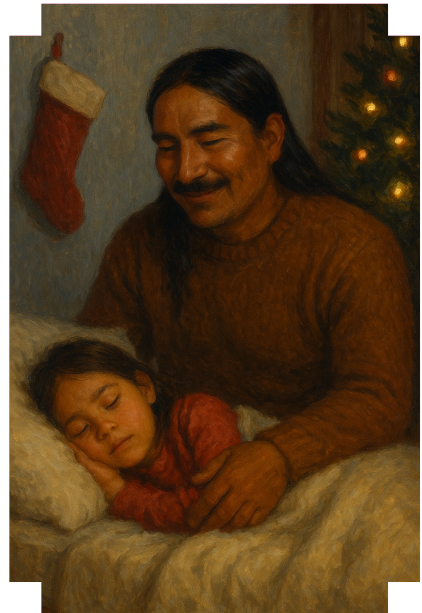
"He did!" she'd say, spotting the present marked from Santa, grinning with unfiltered joy. "Go ahead, sweetie. Open it."

I kept this tradition going for years. When my daughter was about eleven, I even asked my girlfriend at the time, now my wife, whether I should finally tell her the truth. "Should I tell her?" I asked one evening, standing in her dining room. "I think she already knows," she said gently.

"You think?" I didn't want to believe it. "She still puts out cookies for Santa, and she always asks about getting a present from him."

"I know. But I think she's doing that for you." "For me?" I asked, taken aback. "I do," she said kindly. "She's known for a year now."

Of course, I didn't want to believe that, and I certainly didn't want to be the one to crush my daughter's belief in Santa. I can't remember how I learned he wasn't real; we used to call Santa and leave messages when



A visual journey through the magic we inherit and the truth we learn: from letters written in hope, to gifts wrapped in secret, to silent snowfalls and star-filled waiting, to the quiet love of parents who keep the wonder alive long after belief fades.



*"The magic fades, but the wonder
remains, even as belief begins to melt into
memory and legacy."*

I was a kid, but I knew friends who were traumatized by the discovery. It's crushing when you learn that someone you love isn't real. I didn't want to deliver that blow.

But I also didn't want to be the parent clinging to something my daughter had already outgrown. I didn't want my nostalgia to block her growing into her own person. So I finally asked her one day while we were in the kitchen. "I'm curious, sweetie: do you think Santa's real? Sometimes people start saying things, so I'm wondering what you think."

She looked confused, struggling with her thoughts. I didn't realize then that she was trying not to hurt my feelings.

"Santa, Dad?" she asked, deflecting, buying time. "It's okay," I said. "You can be honest. Do you still think Santa's real?"

"No, Dad," she answered softly, almost apologetically. "I see," I said, feeling a little disappointed despite myself. "Thanks for telling me the truth."

"But we can keep putting out cookies for Santa if you want," she offered, grabbing a fruit snack from the cabinet. (She later told me she figured everything out when I accidentally left one of the half-eaten cookies on top of the garbage in the kitchen trash can.) "No, sweetie," I told her. "We shouldn't do that anymore. You know now."

Honestly, I think part of my innocence died that day, not hers. Life moved forward, but something had shifted. I wasn't raising a child anymore; I was beginning to guide a young woman.

WRITER: **Miriam**

PH: **Staff**

Recounting Christmas, Re- membering Home

I've learned grief slows the hand. Every item holds a story

“St. Charles after dark where

the river turns to glass and

the city lights write poetry across the water.”



Cleaning out my parents' home after their passing has become a marathon of decisions, practical in nature, emotional in weight. Every object is a crossroads: keep, donate, or sell? Each choice should be swift, yet I've learned grief slows the hand. Every item holds a story.

With the holidays approaching, I've begun to uncover Christmas treasures carefully packed away over the years.

The first was our family nutcracker set, a beautifully carved wooden bowl with painted motifs, surrounded by metal tools used to crack nuts in their shells.

It appeared only during the Christmas season, filled with a medley of walnuts, pecans, and hazelnuts for our family and guests. Then, like clockwork, it would be wrapped and preserved again for the next year.

Even now it is in pristine condition. Although I rarely see the same nut assortments in grocery stores today and the tradition of a nutcracker bowl seems to have faded, I decided to keep it.

I repurposed the bowl to hold apples and tangerines, giving it daily life instead of holiday storage. It sits on my kitchen counter now, and somehow, its presence warms the room.

Next, I came across a ceramic Santa cookie plate from the 1960s large, vibrant, and unmistakably festive. Every year, my mother and I baked Christmas cookies together, and this was the plate that held the first batch.

It was the holidays. I considered displaying it somewhere on the fireplace, on a buffet as a quiet tribute to the past. And yet, I knew I didn't need to own the object to own the memory. So, I listed it on Facebook Marketplace.

One buyer stood out immediately. She asked, "Does Santa have blue eyes?" Her childhood home had the exact same plate, same design, except hers



“Every year, my mother and I baked Christmas cookies together, and this was the plate that held the first batch.”



had long been lost. She was searching for that missing piece of her own past. When she picked it up, she held it gently, almost reverently. Passing it on felt right. Something from my home was returning to someone else's and would be loved again.

