

# NORTH OF THE JAMES®

## THE *Florida Keys*

were like a magnet, drawing us down the East Coast to the very termination of the continental United States, to this southernmost extremity lapped by three bodies of water—Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf. These paradise islands revealed their jewels to us, aquatic and terrestrial, floral and faunal, human and non-human. When we were drawn back northward by the ineluctable call of summer's end we had the good fortune of spending four days in what I consider to be the South's loveliest city. It is a city of squares and parks, and scores of monuments, yet the statues, save for one of them, are in homage to truly honorable men and women. Georgia's First City, the Hostess of the South, drips with a warm and flowing Southern hospitality that bears neither snobbery nor meanness. We were there just three days after white supremacists and Nazis wreaked havoc in the Old Dominion, and it was like a balm to that unbridled hatred displayed on the streets of Charlottesville. But it all began with a Low Country boil, and it would end with one, too. *continued on page 12*

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

# NORTH OF THE JAMES

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## ON CHOCTAW INDIAN GIFT

I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the article: The Choctaw Indian Gift to the Irish and the World by Jack Johnson. I suppose it seems unlike that someone in RVA would make such a personal connection with this topic. My mother grew up on a farm in Mississippi and had a grandmother who was Choctaw. As I approach retirement, I look forward to being able to dig into genealogy to find out more about her relation. My family has always wanted to know more about the Choctaw. As many Americans feel, I have always been so unsettled about the US treatment of the Native Americans and the Trail of Tears. Hearing about this history of the Choctaw and their ability to look outside of their own misery to raise money for the Irish was such an inspiration to read. So interesting to also hear about the continuing relationship between the 2 nations. Thank you!

*Carolyn Moul*

## ON PARALYZED VETERANS

Thank you, Charles McGuigan, for writing an excellent article about the Old Dominion Brawl! Check out what else Charles has written at northofthejames.com Support a local publication.

*Mid-Atlantic Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America*

## ON STIR CRAZY

Wow, Charles McGuigan you have gone above and beyond on this! Thank you so much for your support over the last 4.5 years. Stir Crazy would not be the same without you. So grateful for you and all you do for our community. We are so thankful for all of your support. You have been a huge help to me from day one, and really captured the new partnership with Franklin as well.

None of this would be possible without Franklin Massie—a brilliant, energetic, business man with a sense of style and leadership that is unmatched.

To the staff, our customers, and our community, you make this place what it is. You all bring so much incredible energy.

So thank you all. I am grateful beyond words to be a part of such a wonderful, magical, beautiful place.

*Claire McGowan*

Wow, can't wait to come by soon and see everything in person!! Many congratulations Claire and Franklin, and thank you, Charles, for telling the exciting story!

*Susan Greenbaum*

## ON AMY HARR COVER

Adore, adore, adore my neighbor and friend and fellow Holton Mama, Amy Buckhouse Harr.

She—and teachers like her—are a huge part of why Richmond Public Schools need to enact change quickly, with care. As she wisely states---and as I believe strongly as well—it's not about accreditation and test scores... it's about students' individual progress and sense of value.

Amy is a treasure, and how blessed we are in the city of Richmond to have her. (Her husband's not too shabby either! LOVE Ginter Parked—from whence we got our dinner last night!)

Thank you for this incredible piece on her, Charles McGuigan.

*Cheryl Lage*

Charles McGuigan's first line says it all: "Amy Buckhouse Harr was born, it seems, to become a teacher." Great piece!

*Carol A O Wolf*

This article truly captures the essence of who you are! You shined your great light on my children while you were at Fox, and I am forever grateful.

*Mary Clark Caramucci*

My screen went blurry half way through the article... very proud of you, my dear!

*Betsy Bernhard Cooper*

Wilson What an amazing article, Amy! I was smiling the whole way through it.

*Stephanie Bugge*

You're one of the good ones, Amy. So awesome.

*Lauren Schindler Milan*

You have always worn that smile! You made us feel so loved and welcomed as pledges back in the day. I am not surprised to hear you are making the world a better place for so many, all with your 'light up a room' smile. Way to go, Amy!

*Jeanelle DeVoe Lindsey*

I remember when my eldest daughter went to a few of the youth groups you were leading. She thought you were awesome! The path you've chosen was definitely meant to be.

*Sharon Kronstedt*

Very nice, Amy. Awesome article. Congrats!

*Sean Simonpietri*

Amazing teacher for sure! So nice to see you be recognized.

*Sharon Peck*

This is so wonderful, Amy! It was the truest descriptions of you and your spirit. I'm so lucky to know you and call you a friend.

*Mandy Gatesman*

Wonderful and well written article about an Amazing lady!

*Jennifer Dickerson*

All true. And then some!

*Kathryn Shoemaker Oti*

A beautiful article about a beautiful person. Miss you!

*Beth Wilson*

Amy you have always glowed. You are such a bright light guiding all of us as to how-to mother and how to teach.

*Mary Driebe*

I don't know what we would've done without you at Fox. You got Ian on the right path early and I am eternally grateful. The world needs more Amy Harrs for sure!

*Angela Ward*

Amy you are such an amazing woman! What a great article! Love you!

*Laci Smith Fisher*

This is great! Proud to have been in class with you.

*Amanda Paige*

Wonderful article about a truly amazing person! I love seeing your smiling face Amy!

*Jill Flacker Ritchie*

Congratulations Amy! Really enjoyed reading this story about you!

*Kristy Weiler Rose*

All I could think of while reading this was how influential you were in Colin's life...now he's entering high school with straight A+'s in honors. It was the people like you who truly believed in him, who made him believe in himself. Thank you Amy Buckhouse Harr for being so awesome!

*Tricia Glanz*

Amy, your heart always shines through.

*Philip Weston Holmes*

Oh Amy, this is so precious. I just loved reading about you and your work. Your smile is always come from the inside out. Always brighten peoples' lives.

*Hiedi Kemp Simon*

Yep, pretty much sums up your magic. Awesome article!

*Katie Gray*

I am so thankful for everything that you and Nicki did at Fox and so proud to know you and happy for the children that you have touched and will continue to touch!

*Diane Pride Harris*

Great stuff Amy. Congratulations and keep up the great work.

Wonderful article! You are doing awesome things!

*Becky Smith Myers*

In high school you were extraordinary, and clearly, you still are—your impact is not in the least bit surprising to me, and when I see your smile in your posts and in this article, it is infectious. So happy you got this recognition!

*Amy A Swanson*

I loved reading this article. Good job, my friend!

*Dana Wilson Amy*

What a wonderful and authentic description of you. So thankful for you and your continuing blessing of so many.

*June Hardy Dorsey*

Amy! This is a beautiful account of you! You are amazing! I'm in tears!

*Susannah Meyer*

Love this. You are truly amazing!

*Linda Ringwood*

What a beautiful article about a beautiful person. Proud to know you!

*Sara Jinks*

Amy! So, so proud of you and your vibrant spirit! Thank you for your amazing work! Miss you so! Sending love from Washington!


*Stephanie Johnson Tottingham*

Oh, Amy, this article is so you! Brings tears to my eyes. You are an amazing person. Love you!

*Joy Morene*

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

We encourage all letters to the editor. Submit letters to the editor one of three ways: Go to northofthejames.com/contact; respond on our g-mail address at charlesmcguigan@gmail.com; or send a letter to: North of the James, P.O. Box 9225, Richmond, VA 23227.

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# National Night Out Bring the Community Together

by ANDREW CHURCHER



Two of Richmond's finest.

**W**HILE NATIONAL Night Out does not begin until six, MacArthur Avenue is already bustling with activity. Local shop owners have set up tables with food and drinks outside their stores to entice the coming attendees. Demi's is cooking Paella on the grill while further down Dot's Back Inn is serving up caprese and gazpacho. On the dessert side, The Mill has key lime pie samples, and Stir Crazy is offering cookies and ice tea. As always a misting tent has been set up in the street, a perennial favorite of kids and adults.

