

NORTH OF THE JAMES



BETH *Stanford*

fell head over heels in love with music when she was just a little girl. But self-consciousness would prevent her from pursuing a life on stage. That is, until a couple years back when she began performing with The MelBays. And this past year she had an idea to put together what she called the Women Rock Festival. The response has been overwhelming for this day-long event to be held on March 24 at Hardywood. *continued on page 16*



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The Nature of Real Monuments Words and Silence

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

ON THE DAY after Christmas, St. Stephen's Day, my son Charles and I drove north up 95, followed closely by my daughter, Catherine, and her boyfriend, Tyler, and though we had killed no wren, nor placed its small corpse in a sprig of holly, we honored the feast day by going to my sister Fran's home in Falls Church where most of the family would gather for a night of Southern fare and yuletide spirits.

A ninety-minute drive turned into a five-hour just barely creeping standstill. Our average speed was just eighteen miles an hour. Cross my heart.

But it was well worth it.

Nephews and nieces, brothers and sister, and their spouses, were there. As always I was amazed by the people I'm privileged to call family, by the breadth of their pursuits, professional and otherwise. Among them are doctors and lawyers, teachers and scientific researchers, artists and musicians, interior designers and historians. Two of my nephews are off to college now, and both, just coincidentally, are studying history and philosophy, one at Loyola, the other in Scotland. My nephew Martin, home from the British Isles for the holidays, played my niece's mandolin, strumming with ease any song requested. He has the knack, and an ear for music. My son Charles later played an original song on my sister's grand piano, and sang words that he wrote just a few weeks before, and I was floored by his deft use of language and his profound understanding of what it is to be human. He sang:

"You're screaming, there're tears in eyes that are closed today.

We are devastated, you're not here, and I hope you're breathing tonight."

And the refrain:

"Don't fear, you will be alright.

The sky is clear, and we will never die."

When he finished, there was silence,

and then applause that brought a smile to my son's face.

Late that night, as my daughter and her beau headed south for Richmond (they both had work in the morning), Charles and I drove over to a motel where we would be staying for two nights. They were the cheapest accommodations I could find at a place called the Inn of Rosslyn built right along Route 50, Arlington Boulevard, just a mile from Washington. This was a three-story pink brick building with bleached pink wrought iron rails, all squares and rectangles from the windows to the rooftop, a throwback to the 1960s, but the rooms were clean and warm and there was cable and internet, and the woman from China, who had been the concierge here for fourteen years, was pleasant, giving precise walking directions to Arlington National Cemetery, our destination tomorrow.

I woke early the next morning, at about six, and the temperature was in the lower teens. I got a cup of coffee in the lobby and squirreled away a couple of bagels and two apples, and took them back up to our room where Charles still slept. He rose about nine and, after eating, we left the room, layered in clothing, and walked over to Arlington National Cemetery. That day we would walk a total of twelve miles, but never cross over into Washington.

We had an objective here—to see as many monuments as possible, walking to all of them, even in the bone-chilling cold of the Arctic blast that was settling in, a sort of pilgrimage to broaden our understanding of what makes a great monument, one that unites rather than divides. There's no other city in the world with as many monuments of this order.

From the Inn of Rosslyn we strode briskly down Fairfax Drive and made a right on North Meade Street, passing the US Marine Corps War (Iwo Jima) Memorial and the Netherlands Carillon, skirting Fort Myer, then made a left on North Marshall Drive. To the right of us is an open field that stretches all the way to the horizon, uninterrupted by any development.

We climbed over a low stonewall and were surrounded by thousands of white headstones.

Once inside the cemetery, we walked along the maze of narrow winding roads often venturing off the flat asphalt and onto the frost-crisp blanket of grass, treading carefully in among the white headstones, hundreds of thousands of them scattered across the rolling hills that pour down to the Potomac River.

Each headstone, this time of year, is decorated with a deep green balsam wreath wearing a bright red bow. It's a tradition started in 1992 by Morrill Worcester, president of the Worcester Wreath Company in Harrington, Maine to honor the men and women who have served in our Armed Forces. All of these wreaths are donated, and placed by volunteers.

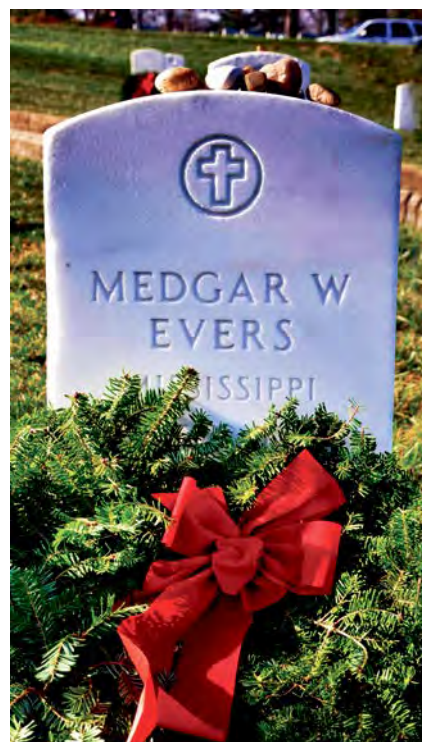
After wandering through the cemetery for a little over an hour, we made our way to a small plot sprinkled with smaller and older headstones, sequestered from the rest. This is the burial site of enslaved African-Americans who had lived in bondage under the former owner of this 1,100-acre estate, George Washington Parke Custis, Confederate General Robert E. Lee's father-in-law. Lee inherited the



plantation when Custis died in 1857, and vacated the site just four years later when the Civil War began. On about the time of President Abe Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, a portion of the estate became what was known as Freedman's Village, a place where recently liberated enslaved people lived and received training, education and medical care to prepare them for lives of freedom.

