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Rodin at VMFA Evolution Of A Genius

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

DON'T KNOW IF RAYMOND

Carver ever saw Rodin's Monument to Balzac, but I'm guessing he must have caught a glimpse of it somewhere along the line. In his short and crisp poem honoring Balzac, Carver describes the French author coming off a thirty-hour stint of writing. He's wearing a loose fitting gown that clings to the sweat of his thighs and, after staring out the window at the people below him on the boulevards, he "lumbers to the watercloset and, flinging open his gown, trains a great stream of piss into the early nineteenth century chamberpot."

There's a raw beauty in that. Release, after hours of endurance, while, at the same time, shattering the sensibilities of a nineteenth century chamberpot. Balzac "lumbers", doesn't stride, and later, returning to his papers and pots of ink so he can pen one last scene before he makes his way to bed, Balzac's brain "sizzles".

Carver's understanding of Balzac is embodied in Rodin's three-dimensional version of the French writer from the headless torso gripping its erection, to the robed memorial of the writer playing a game of pocket pool beneath the tent of his dressing gown.

Rodin embraced every atom of a subject's being and by imbuing his representations of them with this intimate knowledge he re-invented sculpture, and it would never be the same again.

The Balzac Memorial was first commissioned in 1891 by the Société des Gens de Lettres. Time line on the project was eighteen months. But Balzac was a slow and methodical sculptor; he was not about to be rushed.

Rodin obsessed over Balzac, read all his works, uncovered every known document about the author's life and pored over each one looking for clues about this bigger than life French novelist. Rather than solely use images of Balzac that were captured on canvas or in a daguerreotype for reference, Rodin travelled to the writer's birthplace in the French province of Touraine and made sketches of the physiognomies of living natives in that region. He ultimately found a male model in Touraine who fit the bill—a stout man named Estager, who was affectionately known as the Conductor of Tours.



Above: Rodin's Balzac.

Right: Torso study for the final piece.

Rodin made a nude study of Balzac as young and athletic, made another of the author as middle-aged and pot-bellied. He created massive heads of the author, detailed and precise. He sculpted his hand and his feet as separate entities that might be employed in other sculptures at a later date.

When he came down to the memorial, Rodin decided to feature Balzac in his dressing gown. He located Balzac's tailor and had him recreate the Carthusian robe the author was known to wear while writing in his study. He dipped the gown in plaster to create the cloth as it would be creased in real life as it hung from Balzac's formidable torso. The gown draped Balzac but could not completely hide what his hands were up to.

Almost eight years after the Société des Gens de Lettres first commissioned the monument, Rodin, who'd missed his deadline by almost six years, unveiled a full-size plaster model of the work, and the Société was not pleased with the results. They were looking for something a little more conventional. What they wanted was more of a portrait, a precise image of the writer, a statue. Instead, Rodin gave them the contradictions of genius, the duality of the human soul. He pierced the veil of truth when what they wanted was stylized representation, something



they could fathom, something that would not keep them up nights. What began as a fairly realistic face became an almost expressionistic image, thick and blurred, with a gaping mouth that roared against the norm.

Almost immediately after that initial unveiling of the plaster model, critics rose up in arms. They equated the sculpture with an erect phallus, called it a "colossal fetus" and a "heap of plaster".

Based on this criticism, the Société rejected the sculpture and Rodin moved it to his home in Meudon where it remained for many years. It wasn't until 1939, twenty-two years after Rodin's death, that the Memorial to Balzac was cast in bronze and erected on the Boulevard du Montparnasse at the intersection with Boulevard Raspail in Paris, where it remains to this day.

First seen in Montreal under a different name, "Rodin: Evolution of a Genius", now on display at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, invites the public to peek at the creative pro-

cess of the sculptor, part the robe, so to speak, look into the workshop of Rodin's soul for hints of his own evolution as an artist.

In one of the rooms of the exhibit, a multitude of small works are displayed under large overhead lights that echo an artist's workshop. Here you can inspect each composite piece that would, in many cases, become part of a larger work.

Rodin seemed to understand that art, if it is truly revelatory, must concede the fragmentation of human beings. They are not one thing or another. But rather a disparate combination of many things. Rodin would combine and then re-combine these elements into different sculptures. Some would stand alone, some would be enlarged like the giant foot of *The Thinker* mounted on a pedestal.

In his lifetime, Rodin collected thousands of artifacts and he combined these with his sculptures, fusing them into the body of the work. There's a great example of this in a hand-sized

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ART

plaster nude sitting on the edge an alabaster bowl. She is not mounted on it, she is part of it, an outgrowth. In another work, the same female body emerges from a piece of ancient black pottery as if from a pupal casing.

