

## Five Gifts, on the Occasion of the First Full Day of Winter, 2020

My first gift of the first full day of winter came as I slept in late on the shortest day of the year. Cybele got up early and went into town to provision groceries to carry us through the holidays. When she returned, she woke me gently, then whispered in my ear, “The snow level came down last night; we need to go skiing.” While I organized the gear in the car, she made my favorite breakfast of scrambled eggs— smooth as velvet and delicately soft as only she can make them— sautéed vegetables and warm tortillas.

We drove to the Pederson Sno-Park at Mile Post 27 on Dead Indian Memorial Road. The Pacific Crest Trail crosses the highway here. It is literally the spine of the Southern Oregon Cascades, and the best snow in the area can be found there. Three inches of new snow awaited us, light and fluffy, on top of a crust of variable texture. We were the first skiers to head up Burton Flat Road that morning, so we had to break trail, but the snow was light and we glided through it easily. This was particularly true for me since Cybele broke trail for most of the 2.5 miles out. Call that the second gift.

When we were ready to turn around, we ate a couple cookies from the bounty that had arrived the night before from my mom’s kitchen in Southern Michigan. She is a wonderful baker and sends us an astonishing array of homemade cookies each Christmas. It is a long, welcomed tradition to open the package each year and take in the sight of four or five different cookies stuffed with dates or figs, nuts dipped in white chocolate and others in dark, gingerbread, short sugar cookies with anise, candied pecans, fudge, peanut butter balls dipped in chocolate, rum balls, and layered bars with dried fruit and coconut. I’ll call that gift three, but truthfully, at my age? It’s innumerable.

Retracing our tracks back to the Sno-Park was easier, both because we had already packed the fresh snow in our tracks, and also because the road we were skiing maintains an overall gentle rise on the way out, so the ride back is easier. In some places we could just glide along with double pole pushes. In one area, we didn’t even have to do that; instead, we had to watch our downhill speed and use caution to avoid a spill, which happens easier than you might think on skinny skis. Because of the elevation drop, the glide back is much quicker than the kick out. I’m always surprised when we turn the last corner and see the stop sign announcing the highway.

With 150 feet remaining before we arrived at the car, a Pileated Woodpecker flew across the road, right in front of me, and landed with a flamboyant flare on a Douglas fir snag 50 feet away. I froze and tried to take in all I could of this handsome bird. North America’s largest woodpecker, the size of a crow with nearly a 30-inch wingspan (and I had just seen all of that span on the flare), is an elusive resident of Western boreal forests. I have not seen one in a couple of decades, and we have been looking. Yet how easily and suddenly the Pileated Woodpecker emerged from the forest unbidden; here were the strong claws, heavy beak, bold face pattern, the classic Woody Woodpecker crest. (In the Wikipedia entry for Woody Woodpecker, “woodpecker,” links to a picture of the Pileated Woodpecker, even though there are nearly two dozen other species of woodpeckers in North America.) He worked his way up the trunk, probing here and there. Cybele came

up behind me and together we watched our Pileated work the bark for several minutes. We whispered excitedly to each other, calling out what we were seeing and how fantastic it was. When he flew off, his wings made audible swooshes through the air. We were transformed and stood where we were talking about the sighting for a few minutes. As we began to move again, Cybele saw our Pileated cross the highway to the north where she saw him join another. She gave me clues as to where I could pick them up visually: “Your nine o’clock; big bare tree; about 15 feet up.” The pair began working again. Soon, one flew off, then began calling. From time to time one or the other would hammer a tree, making a loud, solid thud that echoed in the forest. The Pileated’s extinct cousin, the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker, was known as the Good Lord Bird; that’s what people said when they saw it. “Charismatic Megafauna” is what we call large, exotic mammals, but I’ll make a personal exception for this encounter, which stayed with us on the drive home, each of us commenting from time to time what a wonderful, long sought experience we had shared. You know that’s gift four.

<p>Woody Woodpecker is a cartoon <a href="#">anthropomorphic woodpecker</a> that has appeared in theatrical short films produced by the <a href="#">Walter Lantz Studio</a> and distributed by <a href="#">Universal Studios</a>.</p> <p>He was created in 1940 by <a href="#">Lantz</a> and storyboard artist <a href="#">Ben Hardaway</a>. Lantz did the groundwork for two other screwball characters, <a href="#">Bugs Bunny</a> and <a href="#">Daffy Duck</a>, at his <a href="#">studio</a> in the late 1930s. Woody's character and design evolved from an unusually garish design to a more refined looking and acting character, a version of <a href="#">Bugs Bunny</a>.<sup>[5]</sup> Woody was originally voiced by <a href="#">Danny Webb</a> in the shorts by <a href="#">Kent Rogers</a>, <a href="#">Ben Hardaway</a>, and <a href="#">Walter Lantz</a>.<sup>[6]</sup></p> <p>Woody Woodpecker cartoons were first broadcast on television in the <a href="#">Woodpecker Show</a>, which featured Lantz cartoons booked by <a href="#">MGM</a> and <a href="#">Warner Bros.</a> footage of Lantz. Lantz produced theatrical cartoons long after the war. Woody Woodpecker remained a staple of Universal's release schedule until the end of his studio.</p> <p>The character has been revived since then for special projects, including <a href="#">Woody Woodpecker Show</a>, a Saturday-morning cartoon television series, and <a href="#">Woody Woodpecker</a> that aired from 1999 to 2002.</p>	 <p>Woodpeckers are part of the family <a href="#">Picidae</a>, that also includes the piculets, wrynecks, and sapsuckers. Members of this family are found worldwide, except for Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Madagascar, and the extreme polar regions. Most species live in forests or woodland habitats, although a few species</p>	<div data-bbox="1052 814 1349 1270"> <p><b>Woody Woodpecker</b> Woody Woodpecker character</p>  <p><b>First appearance</b> <i>Knock Knock</i> (November 25, 1940) <b>Created by</b> <a href="#">Walter Lantz</a></p> </div>
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There was one final gift on the first day of winter. After we arrived home, still buzzing from the excitement of our encounter with our Pileated Woodpecker, I finally sat down and opened the cards and letters that had been arriving for a few days. I hadn’t quite had my head in the right space to open them when they’d arrived. That has never happened to me before. I’d been drifting in an inchoate funk induced by weird current events, the Covid-19 global pandemic and the Almeda Fire. The latter had devastated our town on September 8, making homeless nearly 25 percent of the residents of Talent and our neighboring town, Phoenix, and turned to cinders innumerable homes (many of which I’d built), businesses, cars, forests, gardens and yards. But as I opened and read cards and letters bearing season’s greetings of hope and cheer from dear friends, I brightened too on the shortest day of the year. The longest night would itself be followed by a night not quite as long, and a shorter night would follow that. A New Year, with lengthening days, will follow 10 more days, each longer than the previous, and with that thought, my hope was reinforced for healing, returned fellowship and longer, brighter days. Peace, love and respect to you and yours for 2021.