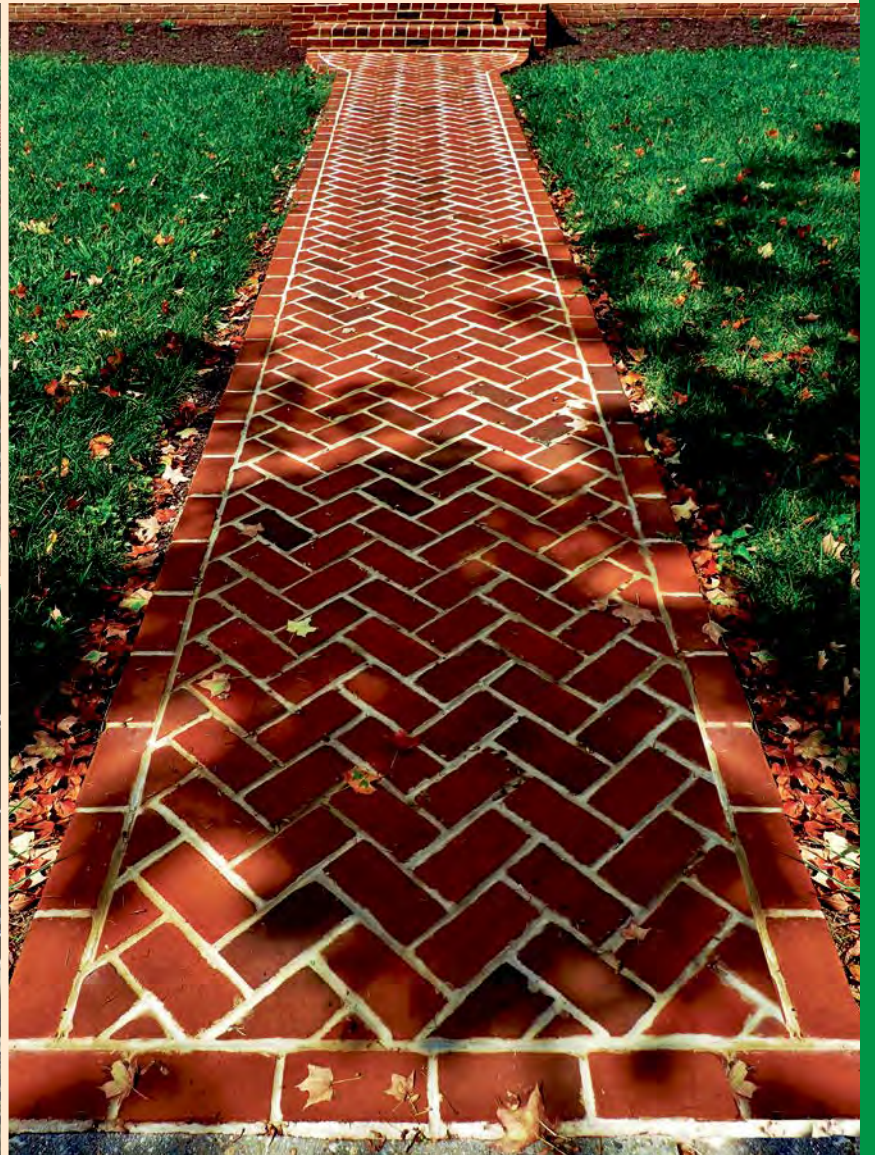
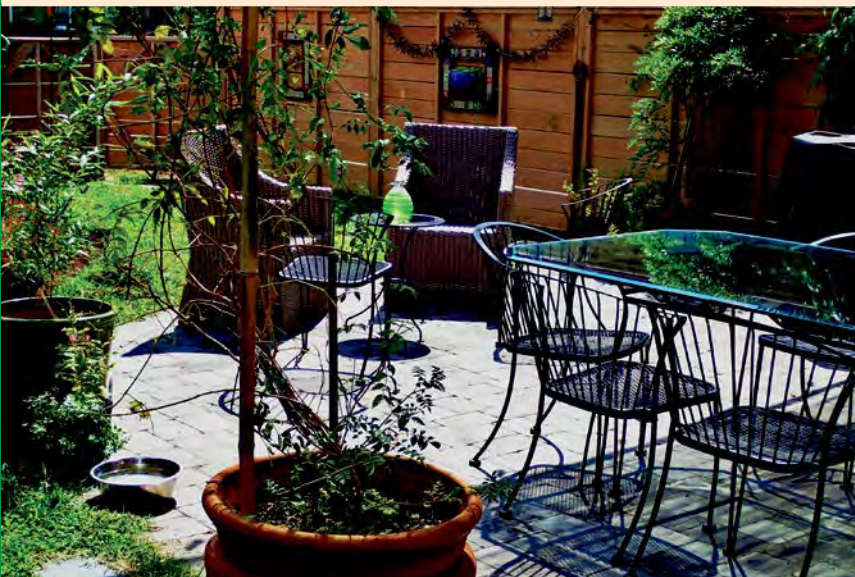
All the while, as we strolled through the cemetery, I was looking for familiar ground. A couple hours later we reached the top of a hill, and looking downward I could see the convergence of two familiar lanes, and we began weaving slowly among the grave-stones, looking for our own names. I found my grandfather's headstone, and Charles found his grandfather's, which are less than fifty yards away from one another, though they were interred thirty years apart.

As we wandered, we literally stumbled on the gravestone of a man who served in the Second World War, and when he returned to Mississippi fought in numerous battles on the home front for Civil Rights. He was ultimately shot to death by a coward who hid behind a cluster of honeysuckle in Jackson, Mississippi. A white supremacist ambushed this American hero, Medgar Evers, who was just 38 years old at the time of his death. After



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FEATURE

I explained to Charles who this man was, we knelt, at my son's bidding, by his graveside, and each placed a small rock on his headstone.