The Gates of Hell, a pair of bronze doors for a decorative arts museum in Paris that was never built, was commissioned in 1880, and it consumed Rodin on and off for almost forty years. He was always adding to it, or taking away from it, or recreating a portion of it. Over two hundred human figures would eventually appear in this piece. Its initial inspiration was "The Inferno" and the figure overseeing the creation, which later became Rodin's most iconic sculpture, The Thinker, is said to be Dante himself.

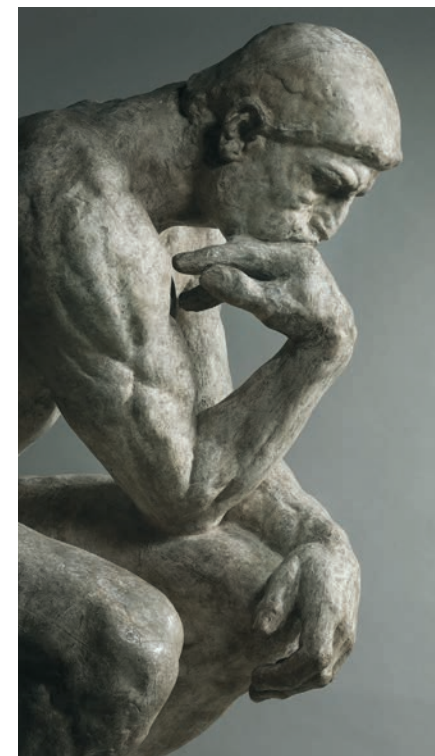
Out of those same doors would emerge a multitude of independent sculptures, among them The Kiss, Fleeting Love, The Old Courtesan and The Three Shades.

Like the Memorial to Balzac, The Gates of Hell would not be cast in bronze during Rodin's lifetime. And like the Balzac monument, Rodin kept the plaster model of these doors at his studio in Meudon, just outside Paris. The first bronze cast was made in 1925 by the founder of the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia.

No Rodin exhibition would be complete without The Burghers of Calais—a sculpture that describes like no other in the world the real face of sacrifice which is seen not only in the faces of these men but in their hands and feet and torsos. Three of the six burghers are featured in the Evolution of a Genius, each standing independently.

Quick back story: England's King Edward III had laid siege to the French port of Calais and King Philip VI of France ordered the city to hold out. Like the Siege of Vicksburg during the American Civil War, starvation finally won the day. Then King Edward III offered to spare Calais' inhabitants if six of its most prominent leaders would surrender themselves, wearing nooses and toting the keys to the gated city. Six of the wealthiest burghers volunteered. Though their lives were ultimately spared, these men gave themselves over fully expecting execution.

In 1884, more than five hundred years after this event occurred, Rodin was commissioned by Calais to create a monument to these six men. Again, Rodin's sculpture was received with criticism. What many people wanted was another standard representation of heroism, romantic, with pyramidal arrangement and allegorical figures.



Top: Rodin's Burghers of Calais.

Bottom left: The Kiss.

Bottom right: The Thinker.

Rodin's burghers exhibit grief and turmoil and agony—honest portrayals of true self-sacrifice. Rodin had wanted the monument to rest at street level so passersby would engage these larger-than-life burghers. Instead the city fathers erected the monument on a massive pedestal in a public park. Years later, after Rodin's death, the Burghers of Calais was finally moved to a much lower base where pedestrians could encounter the men who would have given their lives for their countrymen.

Not long after viewing the exhibit I read this piece written by Rodin himself regarding his Memorial to Balzac. "There was only one way to evoke my subject," he wrote. "I had to show Balzac in his study, breathless, hair in disorder, eyes lost in a dream; a

genius, who in his little room reconstructs a whole society, piece by piece, in order to bring it to tumultuous life, who never rests, turns night into day, drives himself."

And this sculptor of genius and compassion also wrote: "What a sorry time we live in! Some believe in progress because there are telephones, steamships, etc.; but all that is only an improvement of the arm, the leg, the eye, the ear. Who shall improve the soul?"