A police officer with several academy cadets in tow, make their way along MacArthur, talking with shop owners and greeting early arrivals. As the event gets underway, more police officers arrive and in a very similar man-

ner, stroll down the street, interacting with people around them. Typically, police officers like Stephene E. Mcquail and Christopher M. Gleason would be at events like this to provide security. Their presence at National Night Out serves a much different purpose. The two officers explain how the event allows for "one on one engagement with people" which they hope will foster future partnerships between the community and police, which has been the ultimate goal of National Night Out since its inception.

Matt Peskin, founder and executive director of the National Association of Town Watch, set out creating this event with the simple desire to have neighborhoods become safer through police and community members interacting and connecting with one another outside of normal, less positive, circumstances. He was able to establish the event in August of 1984



Above, top: Bob Kocher with plaque honoring Mike LaBelle.



Above, below: Demi's serves up paella.

through his connections with law enforcement agencies, civic groups, and neighborhood watch groups. Every first Tuesday in August since then, neighborhoods across the country have hosted parades, cookouts, and other events to create this connection. Today around 38 million people in over 16,000 communities celebrate National Night Out.

After six o'clock the crowd thickens significantly and many people walk among the storefronts and the tents set up on the sidewalk. The YMCA has one of these tents set up and Pat Scott, the regional youth development

director, stresses the importance of her organization to be at National Night Out. "We want to connect with the community," she says.

Central Virginia Emergency Management Alliance is also here. Derek Andresen hands out informative pamphlets on how to deal with disasters and emergencies – from how to make a supply kit in case of evacuation to securing a room during a storm. Workers outside their mobile unit are available for answering pertinent questions and offering further advice to community members and families.



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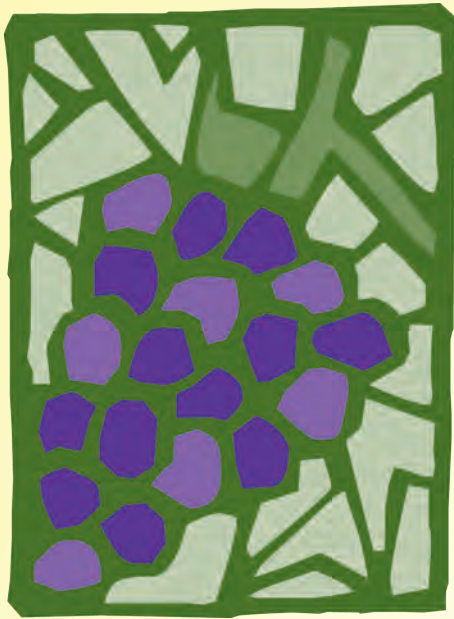
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With the delightful aroma of food in the air, Jimmy Tsamouras discusses why his two restaurants—Dot's Back Inn and Demi's Mediterranean Kitchen—participate in National Night Out. "It's important to know everyone and for your neighbors to know you" he says as he continues to serve up paella from the grill. The simple interactions between shop owners like Jimmy Tsamouras and community residents during events like these are the "most important" as it brings a "sense of community pride" not found anywhere else.

Jodi Teitelman, a Ginter Park resident for more than 20 years, considers the North Side to be a "magical neighborhood" To her, National Night Out is a social event where she catches up with old friends and meets new neighbors.

Independent candidate for Richmond sheriff, Nicole D Jackson, is also at the event, handing out flyers with information on her background and her running platform.

Children in swimsuits rush into the misting tent and get soaked. Other kids begin collecting water off the tent into empty plastic bottles and begin to toss water at one another. Several of them run over to a water bowl for dogs outside one of the stores and accidentally tips it over in their rush to fill their own bottles quickly. Another popular attraction is Northside's Jonathan the Juggler. A large crowd gathers around him as he makes quick jokes and juggles flaming objects for their amusement.

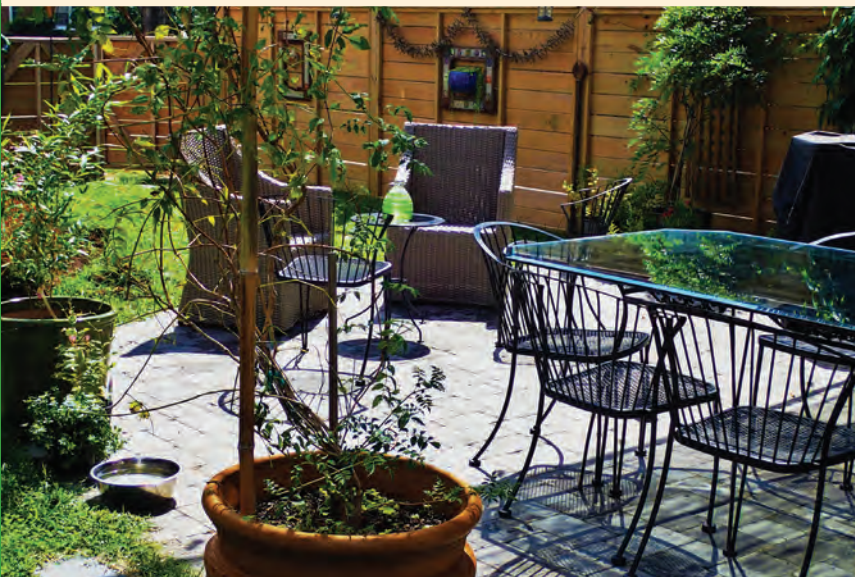
As the event enters its last hour, Bob Kocher wants to make an announcement. Besides being the owner of Once upon a Vine and the one who erected the misting tents, Bob is also a member of the Bellevue Merchants' Association. Every year at National Night Out, the organization honors someone who has helped to improve the community with a permanent marker planted next to one of the trees that line the street. Tonight, Mike LaBelle, co-president of the Bellevue Merchant's Association and a long-time community activist, is honored with plaque, and he receives hearty applause from the crowd.

Community members, from neighbors to police and shop workers, continue to talk with each other as the night goes on. As National Night Out comes to an end, everyone appears to leave happy and content. As Jodi Teitelman says, "I came for the garlic knots (from Zorba's) and stayed for the community." **NJ**



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## HIDDEN HISTORIES

# Rewriting History: Reagan Inducted into the Labor Hall of Fame

by JACK R JOHNSON



**KNOW WE ARE SUFFERING** outrage fatigue, but in the arena of bad ideas, offering Ronald Reagan a spot in the International Labor Hall of Fame is like queuing up Attila the Hun for a Nobel Peace prize. That hasn't stopped Labor Secretary, Alexander Acosta who, you might recall, refused to support basic worker protections during his confirmation hearings, and has remained non-committal at best on minimum wage and overtime rules. Acosta announced Reagan's induction last Thursday, August 24th, at the Ronald Reagan Presidential library. Ouch.

Imagining the lives of Caesar Chavez, Eugene V. Debs, or Mother Jones, all of whom are inductees, it's difficult to see how Reagan would fit the criteria for induction which includes improving working conditions, wages or quality of lives of working families. Reagan's list of anti-labor activity is both wide and deep. According to Dick Meister, during his two terms as President of the United States, Reagan attempted to lower the minimum wage for younger workers, neuter the child labor and anti-sweatshop laws, tax fringe benefits, and cut back job training programs for the unemployed. He tried to replace thousands of federal employees with temporary workers who would not have civil service or union protections.

True, as Acosta noted, early in his life, Reagan was President of the Screen Actors Guild in the 1940s and 1950s.

He led SAG through three successive strikes, but he was notoriously pro-management even then, forging a strike-ending agreement in 1959 that greatly weakened the union. Reagan finally resigned under membership pressure before his term ended.

As President of the United States, it was no different. One of Reagan's first acts in 1981 was to fire 11,000 striking Air Traffic Controllers, bar them from government jobs for life, and decertify the union. Reagan didn't just fire a handful of strikers; he crushed one of the most powerful government unions in the country, burnt their crops to ashes, and plowed their field with salt. This action and subsequent decertification led the way for the decimation of unions across the nation.

According to the New York Times, more than any other labor dispute of the past three decades, Reagan's confrontation with the Professional Air Traffic Controllers (Patco), undermined the bargaining power of American workers and their labor unions. It also stigmatized union membership in general. Using a strike as a leveraging tool for contract negotiations became a venial activity more associated with greed than equalizing the employee/employer playing field.

Naturally, Alan Greenspan loved it: "his action gave weight to the legal right of private employers, previously not fully exercised, to use their own discretion to both hire and discharge workers."