In the late afternoon we found the grave of John F. Kennedy, another veteran of World War II, who, like Medgar Evers, would fight battles on the home front to secure justice, and would ultimately be killed by another coward in another Southern city.

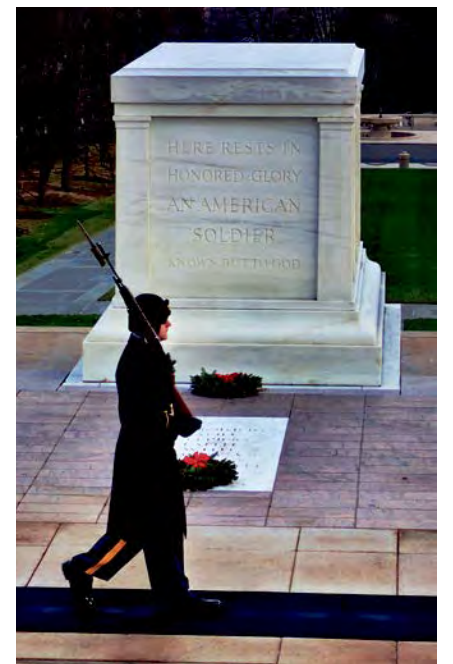
There is no likeness, no gargantuan statue of this American hero, just a fire that burns night and day, a reminder to us that human freedom and dignity are inextinguishable. The words of John F. Kennedy, cut in granite slabs facing the Eternal Flame, ring with undeniable truths. These are quotes of a thoughtful man who was known for his devotion to the Republic, a man whose words continue to inspire even in times of national doubt and divisiveness.

Here are just two of them.

"LET THE WORD GO FORTH FROM THIS TIME AND PLACE TO FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE THAT THE TORCH HAS BEEN PASSED TO A NEW GENERATION OF AMERICANS. LET EVERY NATION KNOW WHETHER IT WISHES US WELL OR ILL THAT WE SHALL PAY ANY PRICE - BEAR ANY BURDEN MEET ANY HARDSHIP - SUPPORT ANY FRIEND OPPOSE ANY FOE TO ASSURE THE SURVIVAL AND THE SUCCESS OF LIBERTY."

"AND SO MY FELLOW AMERICANS ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY. MY FELLOW CITIZENS OF THE WORLD - ASK NOT WHAT AMERICA CAN DO FOR YOU - BUT WHAT TOGETHER WE CAN DO FOR THE FREEDOM OF MAN."

To the left of JFK's burial site, there is a small slab of white marble lying in a bed of grass, behind it a simple white cross. It stands solitary in honor of the former president's younger brother who also died in service to his country, assassinated just five years after a gunman killed his older brother. On the other side of the Eternal Flame, there is a white gravestone like the hundreds of thousands of similar headstones scattered across the rolling hills of this cemetery of heroes. This one honors Joseph Kennedy, JFK's older brother, who also gave his life for his country as a World War II pilot who was shot down by the enemy. Above these burial sites, perfectly aligned with the Eternal Flame, there is a flagpole flying Old Glory, directly in front of Arlington House, formerly the home of a Confederate general. And from this spot, looking across the



Potomac, you can see the monument honoring President Abraham Lincoln, the man who saved the Republic and helped the nation begin the slow path toward redemption from one of its two Original Sins. This juxtaposition is beyond inspiring.

Throughout the afternoon, though the sky was blue and the sun was bright, the temperature continued to drop. We continued on toward the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Braving these frigid temperatures, some eighty people were gathered, bundled against the cold, to watch a sole member of the 3rd US Infantry Regiment, or The Old Guard, keep constant vigil over the graves of men and women lost in battle whose names we'll never know. Another member of The Old Guard would replace this one at the appointed hour. The vigil is kept 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. Besides the wind that sliced through the branches of trees and rustled the last clinging leaves, there was no other sound. Even the clack of the sentry's leather soles was muted by a cushion that runs the length of his watch. Not even a stray cough, or the clearing of a throat. Complete silence. And all eyes were trained hypnotically on the Tomb of the Unknown.

By the time we left, the sunlight was fading fast, and when we got back to the Inn of Rosslyn, it was already dark. We ate at District Taco on Lee Highway in Arlington, and after we ordered, Charles recounted the day, and marveled at the more than 400,000 thousand monuments to men and women we had seen that day. And the words carved into stone. Sometimes just the names and dates of birth and death and service to country. But other times words that transcend the Republic itself and



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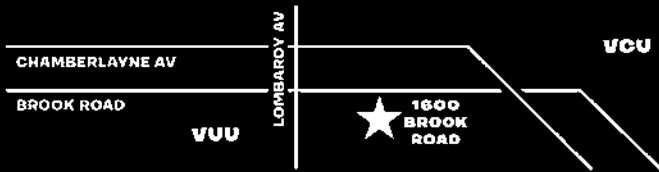
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FEATURE

propel us to become a better people. We talked about the words of JFK and those of his brother, Bobby.

“So monuments are about words?” I asked.

Charles nodded. “But they’re also about no words,” he said. And then he reminded me of the absolute silence at the Tomb of the Unknown.

We both slept soundly that night, the deep slumber at the end of a winter day. In the morning we ate breakfast, and after chatting with the concierge, walked into Washington, D.C., crossing the Potomac on Memorial Bridge. We saw the monuments to Albert Einstein, and took his words with us, particularly these two quotes.

“As long as I have any choice in the matter, I shall live only in a country where civil liberty, tolerance, and equality of all citizens before the law prevail.”

“The right to search for truth implies also a duty; one must not conceal any part of what one has recognized to be true.”

We circled the Tidal Basin, read the words of Abraham Lincoln from his Second Inauguration.

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

And his Gettysburg Address. “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people,

shall not perish from the earth.”

