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DIVERSIONS

Road Trip to Onancock

A Hallmark Movie Kind of Town

by FAYERUZ REGAN

JOKE ALL YOU WANT ABOUT the quality of Hallmark movies, but here's a little secret: Fans know these films aren't great. Rather, they watch for the comfort and escapism that emanates from the small towns and communities these films are set in.

Who wouldn't want a simpler life, the way the characters in these films do? They happily walk down a Main Street of sorts, waving to the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker before opening their flower shop. How quaint. Notice these films never feature our uglier reality of sprawling suburbs, drive-thru lines, and crowded Wal-Mart parking lots. But do Hallmark movie towns actually exist?

The answer is yes, and it's in Onancock, Virginia. Founded in 1608 as a harbor town, it's nestled on the Eastern Shore. The proprietor of the Spinning Wheel Bed and Breakfast is the embodiment of a Hallmark movie character. Mr. Nolan cooks breakfast every morning for his guests in his historical home. Of course he has a dog. His band plays Celtic Irish music in local pubs, and he sometimes helps out at the local theatre. My friend and I told him that his life resembles a Hallmark movie. He smiled and said, "I get that all the time."

ONANCOCK: GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN

En route, you'll cross the majestic Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Enjoy those views! Leave in the morning in order to stop by Cape Charles for lunch, which is just past the bridge. Enjoy window shopping on Mason Avenue, a walkable neighborhood with restaurants and galleries.

Eat: Coastal Baking Co. is set in a quaint Cape Cod, with outdoor seating. They serve up inventive mile-high sandwiches, home-baked desserts, and espresso drinks, which can give you a lift for the last leg of your Onancock road trip.

Shop: Drizzles is a specialty shop selling gourmet oils and vinegars. Basil oil and truffle oil are mainstays in my kitchen, but they take it a step further. They sell a garlic butter black truffle oil, and the

prices were a steal.

ONANCOCK: THE BEST OF THE BEST

Driving into Onancock, you'll love the stately historical homes off the main road, Market Street, some of which offer tours. Water is all around you, and when you pull into town, you'll see a lot of culture for such a small town – population 1,200. There's a local theatre, a movie theatre, restaurants and specialty shops.

Where to stay: You guessed it – The Spinning Wheel Bed and Breakfast. Due to the ridiculous rate surges on Airbnb, Mr. Nolan doesn't use the platform. He keeps his rates honest and relies on reputation to bring folks to his website. Opt for the cozy rooms on the 3rd floor, with pitched ceilings. Breakfast is served in the dining room, filled with Titanic memorabilia. Built in 1890, it's filled with antiques, rocking chairs on the front porch, a TV room, and a sweet pup to keep you company.

Where to eat: Mallard's on the Wharf has the freshest seafood in town, and is famous for their crabcakes. Depending on your seat, dinner may include a sunset over the water, and live music. The waiting area is a historical post office, and under the glass cases are shipping ledgers from the 1800s, old letters, and relics from Virginia's earliest days.

Where to shop: The Corner Bakery Cafe is so famous for their doughnuts, that travelers from as far as New York stop by for a box on their way through town. Many road-trippers use this route along the Eastern seaboard to avoid 95 – and they all seem to know about these doughnuts. Get there early! The treats are known to sell out fast.

What to do: Hit up the North Street Playhouse to see a local play. In October, we got pulled in there by costumed actors to participate in free Halloween-themed fun and games. We left with handfuls of candy! They are a lively group. If it's closed during your stay, take in a film at Roseland Theatre a few doors down. They play art house and international films too!

Visit: While in Onancock, we drove to nearby Assateague Island to look for the flamingoes that had been blown off



Onancock.

course by Hurricane Idalia. They had become local celebrities! Alas, no sighting, but we saw a few wild horses, and that's no small thing.

If you want to feel immersed in a real-life Hallmark movie, now you know where to go. Happy trails! 🐾

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Killing the Administrative State

by JACK R JOHNSON

KILLING OFF BIG GOVERNMENT has been a mantra on the right since Ronald Reagan quipped, “Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem.” Usually, the right’s effort at killing off big government involves reducing tax revenues, but a case currently before the US Supreme Court funded by the infamous Charles Koch is different in a particularly dangerous way. It doesn’t want to starve the beast so much as pull it apart toe by toe, limb by limb. How? By dismantling the Federal government’s regulatory power, the so-called administrative state, one regulatory decision at a time. The impact of such a legal decision might be felt on everything in our lives, from a woman’s right to choose, to the quality of the air we breathe.

