

## Congrats for dogs and having time to be with them

There are rites of passage in life that you never really know what it's like until you go through it. Retirement is one of them.

I never realized, until I announced I was retiring this summer, that people congratulate you when you retire.

If the prefix "re" means to do something again, wouldn't "retire" mean to get tired all over again? Which doesn't seem like something to congratulate someone about. I was looking for renewal, restoration, decompression or maybe just to remember to not hold my breath all the time.

I checked the dictionary to find the possible meanings of the word retire. To retire can mean to quit a room, to end your career or working life, to retreat or withdraw from the world, or simply to go to bed. Everyone, from my doctor to my dog, has suggested I need to nap more, maybe I'm being congratulated because everyone is hoping I'll wake up on the right side of the bed for a change.

I mused to Ben one day, "what am I being congratulated for?" The cats, of course, had to put in their opinions. They suggested I was being congratulated for surviving long enough to retire. Or maybe, they said, it was for having saved up enough money to afford to continue to care for them in the manner to which they had become accustomed.

Another surprise of retiring was that people kept asking what my plans for the future were. They obviously expected some great adventure — like an around-the-world trip. I found I was a little embarrassed to admit my plan was to catch up on sleep, clean my house, and spend time with Ben while I still had the chance. Ben, of course, thought I should have retired sooner.

"We can nap together every

day now," he extolled the virtues of retirement on my first days at home.

"You sound like the doctor," I said. I'd seen the doctor for a physical the month before.

He'd asked if I was sleeping any better. When I pointed out no one sleeps after age 60, the doctor advised napping after I retire.

"And you can feed me every time I walk over to the dog dish," Ben added.

"You'll gain weight," I said. "The vet said you need to lose a few pounds."

"Well, the doctor told you the same thing," Ben stared at me. "I've seen you go to the fridge multiple times just this morning."

"I'm cleaning it out," I said. "Well, put whatever you want in my bowl," he said going over to see if something had miraculously appeared. "I won't tell if you don't."

When I refused to feed him yet again and needed to get away from the refrigerator myself, I suggested a walk. The sun shone. A breeze rippled through the tree leaves. We walked along the road, moving from the shade to sunlight and back again. The creek babbled along after the recent rain. Newts made their slow awkward walk across the road, and for once the mosquitoes weren't out in full force. A neighbor pulled up, rolling down his truck window.

"Congratulations on your retirement," he called. "You having fun keeping Ben in line?"

"Yes," I said. "We're going to have a great time spending every day together."

As he drove away, I realized I do deserve to be congratulated for being able to spend my days with Ben.

*Priscilla Berggren-Thomas is a writer who lives in Homer.*

### Raised by Wolves



Priscilla Berggren-Thomas

## Historical fiction novel based on SUNY alum's ancestor

### Read it for yourself

To buy "Hattie's War," go to <https://amzn.to/46lp6Pr>

By LILY BYRNE  
Staff Reporter

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Peter Serko heard stories about his great-great grandmother, Harriet, through his great-grandmother's diaries. Using nearly century-old scrapbooks, news clippings and letters, he recently published his own.

"Hattie's War" is a historical fiction novel intended for young readers by SUNY Cortland alum Serko. It follows 15-year-old Hattie Howell, a fictionalized version of Harriet.

Serko acquired his great-grandmother's diaries, which date to 1910, more than a decade ago. She lived in Hector — west of Ithaca — with her husband, and discussed in her diaries how difficult life on their farm was.

During a family trip to Gettysburg, Serko learned of Hannibal Howell, his great-great-great grandfather, who died within the first 20 minutes of the battle of Gettysburg. Serko used ancestry.com to learn more about Howell's family.

Howell enlisted with three brothers. He was the oldest of 14 children and had four children at the time he enlisted.

"It made me think 'Why would somebody do that? That seems like a really crazy thing to do,'" Serko said. "I wanted to add to it, but I didn't know what I could add. The Civil War is the most written about war in human history."

Hattie was born five months after her father enlisted, he learned.

"I thought 'That's how I'll tell the story,'" Serko said. "I'll tell it through Hattie's voice, and she would likely have some of the same questions I had, like 'Why would her father do this?' and 'What would make someone do this?'"

"Peter has given history teachers of the Civil War a beautiful gift that raises the bar for



Image provided

"Hattie's War" is a historical novel by a SUNY Cortland alum based on the life of his great-great grandmother.

the impact that their teaching can have on their students," said John Perricone, SUNY Cortland alum, lecturer and 2020 recipient of the school's distinguished educator award. "To experience the Civil War through the eyes of a 14-year-old girl yearning to know the details of her father's death makes this story so personal, powerful and gripping."