So not much has really changed. In our age, telephones become iPhones and steamships become "smart" ships. We may have improved the extensions of our ears and legs, arms and eyes, but the human soul still languishes. Still cries out in a mighty roar. **■**



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BOOK REVIEW

Learning To Read Autism

by FRAN WITHROW

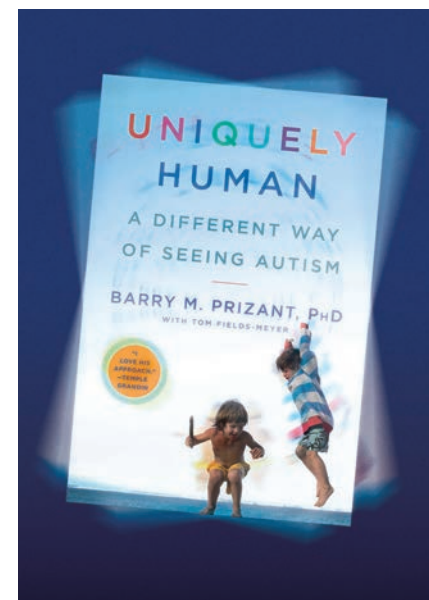
AS A TEACHER OF young children, I naturally gravitate toward books that will help me in my work, so I was immediately drawn to Barry Prizant's excellent book, "Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism." I sat down to read just the first few pages and was so entranced that before I knew it I was half way through.

Prizant's book is divided into two sections: the first helps the reader understand autism, and the second gives guidance for living with an individual on the autistic spectrum. The book is engaging, readable, and positive in outlook. It should be of great comfort to families, especially those whose children have recently been diagnosed.

Filled with stories from his decades of work with children (and adults) with autism, Prizant deftly guides the reader in understanding what it is like to be autistic. Rather than a list of behaviors, autism should be defined as difficulty "staying well regulated emotionally and physiologically;" in other words, dysregulation. While everyone feels dysregulated occasionally, the person with autism is less able to deal with this because of his neurology. The world seems frightening, and the individual copes through what seems to be atypical behaviors.

In the past, therapy has focused strictly on eliminating those behaviors. However, Prizant explains that people with autism are trying to control their world and their bodies to counteract their fear, so therapeutic goals should focus on helping individuals feel safe. "The opposite of anxiety isn't calm, it's trust," he quotes one adult with Asperger's (a form of autism) as saying.

Rather than focusing on simply wiping out negative behaviors, we should focus on the "why." Why is this child acting this way? Is he trying to calm himself? Is she trying to communicate something, even if she can't talk? Is he engaging with others in some way? If we ask "why," respecting the person for who he is and where he is, we can often support him in a more produc-



tive, compassionate way. We can also use those things she is obsessive about (her "enthusiasms," as he delightfully refers to them) to build skills and strengthen communication.

I found the second section of the book equally insightful. Prizant reminds parents that development and growth are lifelong processes, so parents should not be discouraged if their child does not follow a particular timeline for skills acquisition. He discusses how parents can work with support personnel, including difficult ones, and offers many suggestions for helping parents advocate for their child.

His goal for people with autism is that they find happiness and a sense of self rather than academic success. Find the child's strengths rather than focusing on what she can't do, and academics will follow more naturally. He acknowledges there are many challenges and hard work inherent in living with individuals with autism. However, he maintains that with appropriate support, an understanding of the child, and a community that offers choices and means of empowerment, individuals with autism and their families can still enjoy lives of meaning and satisfaction. **NR**

Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism, by Barry M. Prizant, PhD, 272 pages, Simon and Schuster, \$26.00

WINTER 2016

*Just got this post card
from "Mother Nature"*



She said tell everyone in the RVA hey and not to worry that Spring is just around the corner. She says it a tough time of year having to deal with cranky "Old Man Winter" and such but she is hoping to be in town by the 20th of March. She'll be sending little signs of her arrival so be on the lookout.