In 1984, the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) was trying to get the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to enforce pollution controls at industrial facilities under the Clean Air Act. The agency under rabid anti-regulation advocate Anne Gorsuch was more inclined toward industry-friendly deregulation than decreasing pollution. Citing statutory ambiguity, Reagan’s EPA offered an interpretation that was—no surprise—much more to the liking of Chevron. The court ultimately ruled in favor of the agency. It gave President Ronald Reagan’s EPA greater latitude to interpret the intent of the Clean Air Act, a decision which became known in legal circles as the Chevron doctrine or Chevron deference, deferring to the opinion of the Federal administrative regulatory body as they would likely have more technical expertise in interpreting ambiguous language. In a 1989 law review article, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia praised Chevron, saying it “more accurately reflects the reality of government, and thus more adequately suits its needs.”

There’s some truth to that. In its

relatively brief life span, the so called Chevron deference has been cited in 11,760 judicial decisions and 2,130 administrative decisions, and it continues to accumulate judicial citations at the rate of about 1000 per year.

The case currently before the Supreme Court, *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* could potentially remove that authority. According to the NRDC, the case pits the owners of a New England fishing company against a federal agency, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Magnuson-Stevens Act sets catch limits to help prevent overfishing and requires fishing boats to have a government-appointed inspector onboard to monitor compliance. Fishing companies incur the cost of these monitors—in *Loper Bright’s* case, about \$700 a day—but the company has argued that NMFS has no authority to force it to do so. A district court disagreed, reasoning that Congress left that question open for the agency to decide. Applying Chevron, the court deferred to NMFS’s choice that the boat owner should pay. A federal appeals court affirmed this decision. The plaintiffs, assisted by lawyers on the payroll of the Koch brother’s Americans for Prosperity, then appealed to the Supreme Court, which in May announced that it would be taking up the case.

It’s interesting to note that former President Donald Trump — with the backing of the Federalist Society — filled federal courts with conservative judges who are vocal critics of the Chevron deference. And one of Trump’s Supreme Court picks, Justice Neil Gorsuch, has called on his colleagues to stamp out the doctrine once and for all. Neil Gorsuch, of course, is the son of Anne Gorsuch, who was head of the EPA when the Chevron case was decided—in her agency’s favor.

Back in the day, Anne Gorsuch cut a defiant figure in early 1980s Wash-



ington as she slashed air and water quality regulations. She fought with environmentalists, was held in contempt by Congress and eventually resigned under pressure from the Ronald Reagan White House that had championed her. Her memoir was, appropriately entitled: “Are You Tough Enough?” Her son Neil Gorsuch, a Supreme Court justice since 2017, apparently possesses that same anti-regulatory zeal. It’s a small, incestuous world at the top, even at the Supreme Court.

Gorsuch and other like-minded judges have said that overturning Chevron would force administrative agencies to regulate in ways that are more clearly within the bounds of what Congress — the branch of government most closely tied to the voters — has authorized them to do. But Chevron’s proponents have pointed back to the positions of the doctrine’s early supporters — like the late conservative Justice Antonin Scalia — that deference protects expert agencies from the whims of non-elected judges serving lifetime appointments. After all, *Chevron v. NRDC*, the originating decision was considered a victory for Chevron at the time.

Renée Landers, a law professor at Suffolk University asked this simple question, “Why is it better for [federal judges] to be deciding complex issues of regulatory policy instead of the agency to which Congress has

delegated much of the power?”

Landers pointed to a recent ruling by a judge in Texas that blocked access to abortion pills, despite years of Food and Drug Administration approval and research, as one example of the dangers of shifting power from agencies to the courts at the federal level.

“We’re going to have random judges — or one judge in a federal district court in Texas — exercising the control,” said Landers. In fact, Kacsmaryk, the federal judge in Texas who suspended the use of the abortion pill, could eventually play a big role in stopping the Biden administration’s efforts to tackle climate change.

Given the conservative makeup of our current judiciary, vacating the Chevron doctrine could affect everything from a woman’s right to choose, to worker protections, safe food, and clean water across multiple states. Ultimately, it could impact our ability to handle climate change and maintain a habitable planet: something we might want a technical expert to decide rather than a politically connected judge. 🗳️

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John Shinholser Recovery and Discovery

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN, originally printed in 2001

John Shinholser, who co-founded The McShin Foundation with his spouse, Carol McDaid, back in 2004, recently retired as president and senior peer of the foundation he was instrumental in establishing. This cover story first appeared in NORTH of the JAMES three years before The McShin Foundation was born.