Serko had never written fiction before, but this is not the first time he has taken on an artistic endeavor to honor a family member. In 2014, he wrote,

performed and starred in a one-man show "My Brother Kissed Mark Zuckerberg," to honor his brother David Serko, who died of complications from AIDS at age 32.

"That's kind of what I do," Serko said. "I just run into things, and figure it out as I go. This is just another one of my crazy things."

"As a retired secondary teacher, I would have loved to have had 'Hattie's War' to supplement U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction units," said Cindy

Powell, a retired middle school history teacher at Vashon Island School District. "It's readable, relatable and solidly researched; the three Rs if you will, of what I always looked for in literature to make history come alive."

While the war plot and family details are based on facts, artifacts and firsthand accounts, Serko fictionalized Hattie's personality.

In real life, Hattie's brothers and father owned a painting company where they would paint signs and carriages. In the novel, Hattie aspires to be an artist.

"This is a young girl who lived in a rural community in 1878," Serko said. "Her only option in life is to be a farmer's wife, and she doesn't want that. She has dreams for herself."

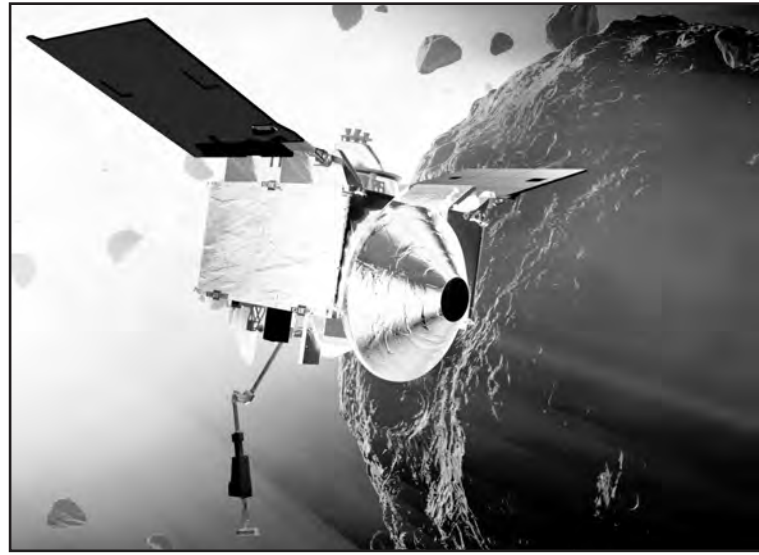
"The Civil War shadows each chapter, but 'Hattie's War' is a coming-of-age novel," Powell said. "Hattie's internal journey is both modern and familiar. She struggles to balance her ambition to become an artist with the desire for home and family. Hattie negotiates depression as she pieces together an understanding of her father."

A year into the writing process, Serko learned one of the fictionalized details was nonfiction. Through letters provided by his cousin, whom he had not seen in 50 years, he learned Hannibal enlisted because he was an abolitionist.

"Part of the reason I wrote this was that I knew my great grandmother, and I knew all my grandmothers, and I'm thinking 'What were their lives like?' 'What were their options?'" he said. "I started thinking about my daughters, and how they could be anything. One of my daughters is a lawyer, one's an executive; my wife was a judge. Their world is totally different from what Hattie was offered."

"Things have changed thankfully," he added. "It was a different life then. I wanted to write the book in a different way, where she is fighting against the system while being drawn into it."

## NASA spacecraft delivering biggest sample yet from asteroid



Conceptual Image Lab/Goddard Space Flight Center/NASA via AP, File  
This illustration provided by NASA depicts the OSIRIS-Rex spacecraft at the asteroid Benu.

By MARCIA DUNN  
AP Aerospace Writer

Planet Earth is about to receive a special delivery — the biggest sample yet from an asteroid.

A NASA spacecraft will fly by Earth on Sunday and drop off what is expected to be at least a cupful of rubble it grabbed from the asteroid Benu, closing out a seven-year quest.

The sample capsule will parachute into the Utah desert as its mothership, the Osiris-Rex spacecraft, zooms off for an encounter with another asteroid.

Scientists anticipate getting about a half pound of pebbles and dust, much more than the teaspoon or so brought back by Japan from two other asteroids.

No other country has fetched pieces of asteroids, preserved time capsules from the dawn of our solar system that can help explain how Earth — and life — came to be.

Sunday's landing concludes a 4 billion-mile journey highlighted by the rendezvous with the carbon-rich Benu, a unique pogo stick-style touchdown and sample grab, a jammed lid that sent some of the stash spilling into space, and now the return of NASA's first asteroid samples.