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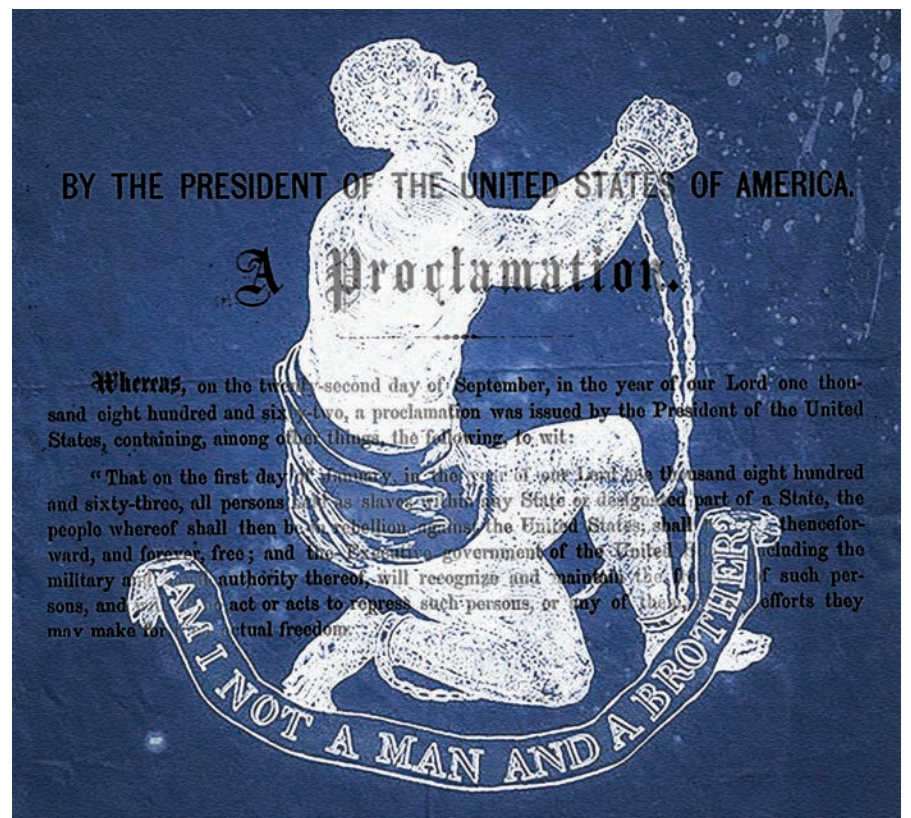
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HIDDEN HISTORIES

Independence Day On New Year's Day

by JACK R. JOHNSON



NEW YEAR'S DAY is always special. Old habits are given up, new resolutions are borne, but one News Year's Day, in 1863 stands out for millions of Americans.

On that day, nearly 150 years ago, slavery was formally declared illegal by Abraham Lincoln. At least in those states where the Union might gain an advantage by such a declaration.

Actually, the Emancipation Proclamation, as the declaration was called, consisted of two separate executive orders issued over the course of a year. The first one, issued September 22, 1862, declared the freedom of all slaves in any state of the Confederate States of America that did not return to Union control by January 1, 1863.

The second order, issued January 1, 1863, named the specific states where it applied.

Many critics pounced on the fact that the Proclamation only gave Lincoln the legal basis to free the slaves in the areas of the South that were still in rebellion. It did not, for example, free

any slaves of the border states (Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia), or any southern state already under Union control.

However, it did allow for the enrollment of freed slaves into the United States military. During the war nearly 200,000 blacks joined the Union Army and most of them ex-slaves, the Confederacy stubbornly refused to accept slaves in their own militaries. Thus the proclamation worked to squeeze the confederate states both economically--through the loss of slave labor-- and militarily.

As the Union armies conquered the Confederate states, thousands of slaves were freed each day until nearly all were freed by July 1865. This meant an ever increasing loss of labor that the confederate states could not use for their war cause and the loss of potential soldiers who confederates refused to use in their own military. Approximately 4 million slaves were freed in total by the end of the war.

Slavery was formally ended in every state of the Union with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment on December 18, 1865.

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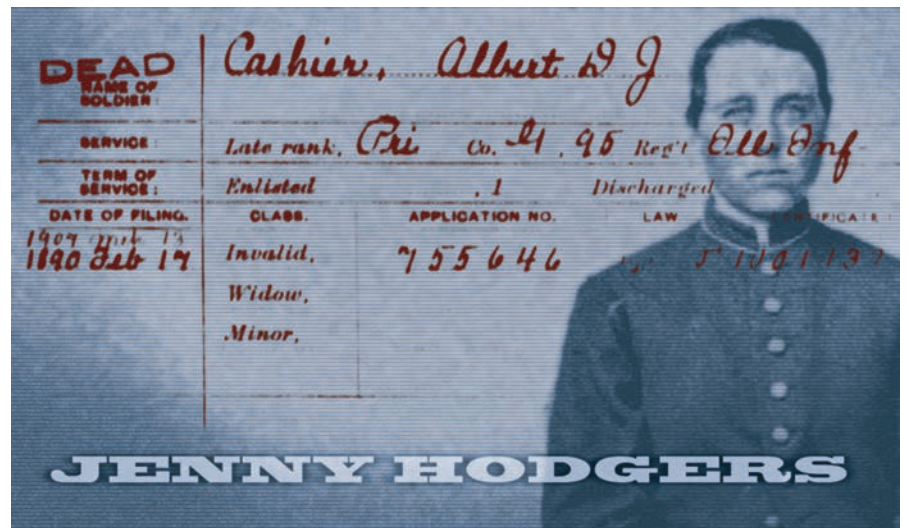


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RAINBOW MINUTES

by BRIAN BURNS and JUDD PROCTOR

Civil War Soldier, Jennie Hodgers



JENNIE HODGERS WAS born in Ireland in 1844 and years later came to America as a stowaway.