As Washington Post columnist Harold

Meyerson observed in 2004, the firing was "an unambiguous signal that employers need feel little or no obligation to their workers, and employers got that message loud and clear - illegally firing workers who sought to unionize, replacing permanent employees who could collect benefits with temps who could not, shipping factories and jobs abroad."

By 2010, the number of workers participating in walkouts was less than 2 percent of what it had been when Reagan led the actors' strike in 1952. Lacking the leverage that strikes once provided, unions were unable to pressure employers to increase wages as productivity rose. As a consequence, inequality has ballooned to a level not seen since Reagan's boyhood in the 1920s.

In 2011, notorious union buster Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin invoked Reagan's handling of Patco as he prepared to "change history" by stripping public employees of collective bargaining rights in a party-line vote.

This leads to a question. Should organized labor honor the very person who helped to bring about labor's demise in the United States? It seems wildly Orwellian, but then again Reagan -- who famously called trees 'polluters', and MX Missile systems 'peacekeepers' -- would probably think it just dandy. The only thing that would be more historically grotesque, I suppose, would be President Trump saying Nazis are fine people, too. **NJ**



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## BOOK REVIEW

# Richmond's Racist Roots: Of Wealth and White Supremacy

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

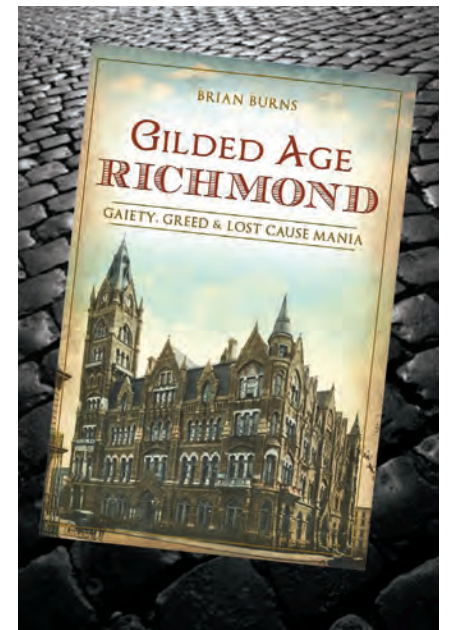
**I**M GUESSING WHEN Brian Burns began this book he had no idea that the United States and its basic values would be threatened by intolerance, white supremacy, unbridled capitalism—utterly un-American traits given voice, and, to some degree, endorsement, by a man who swore an oath of office to protect our Constitution and its guarantees, a man charged with defending our underlying principles.

This book—a quick and engaging read—reminds us how both white supremacy and rampant capitalism are nothing new under the River City's sun. As its title tells us, the backdrop for this book is the Gilded Age when the chasm between the rich and poor grew like a tectonic plate shift.

Sixteen essays make up this slender volume which begins with Reverend Jasper's famed sermon on astronomy that sparked national discussion, and ends with Grace Arents, heir to Lewis Ginter, who became one of the city's foremost philanthropists, trying to make life better for the poor and destitute.

In the era following Reconstruction there was more than a faint glimmer of hope that Richmond might lead the way to a more egalitarian Southern culture. There was modern invention. After much debate the city was electrified—literally. And there were the streetcars, among the first in America. There were also progressives afoot who were firmly committed to putting the ante-bellum South, and all of its racial injustices, where they belonged—six-feet under. Readjusters had gained some political influence.

Back in the late 1880s, The Knights of Labor, which was at the time the largest labor union in the country, decided to hold its annual convention in Richmond. Hundreds of blacks and whites from all over the country would attend. The city seemed ripe for the convention—the Knights had organized an eight-month boycott of Haxall-Crenshaw flour mills, Richmond's typographical union boycotted the city's only non-union shop, laborers at Old Dominion Iron and Nail Works staged a walkout that lasted three months. Richmond even had a pro-union newspaper called the Labor Herald.



But Richmond's reigning white capitalists, also profound racists, were having none of this. They had formed a local chapter of a national vigil ante group called the Law and Order League. And they turned the labor convention into what could well have become a blood bath. White supremacists armed with revolvers threatened to shoot any black labor organizer who showed his face. Descriptions by Brian Burns of this event are eerily similar to what occurred just last month in Charlottesville when white supremacists and Nazis attacked innocent protesters, killing one, and injuring dozens of others.

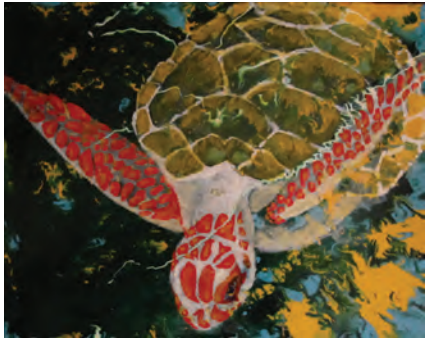
In 1887, that horrific racist Joseph Bryan formed a Law and Order League newspaper called the Daily Time, which would one day become the Richmond Time-Dispatch, the loudest—and often most incoherent—mouthpiece of massive resistance during the Civil Rights era. Bryan had proclaimed that segregation was ordained by “God Almighty.”

There are tons of other tidbits in this book that will fascinate any Richmonder, including particularly pertinent entries about those men who attempted to revise history and create the myth of the Lost Cause. **NR**

***Gilded Age Richmond: Gaiety, Greed & Lost Cause Mania***  
by Brian Burns, *The History Press*,  
158 pages, \$21.99

## ART

### 26th Annual Street Festival of the Arts



Art works by Ed Gorham and Marti Mocaabee.

#### THE 26TH ANNUAL 43RD


Street Festival of the Arts is a fine art and craft show held in Woodland Heights on Richmond's Southside. This year's festival will be held from 10 to 5 on Saturday, September 16 at 43rd Street and Forest Hill Avenue. Limited to 75 artisans, it is a juried show featuring the finest local and regional artisans. A unique selection of contemporary art, fantastic local musicians, great food and a loyal crowd round out this family-friendly event.

Proceeds benefit CARITAS, our local homeless provider.

Many of the artisans have been with the show since the beginning.

However, new artists come on board each year to provide variety and fine craftsmanship in many media. This year's juried outdoor show will include paintings, prints, pottery, sculpture, jewelry, glasswork, and more. Original works of art will be available for purchase and exhibitors will be on hand to discuss and sell their work.

This year's musical line includes the inimitable Susan Greenbaum, Illbillys, Tin Can Fish Band, Bluz Catz and the incomparable Janet Martin.

The unique selection of contemporary art, fantastic local musicians, great food and a loyal neighborhood crowd round out this event. 

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ELLEN ROAD

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# THE Florida Keys

**BACK IN LATE JUNE, CHARLES AND I WENT OUT** to my sister's country home in Rapidan. Her husband Joel was there and two of their children, Liz and Hil, along with Liz's husband, Matthew, and my brother Chris, his wife Margo and their youngest son Martin who would be leaving for Scotland in a couple months where he'll attend college. Hilary made the Low Country boil, which is standard fare in coastal South Carolina and Georgia, a Gullah traction, I'm guessing, cause no matter how poor you were shrimp and other seafood were always available in the Low Country, along with potatoes and corn. It was a spectacular feast—king-fitting—and stories circled the table, and carried over late into the night over drinks, Old Rag looking down on us from the distance. That evening, Charles's cousins showed him how to use a bow and arrow, and throughout the night, he would pull the bow taut, aim, and release the arrow, hitting the bull's eye repeatedly. Charles, who always surprises me with his bounty of gifts, seems to be a natural archer.

The next morning we left for Cherry Hill, New Jersey, home of my cousin Kosh and her husband Antonis, and their three boys, who are all out of the house at this point, off to college and careers. To Charles they were always the three brothers, and took him in at an early age and made him part of their clan.

Charles and I were able to get a twelve-mile bike ride in along the Schuylkill, but there was no zest to any of it. Not this time.

My cousin Kosh is one of those rare people who does not have a mean bone in her body, much like my son and daughter. Over the years we've become quite close, and anytime we're passing through Philly to and from Maine, we always spend a few days with Kosh and her family.

