

Hello, this is Diane Urbani de la Paz with What's Out There, ways to connect with art and culture while staying close to home, for the week going forward from December 25, 2020.

I recently finished reading two picture books created by a young local author: *Autom and the Classroom Anxiety Animals*, and *Autom and the Separation Anxiety Storm*. Taylor Mermel of Marrowstone Island is the writer and artist who made these books for children coping with anxiety. They have glorious color illustrations and the right amount of text. And they deliver useful ideas: take big belly breaths. Ask adults for help. Practice thinking about your happy place. Both books feature a variety of cool kids, along with a gender-neutral puppet named AuTOM. That's A-U-T-O-M, short for autonomous, the way each person can soothe him or herself, in a stressful situation – autonomously. Taylor Mermel's books are available at Abracadabra and Imprint Books in Port Townsend and at Marrowstone Vineyards, where she works. Her website is AuTOMbooks.com.

And whether you are a fan of the Nutcracker ballet or not, I invite you to visit Debbie Allen's Hot Chocolate Nutcracker on Netflix. Instead of showing a full performance of the Tchaikovsky Nutcracker, this film is all about the role that dancing and art can play in a young person's life, and about how Debbie Allen runs a tight – and exuberant – ship, to stage a production of a different color. In it, you get to know some of the young men and women whose lives are transformed by Allen's dance school in Los Angeles. So, of all the Christmas fare out there, this one in my view is more than worth its hour and 20 minutes.

For the past many moons now I've been exploring the takeout dining landscape in East Jefferson County. And I keep finding new, old places with interesting food. This week it was Khu Larb Thai in downtown Port Townsend. We're talking crispy duck for my carnivorous companion, and a mango and tofu dish from the wok for me. There was also golden rice and brown rice. Everything came to us curbside, in generous portions. The sauces were just the right balance of sweet and sour. The tofu and the duck were tender. And for a person like me who prefers mild Thai food, all of this was superb. Thank you, Khu Larb Thai, which by the way is open Christmas Day. Thank you also to all of the restaurants I've visited this year for carryout lunches and dinners. You make the town a tasty place.

And there you have it, the final What's Out There for 2020. I'm Diane Urbani de la Paz, thanking you for listening to KPTZ.