Answering Presidents Lincoln's call for soldiers, she dressed in men's clothes and passed the cursory physical, since no undressing was required. She assumed the name Albert Cashier. Assigned to Company G of the 95th Illinois Infantry, Jennie fought in forty battles over

a three-year period. Once, she was captured by Rebels, but seized a guard's gun and fled back to the Union camp.

Living nearly her entire adult life as a man, Jennie collected a veteran's pension, and voted in the presidential elections before women had the right to vote.

While institutionalized, her gender was discovered, and she was forced to dress as a woman for two years until her death in 1915.

Pulitzer Prize Winner, Samuel Barber, Strikes a Chord

Samuel Barber will long be remembered for his enduring contribution to cultural life. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1910 to a musical family, and began composing at age seven. At fourteen, he entered the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied voice, piano and composition.

While there, he met the young Italian composer Carlos Menotti, with whom he formed a lifelong personal and professional relationship. They

traveled throughout Europe together in the 1930s.

In 1958, Barber received his first Pulitzer Prize for his opera, "Vanessa," in which Menotti wrote the libretto. In 1962, Barber's "Piano Concerto" garnered him his second Pulitzer Prize.

He will long be remembered for his intensely lyrical "Adagio for Strings," which has become one of the most recognizable classical compositions in history.

Get A Hobby

In the 1940s and 50s, when homosexuality was still criminalized, gay people had to find creative ways to communicate with each other. A witch-hunt was underway, not only by the police, but by ministers, psychologists, and even family members.

Underground gay publications started popping up, using code words to spread information. Some were used simply for correspondence, since letters by law

couldn't even mention homosexuality.

One publication, called The Hobby Directory, was distributed to hobby stores everywhere. To the untrained eye, it seemed simply a means of connecting fellow hobbyists. An ad might say, "seeking other devotees of gardening and the opera," or it may hint at desire, saying, "looking for fellow mountain climbers, especially dapper types with a sparkle in their eyes." **NJ**

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South Philly

HOME OF THE BRAVE

PHILADELPHIA, CITY OF MY BIRTH, home to my immigrant forbears. When cityscapes appear in my dreams they are always of Philly, though I have known and lived in other cities. But this was the city I first learned at age nine on an old Schwinn bike that took me everywhere, down cobbled alleys and through deserted warehouse districts, ungentrified and mean, along a working riverfront, into the depths of Skid Row and Chinatown, Society Hill, and the bustle of Market Street where men would shovel ice on fish stacked like ears of corn on countertops along the sidewalk.



Cradle of Liberty. City of Brotherly Love. Birthplace of America. Quaker City. Haven for religious, racial, and gender equality, thanks to the Quaker beliefs of its founder Willy Penn, the genius behind the grid-pattern of the city's streets. Each lot in that first part of the city included a backyard for gardens to encourage sustainability and to retain a sense of the country while

living in a city that was growing fast.

Philly is also called The City of Neighborhoods. And there are scores of them. Neighborhoods within neighborhoods.

South Philly is bounded by South Street on the north and the city's two

quarters and their confluence in every other direction. Within its confines are at least thirty distinct neighborhoods, including Bella Vista, Devil's Pocket, Dickinson Narrows, East Passyunk Crossing, Grays Ferry, the Italian Market, Little Saigon, Packer Park, Passyunk Square, Point Breeze, Pennsport and Queen Village.

Those last two neighborhoods were where my grandparents lived and raised their children. The McGuigan-Wisniewska contingent on Catharine Street in Queen Village; the Cosgrove-Andrzejczyk side of the family on Moyamensing Avenue in Pennsport.

This area of Philly had a large industrial base and attracted immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Poland, Germany, as well as African-American migrants from the South. Many Eastern European Jews also settled in South Philly, especially in Queen Village. It was a true microcosm of the country at large—a melting pot, a cultural tossed salad. It became one of the most vibrant and diverse multicultural communities in America.

Probably for that very reason South Philly became the heart and soul of one of the most unusual annual events that takes place in the United States—the Mummer's Parade.

Each year, a day or two before the new year begins, my kids and I make the trip up north to Philly like salmon returning to their native stream. This year we have Catherine's friend, Amanda, in tow. We stay with family in Cherry Hill and Haddonfield just across the Delaware from Philly where my aunt and uncle, and cousins and their families live.