THERE MUST BE PAINT IN his veins and arteries, rich oils thinned by turpentine, pumping through his system. He's a big man, thick-fingered, dressed in khakis and a white knit shirt. John Shinholser grew up off Skipwith Road and from the earliest days his grandfather, Melvin Meyer of Tacoma Park, Maryland, was a strong influence. His grandfather was a painter of the old school. He mixed lead, tinted his own paints.

When he was just 15 years old, John Shinholser went to work as a painter for his brother David, who had just established himself as a painting contractor. That first day on the job was not John's best. "We were painting a house, and my brother was bitching about the way I had the ladder set up and I told him, 'Look, I got it under control,'" John remembers. "And right about that time the whole bucket spilled. It was a mess. That was in 1974, and that was the first and last time I ever spilt a bucket of paint, until a few weeks ago."

After graduating from Tucker High School at age 17, John got his own contractor's license. He learned to hang wallpaper at the United States School of Professional Paper Hangers in Rutland, Vermont, so he would have work even through the winters. Bit by bit, he was perfecting his skills, gaining a reputation as a fine painter, but he was getting restless.

For several years he worked with a crew that traveled throughout the southeast and southwest, wallpapering and painting hotels. "We were a band of gypsy painters and paper hangers and all we did was go around the country doing one hotel after another," says John. "It was good money, it was steady, you were always traveling. We were doing everything from Hyatt Regencys to

Days Inns. Colorado, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Florida. I was traveling, making good money and I was a party animal. I was on a first name basis with everyone in every whorehouse in the South. It was a way of life."

That way of life included using many different drugs from pot to magic mushrooms, from acid to coke. And liquor and beer. "I got into a little drinking problem back then," he says. "I was drinking about a fifth a day. I was living hard."

And then something happened. John was living in Aurora, Colorado. His crew had been working a job in Denver and he was about to be evicted from his apartment. He'd pissed away almost all his money. In his wallet there was only one ten dollar bill. It was late in the afternoon, the sun was dropping in the sky, and he was faced with a dilemma. He could either use the ten for booze or food.

He strolled through a nearby park that had a large pond. He noticed ducks paddling on the water, waddling on the shoreline. He saw the back porches of the houses that lined the park, overlooking the pond. He saw a dog chained to a post and sneaked onto the back porch and headed for the dog food bowl. He scooped some of the food out of the bowl with his hand and headed to the pond.

"I started feeding the ducks dog food," he says. He holds out his hand, palm up, in illustration. "They'd come up to my hand and eat. One duck and then another." And as one duck billed at the food in his palm, John grabbed its neck and snapped it like a twig. He took the duck back to his apartment then went to the liquor store for a fifth of bourbon. "So I ate and drank good," he says. "Of course the next morning I was spitting

out feathers."

When he woke, plucking a feather from his mouth, his head ached and he felt a profound emptiness. And he was fl at broke. John left the house a little after five in the morning and started up the main drag through Aurora. The cars that traveled along the road still had their lights on and the morning air was crisp. He stood on a corner and eyed a poster that said: "It's not just a job, it's an adventure." He looked at the trim, well-groomed man on the poster, the blunt prow of an aircraft carrier in the background. He considered how he looked and then he crossed the street and approached the recruiting station.

"In a split second, I made up my mind," he says. "I thought, screw it, I'll join the Navy and maybe it'll straighten me out with this drinking stuff." At that hour though the only recruiting station open was the Marines. "So they made me a grunt," says John.

After boot camp in San Diego, he heard about a field radio operator position in Hawaii. "All I saw when I heard about that job was, Hawaii," he says. "I was thinking about Hawaiian reefer and hula dancers." The reality was that John was trained to carry radios on the front line of defense. During his four years in the Corps was deployed to Iran, on the eve of the American hostage release. The ship he was aboard was poised in the Straits of Hormuz. "We were actually locked and loaded, prepared to attack Iran when they released the hostages," he remembers. "We were gung-ho, we were ready to kill, and we were disappointed when we found out we weren't going to go ashore."

Throughout his career as a Marine, John also painted. "I painted tanks and Jeeps and cannons, even the captain's mess on the last ship I was on," says John. "They loved me, I was a poster

Marine."

But there were some problems. John had the habit of drinking too much on payday, getting into bar room brawls, landing in trouble. "So in 1982, after about my fifth time in trouble for beating people up or getting beaten up by them, the Marine Corps sent me to rehab on base," says John. "My life changed completely. That's when I stopped drinking and doing drugs." He tucks a small plug of tobacco next to his gums and his mouth begins working over the cud.