Later in the day, we walked around the Jefferson Memorial and stopped in front of the Southwest Portico to read these words Thomas Jefferson penned for our Declaration of Independence. “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men.*”

And right next to this, an excerpt from a letter Jefferson had written: “*I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times.*”

We spent a full three hours at two other monuments dedicated to more modern Americans, marveling at the beauty of their words. From President Delano Roosevelt:

“Men and nature must work hand in hand. The throwing out of balance of the resources of nature throws out of balance also the lives of men.”

“I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

“We must scrupulously guard the civil rights and civil liberties of all our citizens, whatever their background. We must remember that any oppression, any injustice, any hatred, is a wedge designed to attack our civilization.”

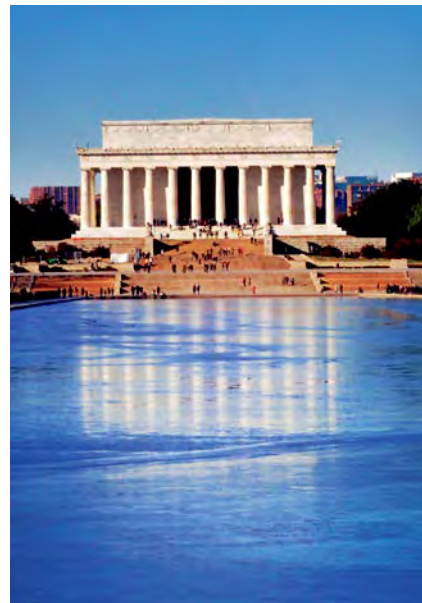
“Unless the peace that follows recognizes that the whole world is one neighborhood and does justice to the whole human race, the germs of another world war will remain as a constant threat to mankind.”

“The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”

And carrying the same torch of equality and universal freedom, the immortal words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness,



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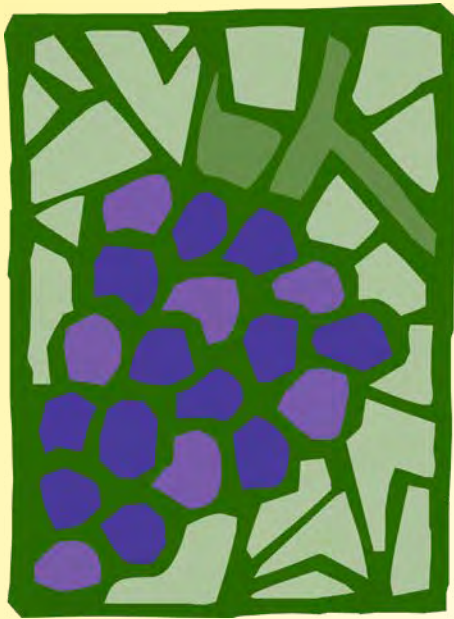
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only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

"I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits."

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of convenience and comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

My son and I feasted on these words for the rest of the day as we roved through the city, then back to Northern Virginia, where we joined a dear friend of mine, Mark O'Brien, for a very late lunch at a Thai restaurant in Falls Church.

We told Mark what we had seen and the words we had read and how we had come to understand that true monuments are not to men, but to ideas that propel humanity forward.

Around the table, as we ate pad thai and drunken noodles, we told stories. Charles recited lyrics he had written. They were pure words, honest words, words that defined the human condition and urged the listener to move forward, not backward.

I quoted these words from Mother Teresa: *"Words lead to deeds, they prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness."*

"That's what monuments are," said Charles. "Words that lead to deeds."

"And that's what your words do, Charles," Mark said.

"You're a monumental young man," I told my son.

The Secret Lives of Bats

by FRAN WITHROW

WELL REMEMBER THE FIRST time a bat got into our house in Ginter Park. My small daughter came into the bedroom where I stood with a towel on my wet hair and calmly gave me the news, whereupon I let out a shriek, dropped to the floor, and sent her to inform her father, who was napping in the next room. The bat followed her, so I scrambled up and quickly shut the door on all three of them.

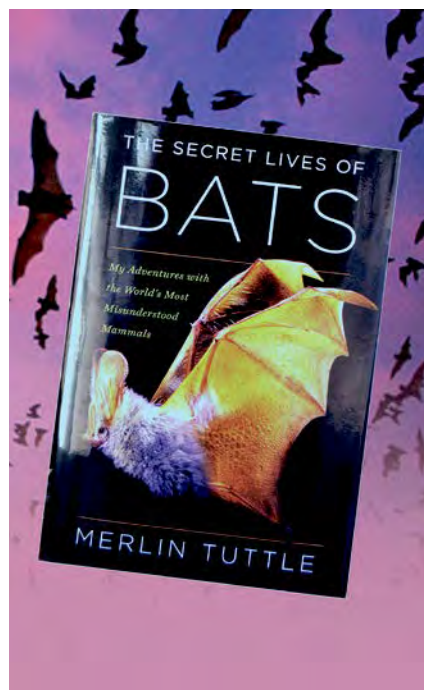
Not my finest moment.

So when I discovered “The Secret Lives of Bats,” I knew it this was a golden opportunity to learn more about these little mammals that periodically appeared in my house.

Author Merlin Tuttle discovered his first cave of gray myotis (gray bats) in 1959 at age 17. It was the beginning of a lifelong love affair, and the start of a decades-long quest to educate the world about bats. Bats, it turns out, are intelligent and gentle, yet these misunderstood animals are often persecuted by a bat-fearing public. People are largely unaware of their importance in maintaining the ecosystem (except for their penchant for eating mosquitos).

Tuttle, founder of Bat Conservation International, has traveled all over the world to study bats, photograph them, and, in the process, reveal their critical role not only in insect control but also pollination and seed dispersal. From the United States to Africa to Australia, he describes his quest to find bats, often risking his own safety as he encounters lions, cobras, poachers, and even moonshiners. I was fascinated to discover how easy it is to train bats, which Tuttle did repeatedly to obtain stunning photographs for National Geographic (many included in the book).