This year we stay with my cousin Kosh and her husband Antonis and their three children, the Three Brothers, as my son calls them—Gregoris, Antonis and Andreas. They are the Papadourakis family and their hospitality—Greek, Irish, Polish—is second to none. They host lunches and dinners and feed thir-

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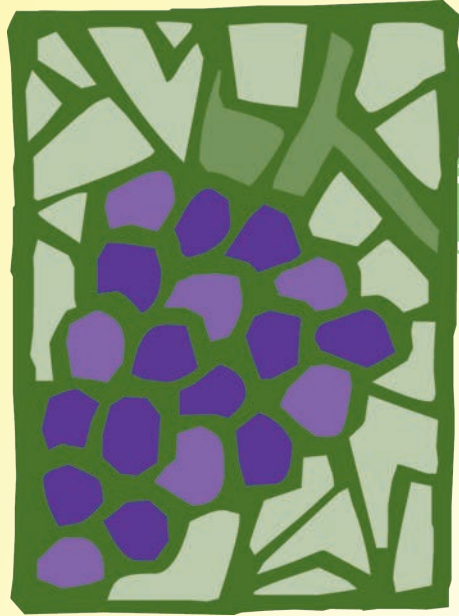
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ty or more people, most of whom are family members. My cousins, McGuigans all—David, Francis and Paul—and their wives and children. Along with the Cosgroves—my uncle Mart and his wife Joyce and his children and their spouses and children.

Early in the morning, the day after our arrival, before the sun is full up, I hike over to Kings Highway, the main drag in Haddonfield. It's one of the oldest townships in New Jersey and much of the architecture reflects the colonial period. It is like Williamsburg, but people have always lived and worked here; it is not the Rockefeller façade of a town with colonial actors playing at life.

Like Philly, Haddonfield was founded by a Quaker, Elizabeth Haddon. Among the historic buildings on Kings Highway is the Indian King Tavern. In 1777, the New Jersey Assembly, with the British close on their heels, met in session at the tavern and there declared New Jersey a state, no longer a colony of the Crown.

As always when I am here, I walk down Kings Highway several miles to the neighboring village of Haddon Heights, which is where Steven Spielberg spent his childhood. Kings Highway is liberally peppered with massive homes, turn-of-the-last-century and earlier, each surrounded by gardens that are botanical essays.

On the way back to my cousin's house, the sun now up and warming, I buy a cup of coffee at a locally owned shop and sit on a bench in an alley off Kings Highway next to a large bronze sculpture of a dinosaur which wears a wreath of winter greens around its neck. Called Hadrosaurus, its remains were found in a marl pit a few miles away. That was back in the 1830s and it was first time in history that an entire dinosaur skeleton was unearthed. As I sit there, coffee in hand, looking at Hadrosaurus, I wonder if the young Steven Spielberg had known about this dinosaur as a child, that led to dreams of Jurassic parks.

That night we all attend First Night in Haddonfield. It's a great New Year's Eve celebration, family friendly, with lots of live music, food and drink and fireworks at nine in the evening so young kids can ring in the new year.

On New Year's Day, we head across the Ben Franklin Bridge to Philly. We look for parking for the better part of an hour and then find one a good twelve blocks away from the parade route, down around 2nd Street.

As we make our way out to Broad Street, just off South, the crowds along the curb are seven and eight people



deep, so we walk further south to find a parting in this curtain of humanity. As we nuzzle up to the curb, a string band, dressed as great white sharks, is making its way toward Center City. People break from the audience and dance a mummer's strut as the band begins playing "O Dem Golden Slippers". Written more than a hundred years ago by James A. Bland, an African-American, it's the anthem of the Mummers Parade, which is as quintessentially South Philly as Ben Franklin or Willy Penn, a Philly cheese steak or Italian water ice.

It's unlike any other parade in America. It's the Mardi Gras of the Eastern Seaboard and celebrates ethnicity more than anything else. In its current permutation it came into existence about a hundred and fifteen years ago. That's what one of the mummies tells me, a guy named Steve Cooper, who's been playing sax with one of South Philly's preeminent string bands most of his life.

"I've been with the Fralinger for forty years," he says. "Our string band was founded on December 18 1914. Our clubhouse is back on Third and Mifflin."

He tells me what he knows of this tradition. "Philadelphia is very much a melting pot of cultures and immigrants came here and brought their cultures from the Old World and it's just reveling around the holidays," says

Steve. "It started in 1901."

My Uncle David had told me a couple years back that this was so. "I think it was originally formed down at what we called the Neck where all the sports arenas are today," he said. "It was a German tradition and people dressed up and shot guns in the air. That's why to this day they still call mummies New Year's shooters. It was a way of welcoming in the New Year."

