

Plum Express

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This Issue, at a Glance:

Did You Know?	page 1
Our Perspective on Society	page 1
	page 2
Editorial	page 2
Poetry	page 2
Editorial	page 3
Sports with the Fred Man	page 3
Poetry	page 3
Guy's Recipes	page 4
Restaurant Corner	page 4
Gaming Corner	page 4
Music Corner	page 4

DID YOU KNOW?

No SSDI Cost of Living Increase?

By: Michael Joseph

Some people find, when they receive Social Security payments, whether they have recently retired or have a (mental or physical) disability, that other people ignore or forget them. Sometimes even the members of their families and friends, who still engage in paid work, may forget and ignore them. This is wrong!

Adding insult to injury, current recipients of SSDI have not received any annual cost of living increase to their already small incomes for 2016.

I asked an AID client, whom I will call "J", how he felt about this. A veteran of the Army, J had an accident while riding his bicycle. Injured, J now walks with a cane. Previously he had been in a wheelchair. His recovery took a long time, and he is not capable of gaining employment in this job market. Regarding the denial of cost of living increase, J said, "I am not pleased with it. It really is just crumbs to birds anyway."

Only advocacy and activism can change this for the better.

OUR PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIETY

Stigma and You, My Fellow Mentally Ill Friends

By: Guy C.

You may have a mental illness, but you should not allow people who think you are different to get you down. Do not allow your self-esteem to suffer because of what they might say. There is a great deal of stigma that goes with mental illness; deal with the stigma as best you can. Do your best to control the behaviors you can, accept the ones you cannot, and try to have the wisdom to know the difference.

Keep your head up high and keep your self-esteem. Do not let the so-called "normal" people get you down

with the stigma they can attach to you, or with the way they may label you with negativity that is not constructive.

Do not allow this.

Remember, you are a unique human being like no other. You are like a snowflake shining in the winter sky, unlike any other and impossible to reproduce exactly or duplicate in complete form. Remember, you are a unique child of God. That means no other being exists who is just like you. We all have a destiny! Find yours! One way to do this is to find people who feels bad about themselves, then let them know their full value.



Memories of St. Patrick's Day

By: Michael Joseph

I consider myself a child of the United States of America, even though my grandparents on my father's side, Grandpa Pat and Grandma Ellen, were from Ireland. My maternal grandmother was Hungarian, and we never knew my maternal grandfather; all we knew was that he liked to gamble. Grandma Irene remarried with Grandpa John, who was certainly all USA. He was the only Grandpa I knew; he was a real card, and we loved him very much.

Anyway, about St Patrick's Day. Well, St. Patrick's Day was also my mother's birthday, and a day of great importance to my father (whom we called Dad). My whole life, alcohol played a big role in this day, or at least

after the third grade or so. I was not drinking anything really then except the brandy my father would slip into our tea once in a great while to put us to bed. I don't remember too much about those days except that the tea was very good, and sometimes it had a hint of blueberry that was very tasty! But about St Patrick's Day... We never really considered it a sin to drink alcohol. After all, Jesus drank wine. He even had turned water into wine. We thought it was so much the better if we could make it 100 proof or so whiskey.

My Dad died when I was fourteen. That is when I really hit the bottle. You'll have to forgive me for saying that all of my St Patrick's Days until

about my 28th birthday are a blur. I participated in a twelve-step program and that changed my perspective. My father told me once that the Irish have a thirst. He said if you can drink water, juice or tea, drink that instead. *"Try to stay away from the booze because it is really bad."* My father is a good man, and so is my older brother Pat (who got most of the attention on that day anyway). Remember, Jesus cried from the cross "I thirst", for all the alcoholic souls lost in misery. So, if you commiserate this St. Patrick's Day, make sure someone else has the keys and that you are with true friends when you do. Love and God bless.

Untitled Poem

By: Michelle C.S.

My head is spinning.

My eyes are weary.

My legs are tired.

My body is exhausted.

Dear Lord, "Why didn't you hear my cry?"

The Lord replied, "I've heard you all along, my child. You didn't want my help. Now you do. That is why you're still here, standing and alive."

If you think it doesn't matter what you do in life, see what people say when you've passed away and are gone.

Belongings and material things come and go, but impressions and memories last forever.

The day is long, the night is cold. There is no one to hold my hand and no one to call my own. I have a name blowing in the wind. I'm looking to find a friend. God Bless my weary soul and God bless each one of us.

Blessed is he who is poor, but rich in heart.

Hobby Corner: Photography

By: Michael Joseph

When is a good time to take pictures? Well, any time is good to take the pictures you like... but always think before you post or email them out. When taking pictures of people, there are two simple rules to follow: never try to embarrass your subject, and always get their best side. If you follow these rules, you are much more likely to have people interested in having their picture taken again!

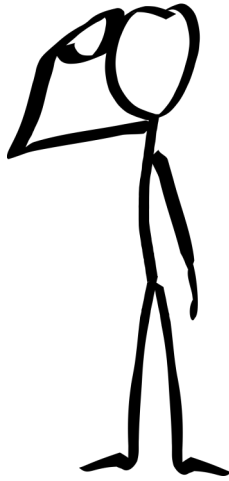
There are four factors of exposure, still in play in the age of digital camera, though you may not realize it.