Shortly after he completed the program, John's stint was up. His superiors wanted him to sign on again, and the offer was tempting. John could have gone on to embassy duty. He could have become a drill instructor, become a career Marine. But John had other plans. "I wanted to come home to Richmond and become a successful contractor," he says.

Which is what he did. He worked hard, completely sober for the first time in years, and within six months had two trucks and five painters. A couple years later he had seven trucks and 25 painters during peak seasons.

Things were falling into place. He got married, built a house off Skipwith Road, not far from the home where he grew up. He began accumulating rental properties, five in all, that served as safe havens for people with alcohol and drug abuse problems. "I was real involved in recovery, I became passionate about it," he says. "I had five halfway houses that housed sixty guys. I funded it all out of my business."

When asked why he funded the halfway houses, John says, "To keep what I've got, I've got to give it away. I've also probably trained half the painting contractors in Richmond. I helped them get started and now they're out there

competing with me and it's made a better contractor out of me. It's a principle I practice in all my affairs."

As his business grew, everything was suddenly within John's reach. He and his wife had a daughter named Mary Page. His taxes were paid a year in advance. He owned five properties, had about \$35,000 in blue chip stocks, owned a new car, had \$10,000 in his checking account, \$15,000 in accounts receivables, and in that year his company had grossed \$800,000. "I mean, I was sitting on the top of the world," he says. "For the first time in my life, I was enjoying the fruits of my labor."

It couldn't get any better. And then it did. He was selected as president of the local Painting and Decorator Contractors Association, a crowning honor. He was preparing to go to the PDCA meeting that evening for induction as the new president. He shaved carefully, put on a suit and tie. He checked on his daughter and waited for his wife to come home from work.

When his wife arrived she said four words that sent a ripple of panic through him. "We have to talk," she told him. "Look," she said, "I'm unhappy and I think the marriage is the problem and I'm going to leave and we just have to deal with it." Almost immediately, a numbness washed over him.

"I was traumatized," John tells me. "I felt like I had arrived. I knew what my mission on earth was and I was doing it, and then, all of a sudden, the plug was pulled."

He wandered around in a daze, crying, something he hadn't done since he was a boy. He was in shock, unable to focus, consumed by emotional pain. His wife moved out within the week, taking their daughter with her. At that time, John Shinholser wasn't sure how he was going to make it.

But there were lifelines. People John knew from 12-step programs over the years came to his aid in a way he would never have guessed. "This was the first time in my life when I literally had a hundred people surround me and carry me through this period where I couldn't carry myself," says John Shinholser. "It was a very remarkable situation. I mean every day I had someone in my presence reassuring me that I was going to get through this. And I did."



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THEY SAT AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE AS THE HOUSE SETTLED

into slumber, its systems quietly shutting down for the night, until there was just the soft purr of the refrigerator, barely audible. This was Bryan Harvey's house in Woodland Heights just blocks away from the house Mike Lucas called home. The two sat across the table from Coby Batty, and these three men, linked by a love of music, had been good friends most of their lives. Each one of them began singing a song. When Mike finished his, Bryan would sing another, and then hand it off to Coby. As the night grew older, they began singing drinking songs, and Mike Lucas sang a song he had written called "Daddy Messed Up." When he finished it, Bryan looked over at him and said: "Mike, that's the best song you have ever written."

Mike Lucas is sitting across from me at another kitchen table. He wears his signature cowboy hat, his acoustic guitar cradled in his lap, his left hand gripping its neck. "I must have been in a sad mood the day I wrote that song," he says. "Most of my other stuff is pretty upbeat."

Bryan Harvey (Requiem aeternam dona eum) was in the very first real band that Mike joined when he was just seventeen. "Our first band was called Honcho, named after Bryan Harvey's dog," Mike remembers. "That would have been the first band I was in that played gigs for money." They would play at junior high school proms and teen dances at a local pool. Bruce Terrell and Bryan Harvey played lead guitar, with Mike on rhythm and Stephen McCarthy on bass. And their drummer was Eddie Rowe who was somewhat older than his band mates and had played with a number of other Richmond groups. "He was the veteran," says Mike. "And all of us sang."

Mike's love for music began many years before that though. When he was just five years old he would walk up to the piano in his parents' house and gently tap the keys picking, out tunes like "Yankee Doodle." His mother saw this and enrolled her young son in piano lessons. But those lessons did not take. Where Mike had a natural ear for music, he could not read a lick of it because, as it turned out, he had dyslexia, which no one at the time recognized even though this learning disorder had been identified in 1877 by a German profes-

sor of medicine who called it word blindness.