That's certainly the origin of the Mummers Parade, but Philadelphia mummery probably started as early as the late 17th century. Among Philly's earliest settlers were the Swedes who celebrated Second Day Christmas on December 26. They extended this celebration to include New Year's Day and began masquerading and parading down the streets of Philadelphia. In a band, they would travel door to door and sing songs and perform dances seeking the reward of food and strong drink.

Even during the Revolutionary War, mumming persisted. During his presidency, George Washington invited mummies into the presidential mansion in Philadelphia every New Year's Day during his two terms in office.

Those early mummies in Philly created a clownish character called Cooney Cracker, who would later become Uncle Sam. By the first decade of the 19th century, the number of mum-

mers who took to the streets on New Year's Day had become so prodigious that a local law was passed, prohibiting merrymaking on New Year's Day, a Cromwellian edict if ever there was one. But the mummies persisted and forty years later the law, ineffectual as Prohibition, was repealed.

Within a decade after the Civil War, an annual parade was held down the streets of Queen Village. It was a small affair, but it led to the formation of some of the early Fancy Dress and Comic Clubs along Two Street. It wasn't until the turn of the century, more than twenty years later, that the City of Philadelphia began to sponsor the Mummers Parade.

In the very early years there were a couple hundred parade participants. Today, 15,000 make up the Mummers Parade of South Philly.

After the parade we make our way down to Fourth and Bainbridge to Famous Deli. No deli in New York compares with this place. They make their own kosher pickles, cure their own corned beef; their rye breads are to die for, their potato pancakes crunch just right. They call their sandwiches over-stuffed and this may be an exaggeration. In reality, their sandwiches explode with corned beef, piled five inches high (and this is no exaggeration). One sandwich can easily feed two very hungry people. Service is prompt, servers pleasant and quick, dressed in black and white. Along the walls of the long room on the restaurant's north side there is a sort of gallery of all the famous people who have eaten at Famous Deli over its many years of operation. Heads of state, presidents, movie stars, teen idols, comedians. And in among all these signed glossy black-and-white photos is one of an Irish cop standing in front of a Jewish grocery probably right around the corner on 4th Street. The cop looks a lot like Spencer Tracy. It's my grandfather, Marty Cosgrove, Marty the cop, who walked a beat in this area of South Philly for many years. He would accompany the owner of the deli—at that time Sammy Auspitz—to the bank every day to make a deposit. And any time any of us—McGuigan or Cosgrove—ever walked in the deli, Sammy or his son would refuse our payment. Sammy and Marty were very close friends, and he would often tell my grandfather that he must be descended from one of the lost tribes.

Guys like Sammy Auspitz convinced my grandfather to move his young family to Moyamensing Avenue. At the time they were first non-Jewish homeowners in the 1900 block of Moyamensing. My mom told me

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her father wanted his children raised around people of the book. He wanted his children to all go to college, which is what happened with all his Jewish friends. And all three of his kids went to college—one became a doctor, one became an artist, and my mother became a professor.

Before her death this past March, my mom had told me that Marty the cop drew his gun only one time in his career and then he fired it up in the air, over the head of a perp. “He didn’t use his gun,” my Mom had said. “Because he knew if he used his gun he would use it to kill and he didn’t want that on his conscience.” My grandfather also saved many African-American youth from a system of injustice that would have ground them to pulp because of their skin color. If a kid stole something, got in a fight, committed some small offense, rather than book him, my grandfather would take him home to his parents and let them handle the discipline. He knew, that once in the system, the kid was doomed for life. Many young black men thanked my grandmother at Marty the cop’s funeral back in the 1970s for his approach to law enforcement. He left the force after twenty-five years because it had become so corrupt. I often think men like my grandfather should have taught police officers everywhere how to act and react in the performance of their duties. Be not Draconian; and

only draw your weapon as a very last resort, and then fire it in the air, if at all possible.

We walk the streets for hours over to Independence Hall, where our nation was born, and down to Elfreth’s Alley, the oldest residential street in America. We walk quickly and cover a lot of ground. We make our way up through the theatre district on Walnut and then back track to South Street through the hipster crowd.

All the while we are taking in the art of building elevations. Every street seems to sport at least one building with a fairly massive mural painted on one of its facades. Some are decorated with mosaic tiles and chips of glass and shards of pottery that tell a story. Philly has more murals than any other city in the country. There are more than three thousand of them citywide. Back in the eighties, the city wisely created the Department of Recreation’s Mural Arts Program. It did two things: beautified fairly dull facades and served as a creative outlet for graffiti artists.