1. Film speed. This is easier to set on your digital camera than it was previously. The higher the ASA number/film speed, the less light needed to put an image on the film. Due to the ability of digital speed to capture images at 1000 or 1200 without graininess, the door to night photography has been opened!
2. Shutter speed. This is also easier to set on a digital camera. The longer the shutter is open, the more light gets to the film and the more the film gets exposed.
3. Aperture size. The aperture is the opening on the lens or camera you are using. This is usually measured in f/ stops. Remember that the larger the f/ stop, the smaller the opening on the camera. Also, the larger the f/ stop number, the greater depth of field in the picture. But large f/ stops require longer exposure times or shutter speed (to allow more light into the camera).
4. Existing light. This requires the most patience. The sun and sky must cooperate with you, or you must set up your lighting just right for what you want.

These factors exist in any exposure, from film cameras to digital cameras. When you discover how these factors relate to one another, you will be a true hobby photographer.

Outward Bound

By: Tom O.



I once participated in Outward Bound, the outdoor adventure character- and competence-building program that had desert, forest, mountain, and boat summer camp trips at sea in wild, unsettled parts of this country. I had been to a private Army ROTC high school, which made me very good at systematic action. You just never got to learn flexible response. All drill and no obstacle course. We didn't have obstacle courses. Outward Bound, on the other hand, was a three-week continuous obstacle course. Sailing a boat from one island to another is a good way to learn flexible response. I learned more about responding to things with structure and flexibility in the three weeks of Outward Bound than from three years of ROTC high school.

Sports with the Fred Man

By: Fred M.

The Blackhawks are first in the Western Conference. The coach of the Blackhawks, Joel Quenneville, just signed a three year contract to stay in the position. Hurray!

The Chicago Bulls are now eighth in the Eastern Standings. They play hurt most of the time; we can be proud of our Chicago Bulls.

I hope you had fun at your Super Bowl party this year. The Broncos won versus the Panthers, 24 to 10. And that's sports with the Fred Man! Have a happy day!



Blackhawks vs. Penguins, January 2016

Image source: blackhawks.nhl.com

“Untitled Poem”

By: Michelle C.S.

I must be traveling on,
for I must find out who I am.
As I travel, I stop along the way,
for I found myself at the crossroads
of heaven or hell.
I ask myself, *when it comes to
Judgment Day,*

what will I say?
Then I thought to myself,
I lost myself for a minute.
Then I got down on my knees and prayed.
I found myself with you,
for you showed me the way home
and I found all the answers

to my questions.
I can stand up and be proud of
who I am today.



Guy's Recipes:**Zucchini (or Apple, or Banana, or Blueberry...) Bread or Muffins****By: Chef Guy**

3 eggs

1 cup oil

2 cups sugar

3 cups flour

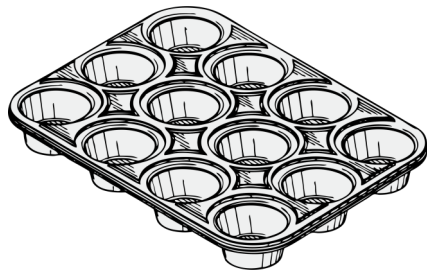
3 tsp vanilla

1 tsp salt

3 tbsp cinnamon

1/2 tsp baking powder

2 cups chopped zucchini or fruit of choice



Mix all ingredients in a medium-sized mixing bowl.

Pour into loaf pan, or spoon into muffin tin.

For bread, bake at 325° for 1 hour.

For muffins, bake at 325° for 20-25 minutes.

Gaming Corner: Backgammon**By: Michael Joseph**

The game backgammon predates written history. It's pretty fun. Two people play against each other, like checkers or chess. Its rules run from simple to complex. Each side of the board has twelve slots or tracks, called points. Each player starts with fifteen pieces (checkers, draughts, stones, men, or counters— different people have referred to these pieces different ways). The objective of the game is to move all your pieces off the board. The pieces are moved based on the dice rolls. It is a game of both luck and strategy, as one can use combinations of different dice rolls differently to win. Backgammon dates back over 5000 years, so you should be able to find a set of official rules and a board easy enough. Enjoy!

Restaurant Corner:**Swordfish Restaurant****By: Chef Guy**

Swordfish Restaurant is located in Wind Point shopping mall, address 207 N. Randall Road, in the center of Batavia.

This is a contemporary sushi restaurant. Some of the best sushi in the western suburbs can be found in this modest Japanese offering, which has an interesting menu of creative rolls and grilled dishes. Tasteful décor and skilled staff increase its appeal.

I give the Swordfish a high rating. The sushi is to die for. Every bite melts in your mouth. The average cost for a meal at this restaurant is \$34.00.

Swordfish: ★★★★★ Explore and enjoy until next time!

Music Corner: The Phenomenon of Taylor Swift**By: Michael Joseph**

According to Wikipedia Biographies, Taylor Swift is an American singer songwriter, born in 1989 and raised in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania. She moved to Nashville, Tennessee at the age of 14 to pursue a career in country music. Her career picked up in 2006 with her hit "Our Song," which she both wrote and sang. In 2008, she crossed over to the pop charts with her new releases, and then her album *Fearless* propelled her even further. Yes, at age 27 Taylor Swift is a phenomenon unparalleled in rock 'n roll / pop country since Elvis Presley himself. Rock on in the free world!