Tuttle is one dedicated bat lover, and I was spellbound by his dedication. He spent nights shivering in rivers, waiting to gently net bats for photographs or tagging. (They were always carefully released afterward.) He climbed into and out of dark caves with little light so as not to disturb mother bats



and their babies. He taught farmers that burning caves full of bats meant they would then need to use more chemicals to control insects. Some cactus flowers can only be pollinated by bats, and Tuttle braved the desert's extreme heat, taking thousands of photos to get one showing a bat with a pollen covered head.

From flying foxes with a wingspan of five feet to bats so small they weigh as much as a nickel, Tuttle lovingly reveals to us the world of these captivating animals. (A photo of an exquisite painted bat and one of a dwarf epauletted bat had me cooing warmly.)

I was totally engrossed in Tuttle's exciting adventures, his readable style, and his warm, familiar manner. I finished this book in a couple of days, but kept going back to look at pictures or reread a particularly enthralling bat encounter. This engaging book will give you, as it did me, a new appreciation for those alluring creatures swooping through our sky at dusk. **NJ**

The Secret Lives of Bats
by Merlin Tuttle
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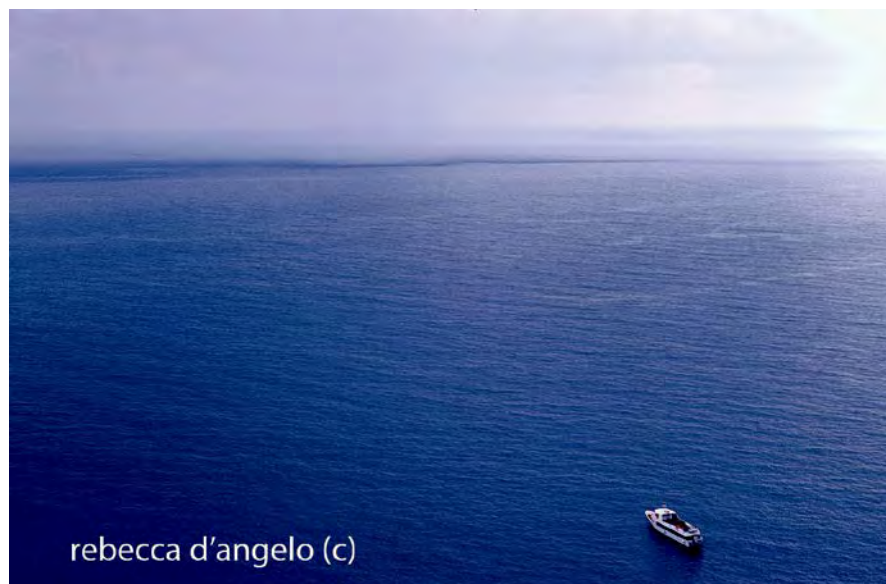
Selena Tosh Show at Corner Office

WISH JELLY, recent sculptural works by Selena Tosh, will be on display at Corner Office from January 27 through early February. Selena's work toys with color and artificiality through a melding of found plastics, and cast and poured clear epoxy resin elements. Selena, last year, earned her BFA in sculpture from Warren Wilson College a liberal arts school near Asheville, North Carolina, in the Swannanoa Valley.

Corner Office
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Click IV Invitational Photo Exhibit at Glave Kocen Gallery



After a four-year hiatus, Click, an invitational photography exhibit, is back at Glave Kocen with the work of Virginia photographers. "The mission of the exhibit is to show the beauty and depth of photography through a wide range of process and perspective," according to BJ Kocen. "Click also prides itself on bringing together pro-shooters alongside emerging photographers."

At least seventeen photographers will show their work in this year's exhibit. From pinhole works by Steve Griffin to photomontages by Tom Chambers, the exhibit highlights the limitless art of photography. Other artists included in the show are Brent Cavedo, Lanvi Nguyen, Alex Nyerges, Zachary Reid, Jude Dizon, and North of the James photographer Rebecca D'Angelo.

For fifteen years, Rebecca worked as shooter for The Washington Post. Her piece featured in Click IV is from a series she did called "Skyscapes".

"Many of the photos took on a painterly quality and were as much about stillness, aloneness, and a subtle beauty as they were about geometry and color," says Rebecca. This photo was taken from a summit above the coastal town of Sorrento, Italy, overlooking the Bay of Naples.

The exhibit opens February 2 with an opening reception from 6-8 pm, and runs through February 24. Glave Kocen will, on February 17 at 11:30 am, host a gallery talk called "Click & Tell" where the artists will tell their stories about their photos. For more information, call (804) 358-1990, or visit GlaveKocenGallery.com

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THIS WOMAN ROCKS



SNOWFLAKES FORM BLIZZARDS, and a single voice, of the right pitch, can create an avalanche. Disgusted by the views of the president-elect, Teresa Shook of Hawaii created a Facebook event inviting folks to march on Washington, D.C. the day after the inauguration. People would also take to the streets in more than 600 sister cities nationwide, making last year's Women's March the largest single-day demonstration in American history. Less than a year later actor Alyssa Milano tweeted #metoo. Since that moment, stories of sexual assault, harassment and rape have been shared by millions. And men of seeming limitless power have been toppled like hollow bowling pins. It just takes one person to start a movement.

A COUPLE YEARS BACK, Beth Stanford, a local singer with the MelBays, was teetering on the edge, felt like she was going to lose her toehold, and go tumbling down. She was in the final throes of a relationship that had been plummeting south for years. There was control and manipulation, and a little gaslighting, for good measure.