As I navigate this process, I'm learning that letting go can also be an act of keeping. Some things we hold onto by placing them on a shelf. Others, we honor by sending them where they are needed next.

May your holidays be filled with joy, cherished memories, and rich prospects for the future.

Miriam

Holiday magic on full display at the Winterfest Art Market and Warehouse 55: timeless Christmas charm from floor to ceiling.



Cozy Winter Foods of the Fox Valley

And Where to Find Them

Winter in the Fox Valley has a way of slowing us down. The long nights, the early sunsets, the snow that muffles everything; they make us seek out warmth wherever we can find it.

And sometimes that warmth comes in the form of a spoonful of soup, a bite of bread dipped in broth, a sizzling skillet arriving at the table, or the steam that rises from a mug before the very first sip.

WRITER: Staff

PH: Staff

Across our towns, from Geneva to Naperville, Algonquin to East Dundee, Huntley, Cary, and Oswego, chefs and kitchens are serving the kind of meals that make the season feel like an invitation rather than something to endure.

Here are twelve dishes and destinations that define comfort this winter, each offering a unique embrace of flavor, atmosphere, and the simple pleasure of a well-made meal.



Comfort dishes worth bundling up for.

Sizzling Molcajete: Hacienda Real, Geneva

Served steaming in a hot stone bowl, Hacienda Real's Sizzling Molcajete blends steak, chicken, shrimp, and chorizo into a bold, aromatic dish that warms the whole table. With tortillas, beans, rice, and grilled vegetables, it's an indulgent winter meal that turns even an ordinary night into a celebration.

Seafood Paella: Hacienda Real, Geneva

Bright, fragrant, and layered with shrimp, mussels, and seasoned rice, this paella brings a Mediterranean warmth to a cold Midwestern evening. It's lighter than the molcajete dining room.



Glowing rooms, and the comfort of a cold-weather meal done

but just as comforting, especially when paired with the cozy glow of Hacienda Real's dining room.

Hibachi Filet & Lobster: Shinto Steakhouse, Naperville

Few winter meals feel as alive as Shinto's hibachi dinners. The Filet & Lobster plate, tender steak, buttery shellfish, fried rice, noodles, and seasonal vegetables, arrives with steam, fire, and the kind of showmanship that makes the cold outside feel distant and forgotten.

Tempura & Warm Sushi Combination: Shinto Steakhouse, Naperville
For a lighter take on winter comfort, Shinto's warm tempura paired with fresh sushi offers a balance of crisp textures and clean flavors.

Add miso soup and the restaurant's softly lit atmosphere and you have a meal that feels both energizing and soothing.

Seasonal Entrées: Montarra, Algonquin

Montarra's chef-driven winter menu from slow-roasted steaks to delicate seafood and herb-infused risottos, offers refined warmth for a night out. Candlelit tables, thoughtful plating, and deep, comforting flavors make it a destination for anyone wanting elegance with their comfort food.

Wood-Fired Dishes: Mockingbird

Bar + Garden, East Dundee

Mockingbird pairs rustic charm with modern flair. Whether you choose a blistered-edge wood-fired pizza, roasted vegetables, or a hearty seasonal entrée, the warmth of the brick oven sets the tone. It's the kind of spot where winter meals become unhurried and memorable.

Scratch-Made Soups & Quiches:

Local Cafés in Huntley

Huntley's neighborhood cafés excel in comfort: steaming soups, buttery crust quiches, and soft brunch plates that bring color back to cold mornings. It's the sort of food that fuels errands, conversations, or simply a slow winter Saturday.

Pot Pies & Winter Specials: Cary's

Cozy Cafés

In Cary, several small cafés offer pot pies with flaky golden crusts, scratch-made stews, and warm breakfast plates perfect for easing into winter weekends. These meals aren't fancy; they're familiar in the best way.

Classic American Comfort Plates:

Fox Valley Pubs (Various Towns)

The region's beloved pubs offer timeless winter staples: thick stews,

French onion soup with bubbling cheese, mashed potatoes that taste like home, and warm bread that seems to thaw the evening. It's comfort food without pretense.

Bakery Fresh Cinnamon Rolls: Fox

Valley Bakeries (Open Locations)

Soft, warm, and fragrant with cinnamon, local bakery rolls are the perfect antidote to gray winter mornings.

Paired with a hot drink, they turn a simple stop into a small winter ritual.

Brunch Plates & Warm Drinks:

Boutique Cafés Across the Valley

Throughout the Fox Valley, small cafés transform winter days with hearty brunches, baked goods, and specialty warm drinks. These charming spots offer everything from cozy breakfast scrambles to house-made pastries perfect for a slow, comforting meal.

Winter asks us to seek comfort, to find warmth where the season takes it away. Across the Fox Valley, these dishes and destinations create that warmth in flavor, in atmosphere, and in the shared experience of a good meal.

Whether you're gathering with friends, planning a date night, or simply treating yourself, these cozy plates offer a delicious way to savor the season.

Your Future Ad

Your Future Ad

Your Future Ad

Your Future Ad

Your Future Ad

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FOX VALLEY REVIEW

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