"I ask myself how many heart-pounding moments can you have in one lifetime because I feel like I might be hitting my limit," said the University of Arizona's Dante Lauretta, the mission's lead scientist.

A brief look at the spacecraft and its cargo:

### THE LONG JOURNEY

Asteroid chaser Osiris-Rex blasted off on the \$1 billion mission in 2016. It arrived at Benu in 2018 and spent the next two years flying around the small spinning space rock and scouting out the best place to grab samples.

Three years ago, the spacecraft swooped in and reached out with its 11-foot stick vacuum, momentarily touching the asteroid's surface and sucking up dust and pebbles. The device pressed and grabbed so much that rocks became wedged around the rim of the lid. As samples drifted off into space, Lauretta and his team

scrambled to get the remaining material into the capsule. The exact amount inside won't be known until the container is opened.

### ASTEROID BENNU

Discovered in 1999, Benu is believed to be a remnant of a much larger asteroid that collided with another space rock. It's barely one-third of a mile wide, roughly the height of the Empire State Building, and its black rugged surface is packed with boulders. Roundish in shape like a spinning top, Benu orbits the sun every 14 months, while rotating every four hours.

Scientists believe Benu holds leftovers from the solar system's formation 4.5 billion years ago.

## Notebook

### Zine workshop in Homer

The Being Female Collective will sponsor a zine workshop from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Sept. 30 at Artisan Elements in Homer.

A zine is a handmade magazine originally used by writers and artists as a way to work for social justice. Zines have often been used by feminists in the fight for women's rights.

The workshop will use writing prompts and different media to help participants produce a unique expression of themselves and their vision for a better world.

Register at [beingfemalecortland@gmail.com](mailto:beingfemalecortland@gmail.com).

### Museum of the Earth turns 20

ITHACA — The Museum of the Earth in Ithaca will mark its 20th anniversary with free admission from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sept. 30.

Visitors to the 1259 Trumansburg Road museum can view the exhibits and resources.

"The Museum of the Earth offers a glimpse into one of the nation's largest fossil collections," said Warren Allmon, director of the Paleontological Research Institution, the museum's parent organization. "The PRI collection dates back to the first half of the 19th century and the founding of Cornell University, and the museum allows residents and visitors in the Finger Lakes to experience a big-city museum in the middle of one of the most geologically spectacular regions of the country."

## Colo. nature lover seeks noise cancellation

DEAR AMY: I live in Colorado and have young children at home, as well as a job where I am constantly bombarded by sound.

I frequent outdoor spaces seeking peace, solitude, and the quiet sounds of nature — for my mental health.

I am dismayed at the proliferation of Bluetooth speakers, large and small. They seem to be everywhere! Hiking trails, lakes, on boats and paddleboards, at the pool, while camping, even strapped to people while they are biking and skiing! Few seem concerned about the noise pollution they are inflicting on others around them.

Why do people seem not to notice or care that those around them may not wish to listen to their choice of music?

What happens if we get multiple, conflicting speakers at the same time?

### Ask Amy

By Amy Dickinson

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The Chicago Tribune



I wish I could ask people to use headphones when they are alone, or at least turn down the sound so it is mostly heard by a group in a small vicinity, not everyone around them.

In the case of running or biking, they should only wear one ear bud and have the volume on low for their safety and those around them.

Is there a respectful way to ask people to either turn their music down or off so that those of us

wishing for quiet can also share the space?

What do you think?

— Not Musically Inclined

### DEAR NOT INCLINED:

My time on this earth has been long enough that I've seen two iterations of this problem — first in the '70s/'80s, with the rise of the mighty "boombox," and now with the prevalence of personal Bluetooth speakers.

Back in the boombox days, cities started enacting and enforcing noise ordinances (especially on public transportation). That, and the rise of the Walkman, seemed to finally bring on the sounds of silence.

Little did any of us realize that we would look back on the last three decades as halcyon days of relative quiet.

Like you, I don't understand the impulse to share one's music with strangers (perhaps

readers will weigh in to explain), and yet they do — contributing more noise to an already noisy world.

Yes, there is a polite way to ask someone to turn down their music ("Would you mind turning down your music?"). And yet — the important question for you to answer for yourself is whether it is safe to do so.

It seems that people who blast music while in public are finding ways to dominate the space, and it is not always wise to confront this sort of dominance.

Your town and local park system might find it appropriate to enact (or enforce) rules regarding noise pollution. You would be doing your neighbors a favor by taking up this cause to these governing bodies.

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