We're sitting in Beth's dining room in a classic Sears bungalow just off Route 1 in Glen Allen, the rem-

nants of one of the early streetcar suburbs that sprang up along the defunct Richmond-Ashland Railway. "It's almost unbelievable the amount of s*** someone has gone through or has had to deal with," she says. "You're right there on the edge of the abyss when you sense, as a victim, this is so bad no one is really going to believe you. Your toe is hanging off the edge of the cliff, and you might not survive this abuse. Whether it's emotional, physical, social. Whatever it is."

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO

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She pauses, almost breathless, and then continues in a rhythmic and sonorous voice: "And so I deliberately hung there at that point. And it's a scary place to be standing, but goddamned it, it is real, and I'm not jumping off the cliff. I'm not slipping. I'm on the edge, but I'm firmly rooted on this ground. And I'm not scared of you, or scared of it. I'm not afraid of the abyss."

Gradually, Beth pulled back from the edge. "This is where I came two years ago to my own sense of self," she recalls. "Once you're there, there's this illumination that occurs, and this sense of empathy and understanding overcomes you, and you can then turn away from the edge of the abyss, and go back into your community, and be a better person and more supportive."

About a year ago, Beth's son, Sam, the oldest of her three children, became president of the VCU chapter of Women Matter, an organization, founded in 2013 by Eileen Davis, and dedicated to the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and the

International Women's Treaty. "It's not about just women," Beth explains. "It's about understanding women and supporting women so much that it actually just becomes organic and invisible to our culture. I am very proud of my son."

And the year before that, on about the same time Beth was staring into the abyss, she finally did something she had only dreamt about her entire life. She backs up in the telling of her story to her childhood. "From the time I could stand up, I loved music," she says. "I was always dancing and singing in front of the mirror." In the car with her father, George Stanford, Jr., she would sing along with whatever song blasted from the grills of the speakers. "Wow, you just naturally harmonize," her father would tell her. And he knew a thing or two about music; he played bass in a local band called Nickel Bridge, and later became a disc jockey. She describes her father as a cross between Richard Pryor and Mell Brooks. "I get my sense of humor and my love of music from him," says

Beth. "Neither one of us could breathe without music."

"I was always very musical," Beth tells me, "But I had a lot of self-esteem issues. I was outgoing, but really self-conscious." She has spent the bulk of her adult career as a teacher, and that helped with her dreams of performing, at least to a degree. "When you teach, you're on stage all day," she says. "You're engaging a 25-person audience that has the attention span of a ten-year old. So you're tap dancing and trying to be funny. So I would get it out that way. Somewhat."

Yet there was still the yearning to let loose on stage, belting out songs that could knock you over. And two years ago, as she was backing away from the lip of the abyss, Beth decided to give it a rip. "I finally got up the nerve to sing back up for a band," she says. "I met Gary Eaton and Ron Faw and Mark Seccia, and they folded me into their band, the MelBays. And once I got comfortable, look out. I found out it wasn't that scary to perform and talk into a mic and sing into a mic.

I've been in the MelBays for a couple years now. Like me, they all love music. They're great guys, and so down to earth. Our mission statement, or tagline, is: No drama. "I finally got to kind of express the musician and the singer that I am, even though it's later in life. And I had a lot of mental and emotional hurdles to do that."

All of these things would lead her to one moment this past year when Beth was on a long, solitary walk, her mind drifting over the events of the recent past, the relationship gone sour, the abyss, a childhood dream realized, her son Sam and his role with Women Matter.

"I was just walking along and it all came to me in one big chunk," Beth remembers. "How about a Women Rock Festival? First it was going to be just a musical thing and it could be a fundraiser for Women Matter."

The air seemed electric with a kind of synergy. She considered the Women's March of last January, #metoo. "It coincidentally dovetailed with my per-

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Beth flanked by her three children, Sam, Frances and Finn.

sonal life,” Beth says. “But none of this is really coincidence. It’s the climate, the atmosphere we’re all in.”

As soon as the idea of the Festival began crystalizing, Beth immediately thought of Hardywood Park Craft Brewery on Ownby Lane. She’d been there for many

events, and it would fit the bill for what she was hatching out. But Beth was a little reluctant at first, worried that her idea would be shot down.

And then she remembered a message painted on a rock.

“When I had my kids and I would go to my midwife’s house for checkups, on her front porch she had a rock that was painted with one word, ‘Ask,’” Beth says. “What’s the worst thing that can happen if you just ask people? The worst thing that can happen is that they can say, ‘Hell no, go away.’ So that is now my thing. I just ask.”

Beth sent an email to Hardywood. And waited, and waited. But there was no response. Three months later she received an email from the new manager that read, “Hey, I’m sorry nobody answered, but I’m really intrigued. Can you tell me some more?”

In short order, Beth set up an interview, though puzzled over how to frame her pitch. It was straightforward enough, a day of music celebrating women, and benefiting Women Matter and the Richmond Peace Education Center.

“So I went in,” says Beth. “And they were like, ‘You can do whatever you



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want within reason. We'll handle getting the food trucks in that are women-owned. We'll handle getting the vendors in the right place, and organizing who's going to be here, and we'll pay the bands."

To put it mildly, Beth was blown away. She immediately created a Facebook page for the event. "And that's when I was really amazed," Beth says. "So many people responded, 'Can I be a vendor? I have a food truck. Can our band play?' In just a few weeks there



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were about eight hundred people saying they were going. I was overwhelmed. It caught on fire so fast." Four bands--The New Misty Central, The MelBays, Suzie and the G-Tones and Janet Martin—have already signed on, and because the event will run from 1-9 pm on March 24, there are still plenty of other slots to fill. "But they would have to donate their music," says Beth.