Several months back Kosh was diagnosed with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, and its crippling effects were rapid. I had written her the following a few months ago, and every word of it is true. "You do not judge, you do not mock human frailty, nor do you hold transgressions against the perpetrator. I've often thought that those who espouse Christian values should study the actions of atheists or agnostics such as yourself. They might learn a thing or two, put into practice the clear words of their savior as framed in his beatitudes, but unfortunately, all too often, they are swallowed by their own self-righteous judgement, delight in casting stones, counting beads, thumping chests, parroting empty words in the desolate spiritual chasms of their churches."

"I learned more from you about what godliness is than from any religious text I've ever read. You embody the profound truths of the Buddha, Christ, Mo-

hammad. You live as they lived. You are the best of what they preached, and, within you, it is a constant. I do hope that all who know you understand the sort of presence they are in when near you. You shower grace on all who are open to it, and it is not some hokum magic grace, emanating from some mythical spot in the heavens. It is real, the sort of grace that makes all feel welcomed and loved. This is Divinity."

During our visit this past summer Kosh and I spent a lot of time talking. She grieves as much for her children and husband as she does for herself. And though she carries the weight of this unbelievable burden, she remains positive and loving.

That first afternoon, the Three Brothers, and one of their cousins, took Charles into the deep end of the swimming pool behind Kosh's home. Charles has always loved the water, but he fears depths he cannot stand up in, anything over his heads. His cousins worked with him, built his confidence, and inside an hour he was swimming laps across the pool from nine feet to the three-foot shallows and back.

We left her Cherry Hill on a bright, hot, early July morning in early July, and headed back to Richmond, where I had my work cut out for me in preparation for the long leg of our vacation through the Deep South.

Here's why: To make this trip possible, I was going to have to rent our home on Airbnb. For more than a year I had been redoing our entire house. I skim coated the walls, primed and painted them, along with all

the woodwork; stripped all the doors, stained them and sealed them with polyurethane; redid all the brass hardware throughout the house; sanded the floors, brushed on three coats of marine spar varnish; finally, after fifteen years, created a study in the sunroom at the back of the house—an old mud room that was in rough shape; even redid the front porch. I put the finishing touches on the house the morning we left in early August and handed my daughter, who would meet and greet our guests, the key to the new locks.

With the car fully packed and our reservations made at four different Airbnb locations, and our calendar set so that we would be homeward bound in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina for the total solar eclipse, we were off, but we didn't get that far.

**LESS** than 130 miles down 95, just outside of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, my son hears a grind and high-pitched whirr.

"What's that noise?" he asks. I listen.

"Nothing," I say, then point to his right. "Maybe it's that car in the other lane."

I couldn't have been more wrong.

We pull into a rest stop, to use the facilities, and when we're back in the car, I turn the key and the temperature gauge rockets up to the top, and we no longer have power steering. Something is wrong and it's after four on a Sunday afternoon, and we are miles from nowhere. My son and I scope out the rest stop, thinking, half-jokingly, that we could pitch our tent and spend the night here, if worse comes to worst.

I check my phone for nearby garages and mechanics, but none of them are open on Sunday. The nearest one is in Raleigh, but that's an hour away. I call my mechanic, Dave Axelle, in Richmond and he tells me the tensioner pulley's probably shot. The car's not drivable. I am able to find a local guy named Mark who has a 24-hour towing service. He picks us up and takes us along with our Honda CRV thirty miles south to Wilson, hands me a discount coupon for a motel room, and sets the car on a slight incline behind the motel. "You're right across the street from a Honda dealership," Mark tells me, pointing across the highway. Then he has another idea. "I'm gonna have this guy call you," he tells me, and gives me his number just in case.

The room's comfortable and was less than eighty bucks with the coupon. We eat barbecue because in Wilson that's what you do, and Charles watches episode after episode of South Park—a marathon of some kind—scientology has us both in stitches. In the morning I call Timmy who, with his wife Sylvia,

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN



*North Carolina sky six hours after the eclipse.*

run a company called Astral Auto Service. He meets me outside at seven while Charles is still sleeping soundly, and immediately goes to work on the car, out of an oversized panel truck that is essentially a garage on wheels. He instantly identifies the problem—the ac compressor had seized up and sheared the serpentine belt. Timmy spent the next three hours finding the right belt and then bypassing the flywheel of the compressor. By ten we were good to go, and the bill was under ninety dollars.

In no time we began our plummet down the coast in earnest, no obstacles in our way, and the car humming, purring contentedly, rubbering away the miles beneath us, and before us.

Since we missed our reservation in Savannah the previous night, we drove straight through to St. Augustine, a healthy jaunt of about five hundred miles, eight hours of steady, but easy, driving. We stopped only for gas and drinks because we filled up on breakfast food at the motel. By the time Charles was ready to roll, they were breaking down the complimentary breakfast room, and the woman tending it all told us to eat as much as we wanted. “Just as long as you don’t use plates and glasses,” she had said, handing us Styrofoam cups and a couple of paper plates. “We’re just going to throw it out anyway.” Charles ate four eggs, a half a pound of bacon and three bagels, which tasted more like pretzels than anything else. I filled my stainless steel thermos with coffee, and pocketed three apples and two oranges.

Our place in St. Augustine is the second floor apartment of a carriage house at the corner of First and Cincinnati avenues, just a couple blocks off San Marco Avenue, one of the main drags which features the legendary Fountain of Youth (which turned out to be nothing but a legend; Ponce De Leon died at the age

of sixty-one) along with the Castillo de San Marco, an impressive 17th century Spanish fort, the oldest masonry fortress in the United States, built of lightweight, fossilized stone called coquina.

That coquina is ever present in Florida. Wherever you tread, just beneath the precious topsoil and the sand beaches, there is coquina, remnants of ancient sea beds, almost pure calcium carbonate. Any chunk of it reveals compressed shells and corals and traces of other marine life millions of years old. It is white to gray to straw-colored and makes the perfect filter to feed the aquifers that supply Florida with the purest of spring water.

Rock is at the base of everything. In coastal Maine—a frequent haunt—it’s granite, and you can see how the lichens there still pulverizing it into soil where wildflowers and blueberries and spruce and balsam thrive. Up there, it’s as if the earth is being born again out of rock and water.

After a quick dinner of oysters and mahi-mahi, we stroll the streets in the oldest quarter of the city, and explore an ancient graveyard.

Here’s the beauty of St. Augustine as opposed to Williamsburg: Where Williamsburg is an open-air museum about the way life was once upon a time, St. Augustine is a living memorial to the past. People dwell here and do business here in buildings that are among the oldest standing structures in America. You can sense the Spanish presence here in the architecture, and the houses and shops are painted in fanciful colors.

After a ridiculously priced breakfast, we ride our bikes for several miles and then pack it in and begin the sojourn south along A1A on Anastasia Island. We stop off at one our National Parks’ many treasures,

which includes a free ferry ride to an island where Fort Matanzas stands, facing seaward. It was built 175 years after the founding of St. Augustine, and acted as a sentry to the backdoor of the Spanish settlement.

Later that day we arrive in Jensen Beach for a single night in the home of Lisa and Doug. She works in healthcare; he is a firefighter and they are gracious hosts. They even leave a plate of cookies for us. In the morning we head south to the Keys, non-stop driving along Florida’s Turnpike, the only sure way to avoid the hell of Coral Gables and Miami, which is why they call this stretch of highway the Less Stressway.