When we return to my cousin Kosh’s house, the family begins to arrive for this New Year’s Day party, and vast quantities of food, mostly Greek, are strewn across tables, enough to feed a sizable army. And wine is poured and beers uncapped, and then people begin talking—current events, politics

and so on. But as the evening settles in we’re suddenly all telling stories.

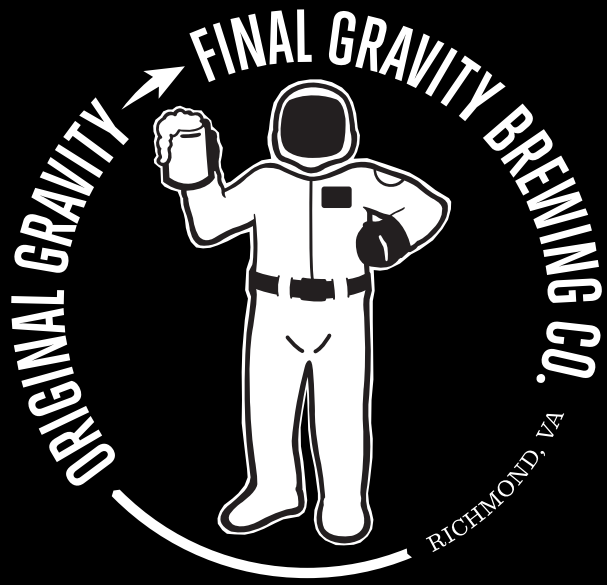
You often hear how great Southerners are at telling stories. But truth is the best story tellers I’ve ever known come from South Philly. I remember nights as a boy in the summer, late, sitting with my grandparents and brother on the warm white marble stoop on Catharine Street, listening to stories. Or other nights on the porch at the Cosgrove’s on Moyamensing Avenue. I could see the glowing orange ember of my grandfather Cosgrove’s cigar bobbing before him in the darkness as he told stories and shared stories with neighbors passing by.

We had heard how my mother’s paternal grandfather, working longshore, was crushed under a palette being lowered from a ship. The riggings were old and should have been replaced, but the owners were thinking about saving money so they let it go and my great grandfather, in his prime, was crushed like an insect under the hard sole of a boot. The corporation that owned the vessel thought more of profit than human life. His wife raised all the children, worked scrubbing office floors, walked many miles to and from work four times a day to save on what they called “car fare”, meaning bus or trolley fare. Her son, Marty the cop, an incredibly bright guy, had to leave grammar school to help his family make ends meet. They literally lived on oatmeal—three times a day—sometimes, but rarely, sweetened with rendered fat.

My Uncle David’s grandmother, born in Poland, raised her two girls by herself; her husband had taken a powder. They were dirt poor, lived hand to mouth as so many of these amazing immigrants did. And these immigrants were loathed by the Nativists, who persist, for God knows what reason, in our culture to this day. Yet it has always been immigrants who have made our country strong, give it, its very backbone.

When I look around at the four successive generations of these McGuigans and Cosgroves and Papadourakis, all of immigrant stock, I am amazed by who they are and what they have accomplished. They are lawyers and doctors, researchers and engineers, Naval officers and young men attending the Academy. They are teachers and actors and writers and painters and sculptors and even an EPA director. They study Arabic and international affairs, history and literature, art and science.

My mother used to say that we all stand on the shoulders of those who preceded us. Those who preceded every one of us all hailed from South Philly. **NJ**



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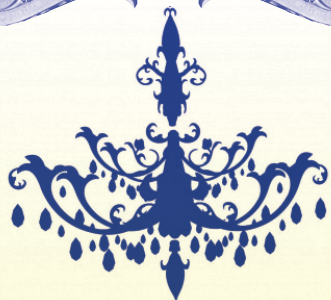
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1781; March 5, 7pm, Tin Pan, 8982 Quioccasin Road, Richmond, Virginia 23229, 804-447-8189; March 11, 7pm and March 13, 2:30 pm, Rock & Roll Jubilee, Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen, 2880 Mountain Road, Glen Allen, VA 23060.

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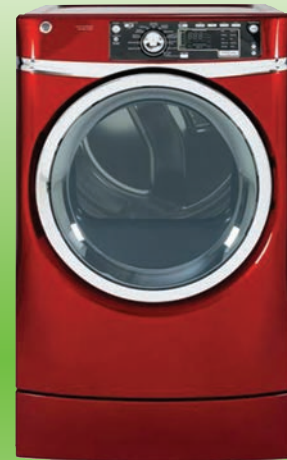
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 Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:30 am-7 pm • Friday 8:30 am- 6 pm • Saturday 8:30 am-4 pm • Sunday: Closed
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