Something similar would occur when he was in elementary school. He joined the school band to play trumpet and though he could not read the music, he was able to follow a girl trumpeter who stood next to him. He played well, learning by ear. Then, in fifth grade he was tested on his ability to read music.

"They stood us up in front of everyone with a piece of music that we had never played," Mike tells me. "Of course I couldn't read it. And they were like, 'Oh, you can't read music, you're out of the band.' If I heard it, I could play it. They didn't know about dyslexia back then and they just said I was lazy."

This would not in any way discourage Mike's pursuit of his love for music. And a Christmas gift to his sister, who was thirteen at the time, changed everything for him.

"My sister got a Barclay guitar," says Mike. "Everyone was getting guitars back then with The Beatles and The Stones being so popular." But his sister didn't have any interest in the instrument, and it ended up discarded in her closet.

"I was rooting around in her room and found the guitar and started playing with it and I took to liking it," Mike says. "I was nine or ten,

and I would sit on the curb in front of the house playing it."

One day, as Mike strummed that guitar from his perch on the curb, Bruce Terrell, a neighbor, happened to be walking by, so he stopped and sat next to his friend, and they would hand the guitar back and forth, but neither of them had any clue how to really play it, let alone tune it.

So what they did was tune three of the strings in the same note, and compose a surf song. "We wrote a song before we could even tune a guitar," says Mike. "And that's what started everything; I was hooked. Bruce Terrell, one of my oldest friends, was instrumental in all my first bands."

After these preteens wrote that surf song, Bruce went off to get proper guitar lessons, and Mike's mother handed him two dollars and told him to knock on the door of a neighborhood musician and ask for a lesson. "He was a guy named Tommy Martin who played in a band," Mike recalls. "He had taught me chords, and how to play 'Gloria' and 'House of the Rising Sun, and a Monkees' song called 'I'm Not Your Stepping Stone.' You had to take off your shoes to go into his house. And he had his Sears Silver-tone guitar and a microphone and a stand. This guy was a total pro to me. He might as well have been one

of the Beatles."

When a teen dance was held at Chestnut Oaks Recreation Pool, Mike, too young to be admitted to the dance, would watch through the galvanized steel links and his eyes widened as Tommy Martin and his band performed. All the band members wore orange slacks and blue alligator shirts, and they had all the right equipment. "It was dazzling," Mike says. "I was enthralled, and that's when I decided this is what I want to do."

Shortly after Mike came of age, a number of his friends took him down to The Warehouse (a now defunct restaurant/bar) in Shockoe Slip and bought him shot after shot in celebration. Jimmy Morgan, who had played with the Good Humor Band, was playing there, and during a break, an alcohol-fueled Mike Lucas approached the stage area.

"Hey man if I were to bring a little amp and play guitar behind you would you be okay with that?" Mike asked Jimmy. "Because I really like what you do."

Jimmy nodded. "Sure. Come on down."

And so Mike, who was employed laying carpet, came to The Warehouse with a small Yamaha amp and his Fender Stratocaster. Jimmy

would invite him to do a couple of solos.

"Well he liked it, and I liked it," says Mike. "The next thing I knew after sitting in a couple nights with him, he says, 'You want to join up?'. And I couldn't say yes fast enough. That was my first full-time music gig."

The pair continued as duo for a couple of months and then were joined by Bucky Baxter on pedal steel, and not long thereafter, Stephen McCarthy added his bass talent, and Hank Miller played drums, and The Pep Boys were born. They became a traditional, straight country band, performing covers by Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson.

"It was the real stuff and I'd never played it before and it was like a light going off over my head," Mike says. "It was like, 'Oh, this is where everything came from.' But I had to play it before I warmed up to it."

During that period, Mike and his band mates went down to Nashville to record two songs, and none other than Ricky Skaggs sang background vocals for them. "This was a huge thing to us," says Mike. "That was the greatest thing that could have happened to a bunch of young guys."

The Pep Boys stayed together for a little over a year, and then Jimmy headed out to California. Right after the announcement, as the band was breaking down their equipment at The Warehouse, Mike wore a hangdog expression as he was loading his equipment into his 1968 Pontiac Tempest. And then he heard a motorcycle that pulled next to him, idling. It was Greg Wetzel.

"Hey Mike, what you doing, man?" he asked.

"I'm kind of bummed," Mike said. "I just lost my gig."

With a wide grin on his face, Greg Wetzel pointed at him and said, "You're with US now." And then Greg pulled off.

"I didn't go twenty-four hours without a gig," says Mike. "It was insane. That's how I got in The

Good Humor Band."

For the first couple months Mike served as sound engineer and roadie, but then began playing and singing, and the band had gigs up and down the East Coast. They recorded well over an album's worth of material, and two years later the band broke up.