She fairly gushes about Hardywood, their staff, and all they're doing for this event. "Five percent of all the beer sales the whole day will go to Women Matter and the Richmond Peace Education Center, and the vendors don't pay anything," says Beth. "Bikini Panini will be there, and Hardywood is going to draw from their own well of women-owned food trucks. The people at Hardywood are the best, and they're all about the community." It was, by the way, the good folks at Hardywood who recommended the date—March 24—because of its proximity to International Women's Day.

"The thing about the Women Rock Festival, is it's not a corporate thing," she says. "It's a community thing, and that's what I wanted for it to be. About women, and men who support women, who come together and realize how much beauty, and creativity and joy and positivity and energy there is in Richmond. I want it to be totally grassroots tolerant, because that's the nature of women, bringing people together, whether it's family or friends. We're nurturers, we're community-minded."

"If you give it just a little nudge, it will snowball," says Beth Stanford. "You don't have to micromanage stuff or have corporate funding. This is just us as human beings coming together. I've been brought to my knees many times in my life, but I always get back up. And sometimes I don't think I'm gonna, but then I'm standing up and I don't know how." **NJ**

To learn more find RVA Women Rock Festival on Facebook.



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HOBNOB Destination, Neighborhood Dining

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

KRISTIN AND TRACEY Thoroman love food. Everything about it, too. Its origins and preparation, its presentation and how it's served. Opening HOBNOB in the space The Hermitage Grill occupied for two decades was a dream come true, as well as a marriage of the couple's passion for food and community.

When they do have free time, the Thoromans love to watch cooking shows, their favorite being "A Chef's Life" on PBS, which features Vivian Howard and her husband Ben Knight, who operate a restaurant in North Carolina that specializes in locally produced food for seasonal menus. "In fact," says Tracey, "We went to their restaurant, The Chef and The Farmer, on our wedding night three years ago in Kinston, North Carolina on our way to Savannah."

Kirstin knows a lot about presentation and organization. She's the exhibitions manager at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, the one responsible for putting together seasonal offerings like Dominion Energy GardenFest of Lights and Butterflies.

And Tracey has been in the food and beverage industry from the time he was little more than a boy. At sixteen, still in high school, he went to work at the Crossings Golf Club, and though at first he worked on the links, he soon moved into the clubhouse, washing dishes, his passport to the kitchen.

"I just sort of fell in love with the process, cooking food, and making people happy," he says. "During the winter I used to work with Cater Corp."

Over the next two decades Tracey would learn just about all there is to know about running a restaurant, and how to create culinary wonders. He worked for Paul Ivey, owner of Virginia Barbecue, managing their restaurant up in Fredericksburg. For eight years, on and off, he worked for Garland Taylor at the Hometeam Grill. "I was the GM for the Twin Hickory location for about a year, but realized my love was in the kitchen," says Tracey.

Most recently he managed food and beverage operations for three golf courses in New Kent County, a job he had for about three years. And then Bill Hatch, one of Tracey's long-

time friends, happened to run into Waller McCracken, co-owner of the Hermitage Grill. They leaned against their carts halfway down an aisle at COSTCO. Waller was looking for a nighttime chef. Bill immediately thought of Tracey.

"Well I might know somebody," Bill said. "But he's probably looking for a little more than being a chef."

"I'd still be interested in talking to him," said Waller. "I'm thinking maybe in the next couple of years of selling."

Tracey talked with Waller, and he agreed to come on as night chef this past June. Five months later Tracey and Kirstin bought the business. "It was an asset purchase," says Tracey. "We fell in love with the bones of this place. We thought it was a great location, and we really love the neighborhood. We love the idea of a neighborhood family restaurant. Love the fact that it's small and manageable, and we have a great little staff here."

"And," says Kirstin. "We live in Lakeside."

The purchase was finalized on November 13, and four and a half days later HOBNOB opened. Which is just short of miraculous. They completely redid the front of the house. "Waller allowed us to start renovating that Sunday night right after Hermitage Grill closed for brunch," Tracey remembers.

They had help. Dave Phillips, who live a block away, offered to paint. "He came here four o'clock that Sunday night and started painting, and he stayed until 5:30 the next morning," says Tracey. "He went home for five hours, came back and painted until four the next morning. He did all the walls in white." In that same short time, a local subcontractor in the neighborhood installed a new floor.

And community support has continued. Tim Laxton, owner of Early Bird Biscuit Company, supplies HOBNOB with biscuits for their Sunday brunches, and biscuit dough for the crusts of their chicken pot pies. What's more, he doesn't charge them. "Tim's been an awesome supporter of ours and he doesn't let us pay," Tracey says. "That's one of the things we love about Richmond, there are so many supportive restaurants now, so many people who want to see other folks succeed."



Another cool thing about Richmond is that people really support the local restaurants more than probably anywhere else in the country."

Even at this early date, HOBNOB is becoming known for certain signature dishes, chicken pot pies, and shrimp and grits among them.

"I think another one that's been really popular is the chicken and waffles we serve for Sunday brunch, says Kirstin. "Brunch has been just a huge hit for us."

"This past Sunday we did a hundred covers from nine till three," Tracey says.

"The salads have been very well-received," says Kirstin. "I think a lot on our menu is right now seasonally for winter so it's a lot of comfort food, things people can warm their bellies with. But we want to be conscious of those people who want a nice fresh salad with interesting ingredients."

"One salad that's been really popular lately has been the crispy potato and arugula salad," Tracey says. The potatoes are par cooked, then fried at the time of ordering, and served with fresh mozzarella, toasted almonds, Applewood bacon, arugula and a maple vinaigrette.

HOBNOB is also known for its beef brisket empanadas served with buttermilk barbecue sauce. And a roasted cauliflower appetizer topped with a caper, pistachio, garlic and lemon zest gremolata.

"Kirsten was pushing to put it on

the menu, I thought it might be not be something that connected with our customer base right off the bat," Tracey recalls.


"What happened on opening night?" asks Kirstin.