**MY** heart breaks the moment we cross over to Key Largo. I can make out Gilbert’s Resort in the distance, and a flood of memories washes over me. Ten years ago my daughter Catherine and I first visited Florida. We flew into Orlando, and in a rented car crisscrossed Florida a half-dozen times in just ten days (You can cross the entire state at its widest in less than three hours), logging more than two thousand miles. We packed in as much as we could. Disneyworld was a let-down—it was dirty and the lines long, and every one of the employees we met was very young and from Belarus or Ukraine or Lithuania, not much more than girls really, and they were underpaid and overworked. We left this disenchanting kingdom at my daughter’s urging and got down to the business of Florida. We swam the next morning in a place called Blue Spring, a state park not far from Deltona. Here the water is turquoise and the sand beneath it sugar white. We snorkeled there and free-dove down to the aquifer that feeds the spring. As we neared this hole punched through the ancient crust of fossilized coral we could see plumes of white erupting through the blue-green water, clouds of white sand forced from the bottom by the force of



the spring water. We spent time in the Everglades and at Boca Grande and Gasparilla Island. In South Florida we visited Coral Castle, an odd structure built by an odd man who was first and foremost a maker of myths. Then at midnight of the seventh day, we came to that bridge that really begins the Overseas Highway, and we could see the harbor lights, and the running lights on boats making their way out of the docks, and we spied a place called Gilbert's Resort—not much of resort really, kind of rundown rooms with doors that were made of stainless steel, but it would be our home the first night in the Keys. There was a big tiki bar and a bad bar band playing Jimmy Buffet songs, and every tequila-loaded patron singing the refrain from Margaritaville. At one in the morning, my eleven-year old daughter sat next to me on a bar stool and a sweet waitress brought Catherine a slice of Key lime pie and a glass of Sprite. I drank a beer, and my daughter held her blue-green blankie and stuffed panda bear, whose name just happens to be Pandi. We stopped at twelve beaches along the Keys and stayed a night in Key West where the acting manager gave us a deal on a waterfront room overlooking the Naval Base. Outside we collected a few coconuts. Inside the lobby there were parrots who roamed free, one sidled along the counter as we checked in. The owner of the hotel was making a run to Cuba, the temporary innkeeper told us, and then he began telling stories about how many times he himself had gone to Cuba and how content the people there were and how they were all fed and educated and had access to medical care. "You don't see poor people there like you see poor people here," he told us.

We whirled across, and up and down Florida, which is easy to do because the roads are flat and gridded like a sheet of graph paper, all bee-line straight. And the sky is gloriously big and extremely active, always putting on a show. The clouds are like sponges sucking up water on either coast, forming these great stacks of cotton ball cumulus clouds that shower you with torrential rain and pass within ten minutes, and then in another ten minutes the sun dries up all evidence of rain, making the air thick as a sauna. So this is the third year we have been without my daughter on our summer vacation; she's busy with college and work and her sweetheart, Tyler. Which is as it should. But still.

Charles and I are in the lower Keys for the next seven days, just thirty

miles north of Key West, on Big Pine, home of the Key deer, tiny versions of our native deer—a subspecies of the Virginia white-tailed deer. They're sometimes called toy deer, and there's reason for this. At maturity they stand no taller than a small Great Dane, and weigh considerably less at about 55 pounds for a full-grown buck. These deer are endangered as the signs along Route 1 inform you, but they seem to be everywhere on this island and the adjacent No Name Key.

This first early evening on Big Pine, Charles and I bike around the island, and in an open field next to a church of some sort we count fifteen Key deer grazing on grasses and the mangroves that ring this field. They are docile and downright friendly, not at all spooked by us when we approach them. The males look fierce at a glance, but that seems to be all show. One eight-point buck comes within five feet of us. His antlers still bear velvet, and he is inquisitive, rubs his moist nose on my outstretched palm. He's probably just looking for food, and these deer are voracious eaters and fairly omnivorous. They eat everything of a vegetable nature, but seem particularly drawn to tropical flowers that folks down here plant in their yards—things like hibiscus. They also eat figs and mangos and other fruits native to the region. Their chief sources of nutrition in the wild are thatch palm berries and mangroves, but they truly love flowering bushes and tomatoes, which is why there is such a profusion of chain link fences on the island, and we're told by the owner of this trailer we rent to keep the gates closed.

The owner of the trailer is a woman named Lane who lives with her partner in the trailer right next to us in the same compound. But you wouldn't know it was a travel trailer. Living here is more like living on a boat with its tight, organized spaces. And Lane created a sort of tropical botanical paradise all around the trailers. You're shielded by palms and scores of other tropical plants. And, of course, an abundance of lizards—Anoles and geckos primarily.

We head down to old town Key West and wander among the houses and lush vegetation, making our way over to Duval Street and the tourism, then down to Sunset Pier at the appointed hour and listen to (what else?) Jimmy Buffet songs. Then head back north thirty miles to our quarters.

**WE** leave the Big Pine compound early every morning, Charles opening the gate while I back out, and when



*A typical Key West house.*

I'm clear he secures it behind us, latching it to ensure that the Key deer stay out. We'd eaten eggs and English muffins for breakfast, and I packed lunch in the cooler, along with a full gallon of frozen water. I buy gallon jugs of spring water each day, fill our small bottles, which we reuse time and again, with Zephyrhills which is collected from Florida's own natural springs. I freeze those bottle each night and let them thaw the following day in the cooler. This serves two purposes: it keeps our lunch of sandwiches and fruit cold; and it affords us brain-freezing water for the rest of the day. Works well—trick I learned doing exterior house painting back in college.

We head back down to Key West, straight for the tip, the most southwesterly point on the East Coast, a place called Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. Florida has an exceptional system of state parks, rivalling our own in Virginia. The beach here is painful on bare feet. It's made of glaring white, pulverized coral strewn with coal black flecks, which are fossilized shark teeth, so water shoes are a must. But the water is soothing as a mineral bath. The water temperature must be close to ninety, and the salt content of the water is much higher than what it is in the Atlantic off Virginia and the Carolinas. It renders you buoyant, and stings your eyes. Because it's a confluence of the Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico, the variety of fish species here is unrivalled, outside of the offshore reefs. Seventy-five yards off the beach there are three breakwaters constructed of massive boulders of fossilized corral rock, which have become reefs, and eel grass grows in great abundance around them.

This is the first time Charles has ever snorkeled. He readily learns to breathe through his mouth, secures his mask properly, and then slips on his fins and takes to the water like a fish. We hover near the boulders for three hours, circling, free-diving, and we see scores of different types of tropical fish, from blue damsels to yellow tangs and, these incredible rainbow-blotched parrot fish. Between the crevices of the rocks, we spy timid spiny lobsters, the only underwater denizens that shy away from us. This is the same spot my daughter and I, ten years ago, encountered a barracuda, and all in good time Charles will have the same experience.

Later in the early afternoon we wander through Bahama Village which is rapidly becoming gentrified by yuppie larva and uber hipsters. I'm guessing the real estate tax rate has been slowly rising, forcing out the folks who have called this area home for generations. It covers about a dozen square blocks bordered by Whitehead Street and the Truman Annex, and Whitehead and Southard. Many of the original inhabitants were Bahamian, and their ancestors still live here, some of them, at any rate. But that's changing rapidly as the area becomes a trendy restaurant destination. It's a sad thing to see.

Everywhere, even in the more upscale communities on the other side of Duval Street, chickens and roosters and their offspring run wild. You could easily live off the natural bounty of Key West. Between the poultry and the fruit (figs and mangoes, and, of course, coconuts), not to mention the fish that are easily caught, and the spiny lobster (in season, of course), you could easily survive. We find a mango tree on Stump Street just off Frances, and help



## 43RD STREET FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

Saturday, September 16th, 10am till 5pm  
43rd Street and Forest Hill Avenue

The 26th annual 43rd Street Festival of the Arts is a fine art and craft show held in Richmond, VA. Limited to 75 artisans, it is a juried show featuring local and regional artisans. A unique selection of contemporary art, fantastic local musicians, great food and a loyal crowd round out this event.

### Fund raiser for CARITAS.

10am till 11am: **Susan Greenbaum**  
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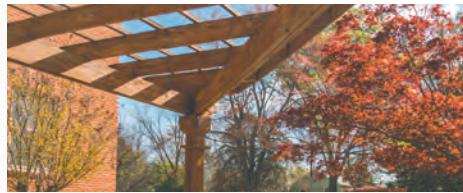
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ourselves to the fruit, which otherwise just rots on the ground. We pick a few every time we're down in Key West.

We visit the Key West Garden Club, which has a nice presence in an old brick fort right at Higgs Beach. It's a nice display, but a number of the botanical specimens aren't natives, and the woman running it today has a school ma'amish attitude toward my son, which I don't really care for. She had a reprimanding tone with him, and he was just being curious.