At around that time Mike got a job as a carpenter's helper and his good friend Clark Robinson taught him how to be a finished carpenter. "I was glad to learn the trade," says Mike. "It's come in mighty handy over the years."

Mike always continued with his music. For a time he worked lounges six nights a week, fifty-two weeks a year. "Redneck bars where people come to dance, pair off, and then leave," he says. "It was a band called CW Rhythm. I learned to play a lot of genres of music. And nothing gets you better on your instrument than playing it every night."

Next he was with Ray Pittman's band called The King Pins. They played from Ocean City, Maryland to Key West. Throughout the course of his life, Mike has played with at least fifteen different bands, including The Honky Tonk Experience and Big Posse.

For six years he worked full-time as a carpenter at the VMFA, and then he started getting a lot of studio work. "I was playing on commercials at In Your Ear and a place called RainMaker," Mike says. "They would hire me for the sessions. And people like Janet Martin and Susan Greenbaum had me come in and play pedal steel parts on songs here and there. Sometimes I did a couple sessions a day, and so I left my job at the museum."

Things were going really well. In late 1998 he did a long gig with the Theatre of Virginia for their production of a play based on the life of Patsy Cline. "They hired local musicians because they wanted a real band," Mike tells me. He would also play with Bruce Hornsby on a soundtrack for the Kevin Costner movie, Tin Cup. "All this great stuff was happening and I was think-



ing I've got it made. This is my life now."

Then in 2000 with the release of the Coen brothers' film, 'Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?' it seemed everyone wanted acoustic music as sound beds for their commercials. And Mike was busier than ever with studio work.

But in the wink of an eye that all changed. "That wheel turned and then it went from acoustic instruments to extreme stuff and they could do that on the keyboards," Mike says. "I went from several sessions a month to one every two months. Now it's once a year."

But one Sunday every month Mike Lucas performs at Northside Grille, and the shows are enchanting.

"I do what I like," Mike says. "Hard country, George Jones, Chuck Berry, Dave Edmunds. I'm kind of all over the map. I'll do anything I think I can do well. The bottom line is, if I'm gonna sing a song in front of people I have to love it."

He lists some of his favorite songs: "Handle with Care, Mercury Blues, Last Dance with Mary Jane, Tennessee Whiskey, Midnight Rider, The Way. These songs hit me like a ton of bricks. Songs that affect me like that, they're the ones I'm gonna play. But it can be from any genre. I love More Than I Can Do, Slip Away, She's a Woman, Wichita


Lineman. If it suits how I play and sing and I feel like I can pull it off, I'll do it."

A singer-songwriter himself, Mike Lucas is particularly partial to other singer-songwriters. "It doesn't get any better than Merle Haggard," he says. "And guys like Steve Earle and Jim Lauderdale are probably my two favorite singer-songwriters right now."

"Music for me was the one thing I was pretty good at naturally," he says of his craft and chosen medium. "Music was a place for me to go where I fit in. It's a magical thing. Lyrics of a song can touch you in a way that nothing else can. Or there can be a classical piece by Bach with a melody so beautiful that it can make you tear up. I don't know if anybody understands it."

And then singer-songwriter Mike Lucas tells me what his oldest friend, a man he has known since he was four years old, once said.

"Coby Batty said it really well one time. We were talking about music and all the different genres and styles, and his explanation for it was, 'it's all beating on a rock with a stick.'"

Mike pauses for a moment, then says. "Music is a magic thing and I don't understand how it works. I just know that it does." 

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN
cover photo by REBECCA D'ANGELO

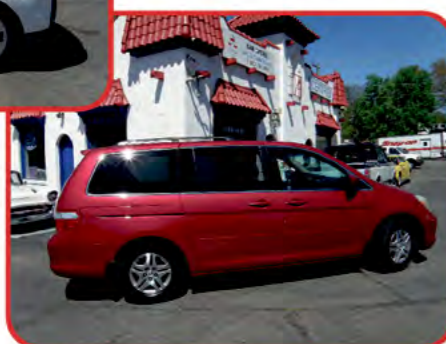


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ART

The Art of David Rohrer A Sense of Place

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



"Corner Fence (34th & Beattie)" 24" x 36"

WITH BRUSH AND oils, David Rohrer captures place in an extraordinary way. It is in the slant of

light, the play of colors, and the characters, which are houses or other structures—and occasionally human forms, that he is able, with his brushstrokes, to make you feel as if you are there. And these are often places we in Richmond have all seen a hundred times over and they are captured in our memory and sparked back into reality when we see one depicted on canvas. A familiar intersection, a certain house, an urban corridor lined with shops, a street that dead ends at another street.