"We sold out of it," her husband admits, grinning. "It was an instant hit."

A few weeks back they offered as a special a twelve-ounce ribeye steak with roasted Yukon potatoes and grilled asparagus. It sold out.

"Our meat loaf has been very popular, and so has our lasagna," Tracey says. "We want to feature something different each day. By changing the menu seasonally, we'll keep it fresh. As we continue to grow, we'll continue to resource local farmers. We want to connect with some farmers who will grow specifically for us."

"Like the Chef and the Farmer," Kirstin says with a smile, and Tracey nods.

"I think people also recognize that our focus is on hospitality and being a warm and welcoming place," says Kirstin. "And being a husband and wife duo working at a spot where we are passionate about the food we serve, and making people feel at home. It's more than just the food; it's the service, it's the feeling you get when you come into a space like this." 

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RESTAURANT REVIEW

Brooks Diner A Pleasant Surprise

by ANNE JONES



I F YOU LIVE IN NORTHSIDE you've driven by it thousands of times on your way downtown. "It looks kind of industrial; did it just change hands? I should stop there sometime..." you've said to yourself.

But Brooks Diner has been around for years, run by the same nice person, Kathy Deleguardia, and serving up exactly what you'd expect – basic comfort food in warm surroundings. And that's the beauty part about it: you know exactly what to expect, nothing pretentiously innovative or annoying. There is nothing, as David Sedaris said when irritated at his overly-fused fare, "smothered in aspirin sauce", no kale in the mac and cheese, nary a sunchoke on the catfish.

What you will find is extra tasty, homemade, and hearty meat sauce on the spaghetti, tender and tangy barbecue pork, a perfectly flat and buttery textbook grilled cheese straight out of a drug store lunch counter. It's comfort food with no pretension, not your Waffle House comfort food, but your grandmother's-house-for-Sunday-after-church comfort food. The mashed potatoes are real, the fried flounder is fresh, and the country-fried steak is perfectly browned. There is even

a whole menu section centered around gravy – chipped beef or sausage gravy on toast or biscuits.


There are also enough sides to satisfy the pickiest pescatarian with a penchant for Cracker Barrel (that would be me). Beets, mac and cheese, butter beans, coleslaw, fried apples, mac and cheese, mac and cheese, collards, mac and cheese, green beans. Pick three for a hearty \$6 lunch. Did I mention the mac and cheese? It's just right. There's also a tuna melt, catfish, salmon cake, fried flounder – it's not all meat and potatoes.

The low prices are another big draw. There is nothing over \$8.50 on the menu. The grilled cheese is \$3.75, for god's sake, and breakfast is available all day. That's always a good sign. And while the space is a little big to be called cozy, it's warm and welcoming. Last week there was a fresh tulip on every table.

So next time you drive by, go ahead and pull in. Eat breakfast on your way to work, or at noon on Sunday. You'll be pleasantly surprised. **BB**

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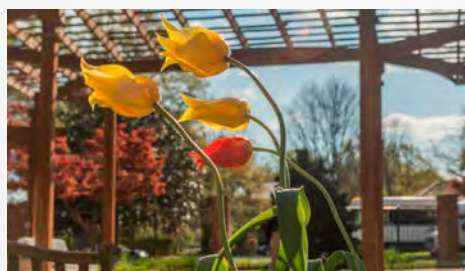
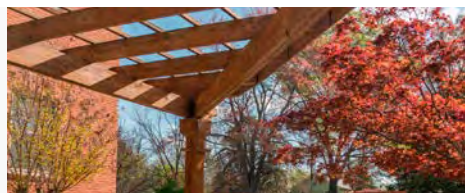
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RAINBOW MINUTES

by **BRIAN BURNS** and **JUDD PROCTOR**

The History of Black History Month

BLACK HISTORY Month is a remembrance of significant people and events in the history of African heritage. It is celebrated in the United States in February.

The remembrance was originally started by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a leading historian who founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson felt the contributions of Black Americans were overlooked or misrepresented, so he began lobbying for Negro History Week. It began in 1926.

Woodson selected the second week in February for the remembrance, the same week that Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas were born – since he believed they had greatly influenced the lives of Black Americans.

In 1976, Woodson's organization successfully lobbied for the month-long observance in February.

President Gerald R. Ford was the first president to officially recognize Black History Month, calling on the public to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."



Tony Washington and The Dynamic Superiors

The Dynamic Superiors were a Washington, D.C. soulful, black male vocal group that signed with Motown in 1974. Most of their early material was produced by the talented duo, Ashford & Simpson.

The Dynamic Superiors had performed together since their junior high school days. Tony Washington led the group with his flamboyant, falsetto voice. He was also an unabashed gay man, both on- and off-stage, and oc-

asionally did concerts in drag. Sometimes he would turn lyrics around on stage. When the group sang, "Me and Mrs. Jones," Tony would sing, "Me and Mr. Jones." This was several years before high-profile Sylvester hit it big.

Although the Dynamic Superiors didn't experience mainstream success, they were happy to be doing what they enjoyed. They made their last recording together in 1980.

Gun Toting, Cigar Smoking, Mary Fields

Born a slave in Hickman County, Tennessee, in the 1830s, Mary Fields earned her freedom in 1865. Six feet tall, with a feisty attitude that often led to fist fights, she made her mark in the American Wild West.

Finding her way to Cascade County, Montana, Fields did men's work at the St. Peter's Mission. But because she smoked, drank and swore, she didn't last long there.

In 1895, Fields was hired as a mail carrier, since she was the fastest applicant to hitch a team of six horses. Carrying the mail with horses and a mule named Moses – and reliably at that – she earned the nickname, "Stagecoach Mary."

Never married, Fields wore men's shirts and jackets. Yet she earned a respectable reputation as the first African American woman to work for the U.S. Postal Service. **NB**



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