Just to the east of the garden is the Edward Knight Pier, a large concrete structure just recently repaired, and fish absolutely love the structure created by the pilings. I talk with a guy who just moved here from South Africa two years ago. He loves the place, and fishes here regularly. He shows me his tackle, which is pretty much like our top-an-bottom rigs with 2.0 hooks, and a rounded sinker to avoid snags. Charles and I watch the crystal clear water where is an explosion of yellow-and-black striped fish that look like bumblebees. Moving up and down the pilings, nibbling and scouring, there are several large parrot fish.

Our fisherman friend catches two mangrove snappers, which are very good-eating. Then Charles, who has wandered to the other side of the pier calls me over. In the crystal clear water we watch a five-foot long barracuda (that's a pretty big one, largest I've ever seen), lazing near the surface, pectoral fins spinning, caudal fin gently waving so it can hold its position, steady as a hovering helicopter. It lays in wait for something and we watch it for a good twenty minutes, but it does nothing as large schools of needle fish swarm around it, some them a quarter a foot long. We'll return tomorrow to ride the seawall trail up to the Key West Bridge and try our luck at fishing here.

As you enter the pier there are two breathtaking monuments: one to victims of AIDS; the other marking the cemetery of Africans who died here. Many of these human beings who were going to be sold as slaves found refuge in the Keys far from the plantation mentality of the country on the mainland.

As we leave the island for our quarters on Big Pine, I'm thinking a lot about the goddamned monuments in Richmond and elsewhere that honor men who

fought to preserve slavery, but I have no idea what's coming to a city less than seventy miles from our Richmond home.

On way home we stop at one of more than twelve fishing bridges that are scattered among the Keys. These are the old bridges that had once connected the Keys and when the new Overseas Highway was constructed the state of Florida had the good sense of preserving the old spans for both bicycle traffic and fishing. So we fish on Shark Key Bridge over Shark Channel. We can see the fish twenty feet underwater. I flick my rig out toward one of the concrete electrical pylons, where there is always good structure. Within minutes I get my first strike—a yellow-tail snapper, a fish I've never caught before. The color is lemon yellow on a bluish white background. I throw that one back, but Charles and I each catch another, considerably larger. As a quick storm begins to move in, I gut and fillet the fish, and we run back to the car, soaking wet when we get in. In an hour we are eating yellowtail snapper baked with fresh mango.

**I**N the morning, after breakfast,

Charles and I bike out to Blue Hole, which is about four miles from our Big Pine compound. It's early yet, but the temperature is already in the upper nineties and the humidity well over eighty percent, but the trip is well worth it. Blue Hole is an abandoned rock quarry created by Henry Flagler to supply ballast stones for his failed Overseas Railroad. The result is now one of the few bodies of freshwater on this entire strand of islands, and is home to abundant wildlife you won't find anywhere else on the Keys. As is our unwritten rule we give what is wild a wide berth. We spot an indigo snake that is over six-feet long, as well as two alligators, a number of Key deer, and a green iguana at least five feet long that scrambles at breakneck speed at our approach.

We return to the compound and pack lunch and a dozen frozen water bottles, then head back down to Key West. It's going to be a long day, and a long night.

We stop briefly at The Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Garden on Stock Island just east of Key West across Cow Key Channel, and I set up an interview with the director, a guy

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Cuban chugs that carried refugees to Key West.

named Misha, but that's for tomorrow. Charles and I head back to Higgs Beach and we bike the trail along Atlantic Boulevard over to South Roosevelt Boulevard. Most of this trip is along a seawall of sorts, a promenade that skirts Rest Beach and Smathers Beach, both of which have white sand, a real anomaly in the Keys. Fact is

these are not natural beaches, the sand is pumped in. The only natural sand beach on the Keys is at Bahia Honda Key, which is all a state park—a place we'll get to in a couple of days.

Along the way we spot a five-foot long male iguana, fairly large and not at all skittish at our approach. We hand-feed it a couple of sections of an orange,

then continue on our way all the way up to U.S. 1 bridge, then turn around and head back to our point of origin. For a couple hours we wander the streets of Key West and then spend the late afternoon almost until sunset snorkeling at Fort Zachary Taylor. In the car we change into dry clothes and head back over to the night-time bustle of Key West.

We visit The Cabaret at La Te Da on Duval Street, watch a couple of acts, and these girls are tremendous singers, impersonators, entertainers, dressed to the high nines with five-inch heels and five ounces of makeup. A couple of drag queens hold court outside and as we talk with them, they begin flirting with Charles and a beet-redness seeps up through his tanned face.

At Sloppy Joe's a woman struts along the bar like a runway, dancing up a storm. I nurse a mojito; Charles a Key West lemonade, minus the vodka.

"Is she allowed to do that?" Charles asks "She's doing it, and everybody seems happy about it."

"Maybe I should dance on the bar," says Charles.

I just shake my head.

We continue the Duval crawl, sticking our heads into the bars along the way where there's always live music. More than a few middle-aged men, sporting white beards, swagger, while others stagger, a la Papa, often down the middle of the street.

It is still in the nineties, and the humidity high, even though it's close to ten o'clock. But if you walk on the sidewalks of Duval Street close to the storefronts lining it, you get draft after draft of icy cool air drifting out of virtually every shop. They keep their air conditioners going full blast with the doors wide open, a lure, I'm guessing, to bring tourists inside.

The further we make our way down Duval Street, the thinner the crowd becomes, and down on the harbor walk there are few people and the streets are dark. Here you can see the stars overhead, and the harbor is packed with some of the most beautiful sailboats and yachts I have ever seen, lined up in their berths like cars in a parking lot. These are large vessels—the smallest being about forty feet. Many of the

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*Banyan, or stangler fig, devouring its host tree.*

restaurants are closed for the night, but down toward the end of the harbor walk, not far from the US Coast Guard station, we find a place called the Half Shell Raw Bar. Charles and I eat a late night dinner of steamed, deep-pink shrimp, and two dozen raw oysters, and when those small packets of salt-water in the oysters burst and you taste the ocean, life doesn't get better.

We finally pull out of Key West at around two in the morning after a visit to a cemetery where the tombs are raised above the ground because the water table is so high. If you were to bury a casket on Key West the earth would simply spit it out.

As we cross over to the Saddle Bunch Keys, I pull onto the shoulder and cut the engine and the lights, and as our eyes adjust to this darker darkness, we both look skyward and can see millions of stars above us and the milky whiteness of the galaxy we call home.

**WE** spend most of the next day at the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden, which bills itself as the only "frost-free" botanical garden in the continental United States. Misha McCRAE, executive director of the garden, gives me a guided tour, while Charles wanders off with Deanna, the garden's education manager.

As we stroll along the boardwalks, all made of recycled plastic, Misha narrates a history of the garden, which has been around in one permutation or other for more than eight decades. Almost twenty years ago Misha began working here, and four years back was made the executive director. He is impassioned about his work and shows me tropical tree after tropical tree that found sanctuary here—venerable tropical trees from other Keys that would otherwise have become the victims of development.

I have no idea how many varieties of palm trees there are in this veritable jungle, but I count at least eighteen, many of which are indigenous to the Keys. There are thatch palms and silver palms, date palms and Washington palms, buccaneer palms and petticoat palms, which host layered fronds at their base calling to mind frilled women's undergarments from an earlier age.

In the wildest part of the forest where there are no boardwalks, just well-travelled paths, Misha cautions me as I reach out for the mottled trunk of a tree. I love to touch bark and memorize its texture with my fingertips. With eyes closed I can tell the difference between a pin oak and a willow oak.

The bark of this tree, which I do not



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touch, is reminiscent of crepe myrtle or sycamore, in the way the bark seems to be shedding. But Misha tells me the layer peeling away is not bark at all, but rather a lichen.

Every single part of this tree from the root to the highest branch is poisonous. If, during a rain shower, you are unlucky, or unwise, enough to stand under this tree for protection from the rain, drops of water that come in contact with the trip and drip on you will be as molten lava. Poisonwood, as it's called, is not for tree-huggers. Any slight contact with any part of this tree will result in an almost immediate skin reaction, blisters rising to the surface in moments, and a stinging burn ensuing. Think of poison ivy, oak or sumac on steroids.