Through March, David's most recent work, a group of paintings called "Vanishing Point," is on display at Eric Schindler Gallery.

David tells me that in his undergraduate years in painting and printmaking at VCU, his work centered on human figures. "And the figure always becomes the most important thing in the picture by nature," he says.

But David decided to move in a different direction. "I kind of wanted to push the figure out," he says. "So there will still be figures in my paintings, but they're usually small."

What becomes the focus then are the inanimate. "I let the buildings be the people and tell the story and have the personality," David tells me.

Many of the paintings in this recent collection are of familiar street scenes and urban landscapes on Southside in Woodland Heights and the Reedy Creek area. There's one that features his home, another his business—WPA Bakery on Semmes Avenue.

"That one's called 'Sunrise at the Bakery,'" says David Rohrer. "That's right in front of my bakery, and that's what I see every morning." ☞

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All's Well That Ends Well

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

ELIZABETH DUDLEY Cann Kambourian, an amateur historian, who, through her diligent research, discovered the site of a Black cemetery in Shockoe Bottom, has lived in Richmond her entire life, all but two of those years in Bellevue, on the city's Northside.

For the past year and half or so, Elizabeth, has suffered a number of health issues. "I've been very, very sick with heart troubles and things like that," she tells me. "I just got a pacemaker on my birthday. I was in the hospital this past week because the incision was infected."

Add to that, Elizabeth is awaiting a medical procedure, and is extremely limited in her mobility. "I'm waiting to have hip surgery, I can walk

a little," she says. "Anything further than twenty or thirty feet, I have to use a wheelchair. So I don't go out of my house at all."

Several years ago, Elizabeth had the privacy fence on the rear of her yard moved forward twenty feet, creating a parking space entirely on her property. She parked her 2006 Dodge Ram pickup truck there, where it remained as her health declined.

Shortly before this past Christmas a code enforcement inspector with the City left his card on Elizabeth's front door. A neighbor had apparently contacted the City about the pickup truck which did not have a current inspection sticker.

In early January, after receiving a notice from the City, Elizabeth contacted the code enforcement



Elizabeth Dudley Cann Kambourian's 2006 Dodge Ram liberated and heading over to Axselle Auto Service on Lakeside Avenue.

inspector, and left a detailed message for him. "I said, 'It's not inoperable, I have it back there to keep it off the street, and it's on my property,'" she remembers. "It has current license plates paid two years in advance. It is insured. I told him there was a mistake and I never heard back from him." Elizabeth assumed there were no problems.

Because she is limited in her mobility, Elizabeth could not see the pickup truck from her rear window because of the privacy fence, and assumed it was still parked where she had left it. Late in January, one of her relatives told her the pickup truck was gone.

When I explain what happened to Third District Councilwoman Ann-Frances Lambert, she says: "And they towed the car without her knowing about it."

Which seems to be exactly what happened. Since the time of the towing, according to Elizabeth's daughter, Melissa Kambourian, those storage fees amounted to almost \$2,000.

As if things couldn't get worse, Elizabeth recently received two letters from DMV notifying her that the towing company had put a mechanics lien on her Dodge Ram and were planning to sell it at pub-

lic auction this month.

"Here's the thing, Charles," says Councilwoman Lambert. "We need to investigate this thoroughly. I've got to check with the city attorney to see what can be done."

Within hours Councilwoman Lambert had begun a very extensive investigation into the matter. According to her liaison Kiya Stokes the following city officials were on the case: City Attorney Laura Drewry, Chief Administrative Officer Lincoln Saunders, Public Works Director Bobby Vincent, Deputy Director of Parking & Mobility Lynne Lancaster, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Robert Steidel, and Deputy Director of Operations Torrence Robinson.

Thanks to these efforts Elizabeth now has her truck back, and the towing company generously rescinded all towing and storage fees that had totaled \$1900. Axselle Auto Service of Lakeside towed the truck back to their lot and inspected the vehicle.

"Everything I do in the Third District is to benefit my constituents," says Councilwoman Lambert. "I am happy this issue is resolved, and I will always be there for Team Northside." 🇺🇸

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MUSIC

**Monthly Music Lineup
At Northside Grille**

HERE'S A LIST OF bands and events hosted by Northside's leading music venue—Northside Grille. MARDI GRAS NIGHTS February 9 through February 13, featuring Say Less Brass Band, The Bopcats, Willie Williams, and Boulevardiers; February 14, Ramona Martinez; February 15, Squeeze the Squid; February 17, NRG Krysys; February 18 Clay Schools; February 21, Jonathan Meadows; February 22, Party Favors; February 23, Tarrant; February 24, Brandon Wayne and his Lonesome Drifters; February 28, Ramona Martinez; and February 29, Lucky Stiffs.