**PILEATED WOODPECKER**

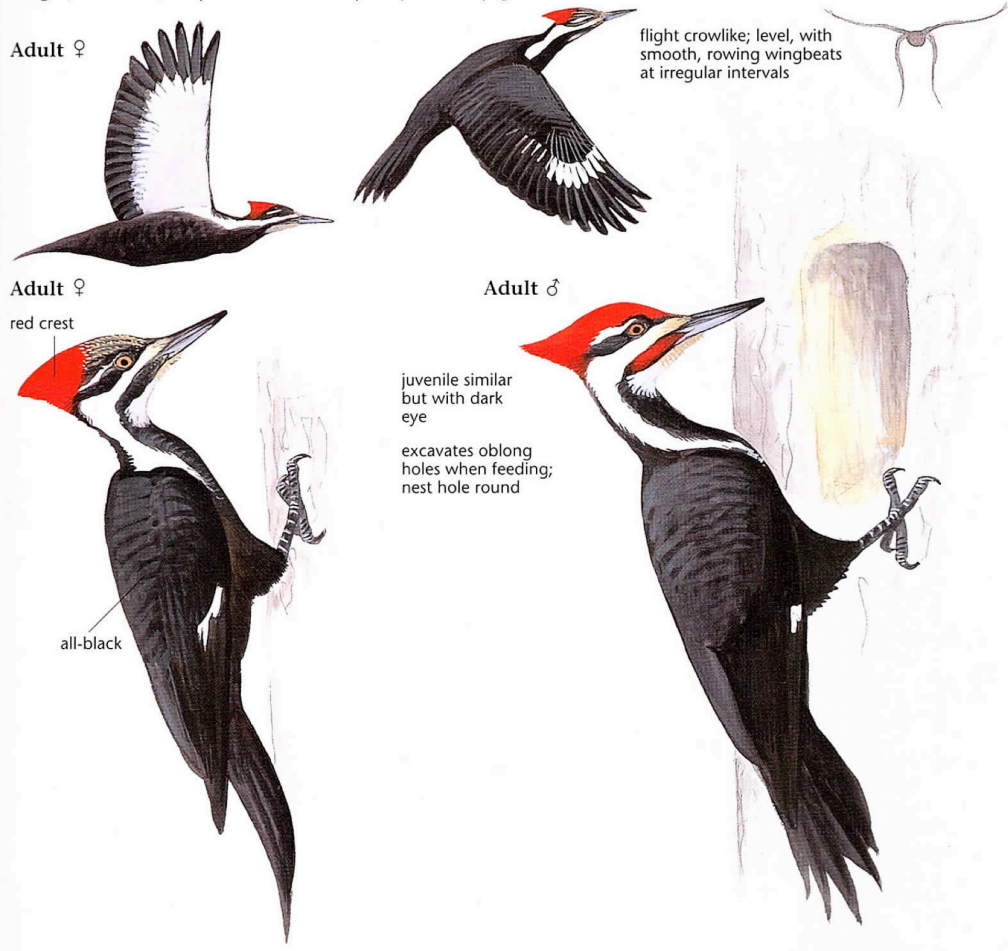
Our largest woodpecker, this spectacular crow-size species is found in mature forests, where it searches for its favorite food—carpenter ants—by excavating large rectangular holes.

**Pileated Woodpecker**

*Dryocopus pileatus*

L 16.5" ws 29" wt 10 oz (290 g) ♂>♀

Long-necked, broad-winged, and long-tailed, with prominent crest. Unmistakable, although crows with white in wings (occasional) may cause momentary confusion in flight.



**Voice:** Contact call single, loud, deep, resonant *wek* or *kuk* notes, often given in flight, with higher-pitched calls on landing; often a slow series of *wek* notes; like flickers but slower, with irregular rhythm and deeper, wilder sound. Main territorial call higher-pitched *kuk kuk keekeekekekekekekeekuk kuk*. Drum slow, powerful, accelerating and trailing off at end; short or up to three seconds long with slight variations in tempo and intensity throughout, only one or two per minute.