Directly across from the poisonwood stands a tree I have seen countless times throughout Florida. It is sheathed in a smooth reddish-brown bark, and the limbs are long and elegant as swan necks. It is called gumbo-limbo.

As jewelweed (touch-me-nots) is to poison ivy, gumbo-limbo is to poisonwood. It's one of those weird occurrences in nature where the antidote to poison often grows right next to the toxic culprit. If you are so unfortunate as to touch a poisonwood, (also called cheché) and suffer the resulting burn, just look around for a gumbo-limbo and make a quick poultice of its bark and apply it to the affected area of skin. Relief is almost immediate.

An hour later we enter an opened field ringed by trees. Here it is not the plants that are on display, but rather the hulls of a dozen boats that memorialize humanity's quest for freedom. Many of these vessels seem barely seaworthy and they are made of every conceivable material, even tarps and blocks of Styrofoam—anything that floats. They are the Cuban chugs, and for years have washed up on the shores of the Florida Keys, some with passengers jammed in tight as packed sardines, others literally ghost ships with no human presence, the passengers swallowed by the turquoise waters of the Caribbean. Over the years, tens of thousands of Cubans escaping the totalitarian reign of a dictator, risked everything to make it to our shores. Many were returned to Cuba, others found sanctuary here.

When I say it's unfortunate how the current administration views refugees, Misha shakes his head and says, "You heard about what happened in Charlottesville?"

I hadn't. I hadn't been checking the internet, and no TV. Not even social media.

But back at the Big Pine compound late that night I finally get on-line and read about Nazis and racists converging on Charlottesville, an army of them. I watch clips of torch-yielding white supremacists spewing racial and religious invectives, and then a terrorist among them killing a woman and injuring others. And a sitting president refusing to condemn these Nazis for what they are.

**FOR** our last two days on the Keys Charles snorkels for hours off Bahia Honda Key, just to our north, perfect water for snorkeling. We then head up to Savannah, Georgia, where Catherine and Tyler are planning to join us for a Low Country boil before heading up to Mount Pleasant, South Carolina for the total solar eclipse.

We stay four days in this remarkable city of parks and squares, and some of the gentlest folk I have ever met. We ride bikes everywhere, along its active riverfront and through its myriad greenspaces. We spend a fair amount of time over on Tybee Island, and visit Fort Pulaski on the way over.

Jimmy Oglethorpe is to Savannah as Billy Penn is to Philadelphia. They were founders of their respective cities, but more than that they were both ardent believers in equality and fairness for all. In a word: They were progressives.

For one thing, Oglethorpe welcomed Jews, Lutheran Salzburger, and other persecuted religious minorities to settle in Georgia. He also wholly opposed African slavery of any kind in Georgia, and never wavered on this. He had a deep respect for all American Indian tribes, honoring their customs, language, and needs. Any land cessions were agreed upon only by treaties shaped by the Indians, whom he also protected from unscrupulous white traders. He lived up to the motto of the Georgia colony which was: "Non sibi sed aliis," which translated from the Latin means, "Not for self, but for others."

There are statues galore in this city, honoring men like Lafayette and Pulaski. But we find only one that references the Civil War, and it is to ordinary soldiers and sailors, not the leaders of the fabled Lost Cause.

Before our final night in Savannah I pick up fresh corn and red potatoes and a pound of andouille sausage for the Low Country boil. I wait to buy the seafood. I'll get it fresh, hours before my daughter and her boyfriend arrive. But that night, my daughter, in tears, tells me she is not going to come after all. She and Tyler are getting ready for classes to start at VCU.

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*Charles at Jensen Beach, Florida.*

I tell her it's fine, that we'll have a Low Country boil when Charles and I return to Richmond.

On the appointed day we head north to Mount Pleasant, South Carolina to a KOA campground where we meet up with a Richmond contingent of the Kambourians, and we watch and marvel at the moon utterly blocking out the gargantuan sun, if only for two minutes. And though it does not alter us, this celestial event fills us with profound gratitude for being part of such a mysterious universe.

Two nights after our return, Catherina and Tyler and Amanda, along with the Kambourian clan, join us for a Low Country Boil, which is the official end of this long, protracted vacation.

And today, as I write the final words in this story, the sky is filling with clouds and fall is in the air after an eternal summer of blue sky days, and the president of our country has decided that it is okay to deport as many as 800,000 young Americans whose parents struggled to find them refuge in a land of freedom, not unlike the men, women and children who had crossed the Caribbean in the Cuban chugs my son and I had seen in the Florida Keys, which are now under the threat of an assault from a superstorm called Irma that promises destructive winds and intense rains and a storm surge that may shove a wall of ocean across these beloved islands, possibly scraping away so much of their frail beauty—these places we've been, these things we've seen, these plants and animals and human beings we have come to know and love. And the culprit behind this hurricane may well be man in all his thoughtless arrogance and his cavalier destruction of our environment which has led to global climate change, something the same president, thinks is nothing more than a hoax, fake news. **NJ**

# Even in the Dark There Is Light

by FRAN WITHROW

**A**T THE TENDER AGE of 22, Michelle Kuo took a job in Helena, Arkansas, with Teach for America. Helena is in the Mississippi Delta, and is among the poorest places in the country. Kuo taught in an alternative school for troubled high school kids called Stars, remaining there for two years. It is there that she first met 15-year old Patrick Browning.

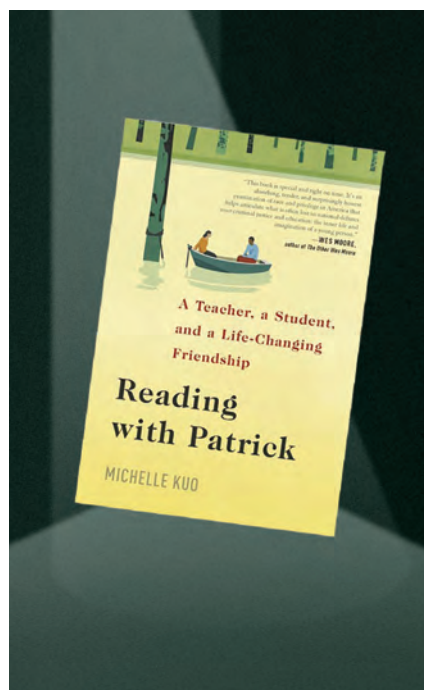
Patrick was sent to Stars for starting a fire in his back yard. Quiet and shy, he finds his voice through poetry and letter writing. Patrick and his peers flourish under Kuo's tutelage.

Despite the progress her students make, Kuo decides to leave the area to attend law school once her contract is over. But tragedy strikes: while in law school, Kuo learns that Patrick is in jail for murder.

What follows is Kuo's description of her continuing, life-altering relationship with Patrick. Returning to the Delta, she meets with him daily, reviving his interest in poetry and writing. They share their favorite lines with each other and memorize poems together. Her connection with Patrick causes her to meditate on her life as well as his, to explore her family's expectations and her own experiences as a minority in America (Kuo is the child of Taiwanese immigrants). How does her experience parallel Patrick's and how do they diverge? How much responsibility does she bear for who Patrick is and what he does?

Kuo's musings include observations about race, poverty, and class. She notes that Patrick and his peers are stuck in a cycle of poverty and prison with few ways to better themselves. Her description of how Patrick was jailed for more than a year before meeting briefly with his court-appointed lawyer is appalling, as is his all too brief sentencing before the judge, who seems to have become numb to the despair and hopelessness before him.

I can't stop thinking about this insightful, thought-provoking book. I picture Patrick's prison issue sandals,



held together with string. I mourn that Patrick is unable to see outside. "Is it raining?" he often asks Kuo when she comes to visit him, and I wonder how we can ever rehabilitate those who cannot even see outside.

I envision these two learners in the dimly lit prison visiting room as Patrick pores over pages, laboriously writes poems. He cherishes an old book, a single pen. In these dismal surroundings, Kuo and Patrick find satisfaction and enlightenment through the magic of literature.

Even in the dark, there is light.