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**CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF
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Several concerts in CMSCVA's 19th season explore the passing of time. This free concert from 2 to 3 pm on February 17, combines poems and readings with the first half of Peter Tchaikovsky's romantic suite of short pieces titled "The Seasons." Experience the calendar journey from January to June in words and the intimate, tuneful music of one of history's most emotional musicians.

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**THE HONEY DEWDROPS
AT SHADY GROVE**

The Honey Dewdrops – Laura Wortman and Kagey Parrish – will perform at the Shady Grove Coffeehouse at 8 pm February 17. This American duo has long felt the push-and-pull between their original roots in the Appalachian Mountains and their current home in urban Baltimore. You'll hear it in their harmony-soaked songs and the mastery of their instruments' acoustic tones, but also in their songwriting, which reflects the hard realities of today. For more information call (804) 323-4288 or visit www.shadygrovecoffeehouse.com.

Shady Grove Coffee House
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**ELIZABETH MORGAN PIANO
CONCERT AT MODLIN CENTER**

At 3 pm February 25 pianist Dr. Elizabeth Morgan will perform works by American women composers from the nineteenth century to today. Between pieces she will discuss the composers' lives and aesthetics and timely considerations related to gender and classical music programming. Composers featured on this program include Latina, Black, Asian American, and Native American women, and feature many living composers and one newly commissioned work.

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BOOK REVIEW

Doing the Right Damn Thing

by FRAN WITHROW

AS A CHILD, WILL Harris delighted in exploring the woods near his farm, and “knew how everything was and how it all fit together.” His family farmed

the land in Bluffton, Georgia, for decades, and Harris grew up to become the fourth generation owner of what is now called White Oak Pastures.

The farm originally raised livestock, butchered and sold by the first Harris, James, who established the farm in 1866. James Harris sold straight to his customers, so he had a huge incentive to offer top quality food, as did most farmers of that era.

But by the time Will Harris’ dad ran the farm after the Depression, industrial methods of production were beginning to predominate. How could farmers resist the new influx of chemical fertilizers which made their jobs so much easier? And with the advent of subsidized crops, it made sense for farmers to focus on just one crop or type of livestock.

It was just a short hop from there to factory farming, with technology taking the lead in growing the biggest cows, the plumpest hens, and the fastest growing pigs possible. Feeding them cheap corn rather than allowing them to graze naturally and confining them on feedlots meant farmers’ lives were not only easier but less financially risky.

This is how Will Harris raised his cattle for decades. But one day he had an epiphany. He remembered his childhood, wandering among the trees and streams and watching the natural cycles of nature unfold. Then he looked at his farm, with its constant stream of fertilizers, growth of just one type of crop, and cattle that heavily grazed the same acres repeatedly, and realized the land was dying.

Harris decided to make a big change. He became a regenerative farmer,

focusing on humanely raised meat and natural ways of working the land without resorting to artificial fertilizers and chemicals. He now focuses on a holistic, non-linear approach to raising food.

“A Bold Return to Giving a Damn” is Harris’ account of how he not only made his farm a kinder, healthier place for his animals and the land, but also did much to revive the city of Bluffton. Harris says Bluffton is one of the poorest places in Georgia, but because his farm now employs almost two hundred people, this previously empty rural area is finding new life.

The story of how Harris determinedly stuck to his plan, despite the hard work, financial risk, and difficulty getting the word out about meat that is healthier (but more expensive), is fascinating reading. Harris’ writing style is conversational, sprinkled with the expletives one might anticipate from a cowboy. But his message is a crucial one: by supporting regenerative farmers and buying local, we can help save the land which factory farming depletes of nutrients, and raise meat in humane ways that actually reduce climate change.

This book is a thoughtful treatise on the rise of factory farming and how some farmers are bravely bucking the trend. A helpful resource section is included on how to find food from regenerative farmers. Whether you eat meat or not, this is a worthwhile read.

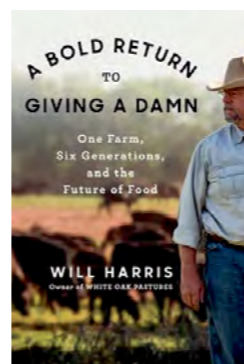
“A Bold Return to Giving a Damn: One Farm, Six Generations, and the Future of Food”

By Will Harris

Viking Press

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