"Reading With Patrick" is many things: memoir, self-reflection, meditation. It is an indictment of our prison system, and an affirmation of the power of poetry, of language. It is an example of what can happen when teacher and student are willing to learn together, and from each other. It is a testament to the endurance of the human spirit. Engaging and compelling, this is a story of courage, of the ways we change each other's lives, and of the deep well of richness lying at the heart of the written word. **NJ**

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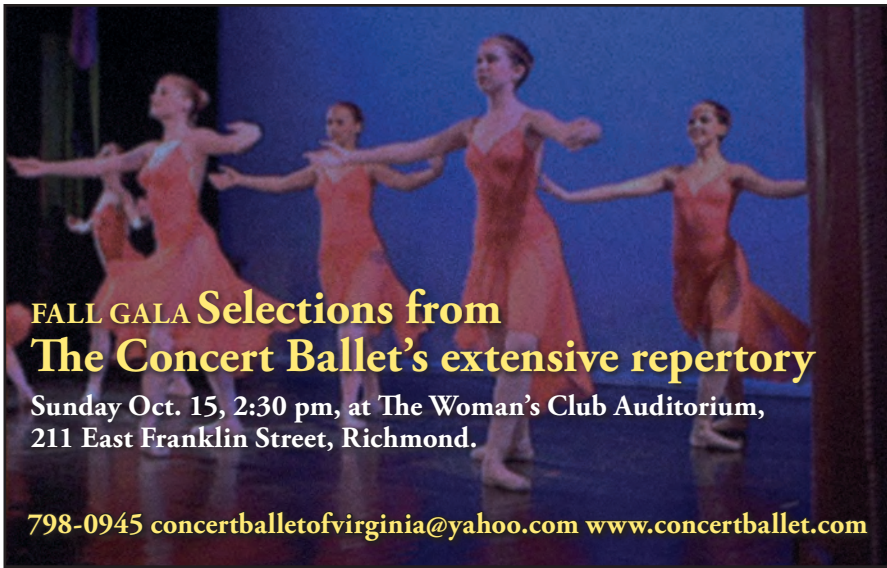
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## RAINBOW MINUTES

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



### Acclaimed Performer and Singer, Chavela Vargas

**B**ORN IN COSTA RICA in 1919 and growing up in Mexico, Chavela Vargas became an icon to several generations of Latin American lesbians, known for her erotic performances and her open expression of lesbian desire. She sang rancheras, which were written to be sung by a man to a woman – and used them to seduce women in her audiences. Her first recording was released in 1961.

A hard drinker, she hit bottom in the

70s – but in 1981 made a major comeback, selling out Carnegie Hall in New York City. She gained a new audience in the 1990s when gay filmmaker Pedro Almodovar incorporated her music in the soundtracks of his films.

Chavela broke Mexican taboos, smoking cigars and dressing as a man. At age 81, she confirmed what everybody already knew - she was a lesbian.

On August 5, 2012, Chavela died in Cuernavaca, Mexico. She was 93. Her last words were, “I leave with Mexico in my heart.”

### Remembering Frida Kahlo

In 2001, the U.S. Postal service issued its first stamp honoring a Hispanic woman. On June 21 of that year, they issued a 34-cent commemorative stamp of Frida Kahlo, the world-renowned Mexican artist who created striking self-portraits. That same day, a similar stamp of Kahlo was issued in Mexico.

U.S. Postal Service Vice President of Diversity Development, Benjamin Ocasio, said, “The Frida Kahlo stamp allows us to reach out across commu-

nities to let everyone know that this organization has a commitment to diversity that involves both our customers and our employees. Our stamp program is a wonderful reflection of this commitment.”

Kahlo stood out from the crowd not just because she was Hispanic and bisexual, but because she was physically challenged due to a terrible bus accident in 1925.


### Film Idol, Ramon Novarro

In 1916, Ramon Novarro started out as a model and singing waiter in L.A. Then, thanks to the Hollywood publicity machine, he became its first Latin American superstar.

Born in Mexico in 1899, his family moved to Los Angeles during the Mexican Revolution. Novarro reached the peak of his career in the title role of the 1926 silent spectacle, “Ben Hur,” although his best performance came the next year in “The Student Prince

in Old Heidelberg.”

The romantic idol of silent films of the 1920s, Novarro was billed as “the new Rudolph Valentino.” After a few box office duds in the early 1930s, he left acting with his fans unaware of his secret: the unmarried Latin Lover was attracted to men.

By today's standards, Novarro's performances are perceived as decidedly effeminate. But way back then, he was it. 



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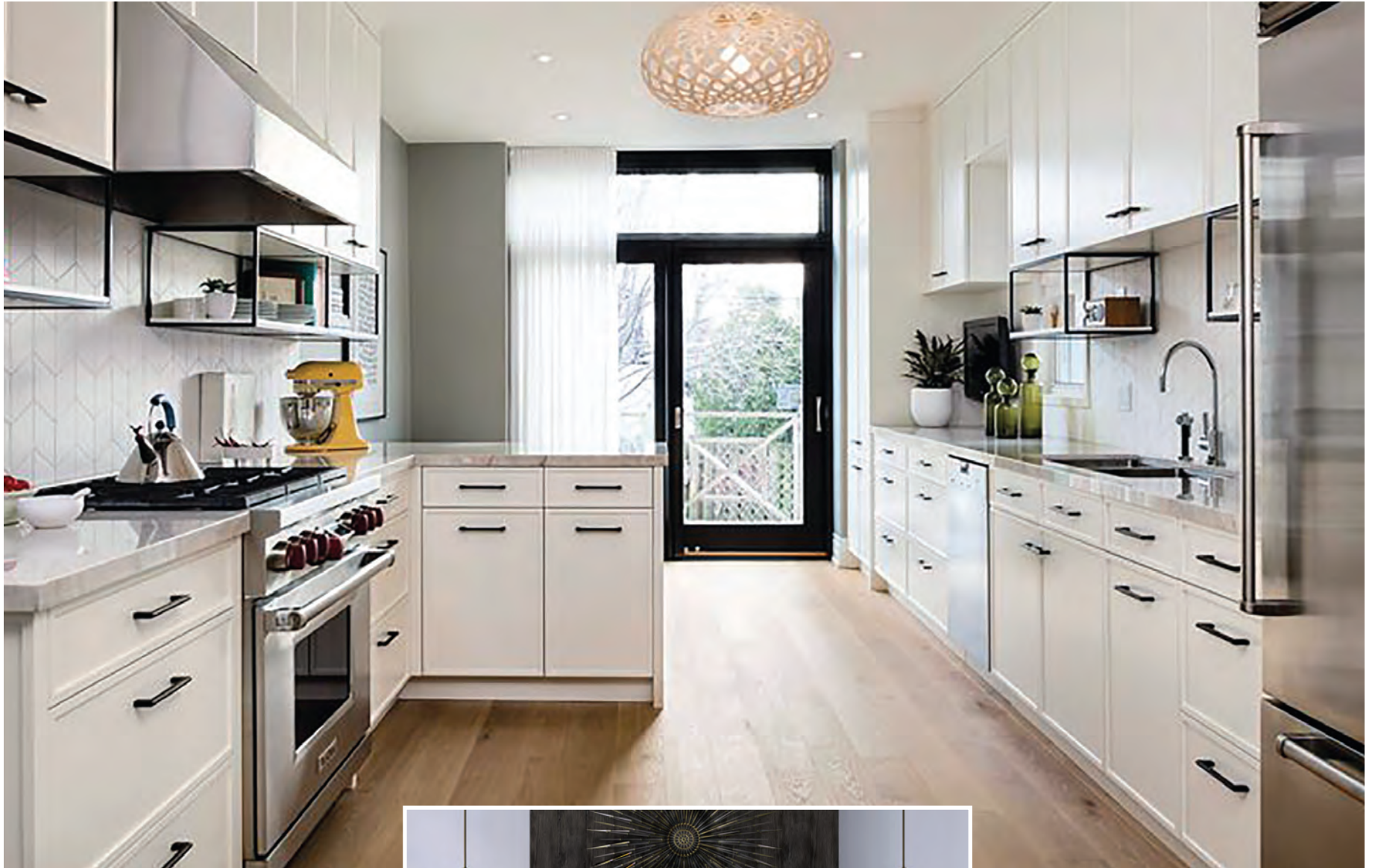
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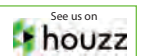
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