

NORTH OF THE JAMES®

Kaity KASPER

does not wear her heart on her sleeve. But her right arm tells a tale. From wrist to shoulder, this appendage bears a polychromatic narrative of a portion of her life. It is rich in symbolic flora and fauna, indelibly printed deep below the surface, shielded from erasure by the skim ice of epidermis. Permanent as fable. Lasting as myth. And this allegorical chronicle radiates a truth beyond expression. It tells part of Kaity's story, which, though grounded in the concrete, is a spiritual journey that began at birth, and is about to take a detour that will lead her to faraway places where she may discover secrets about life itself. *continued on page 16*

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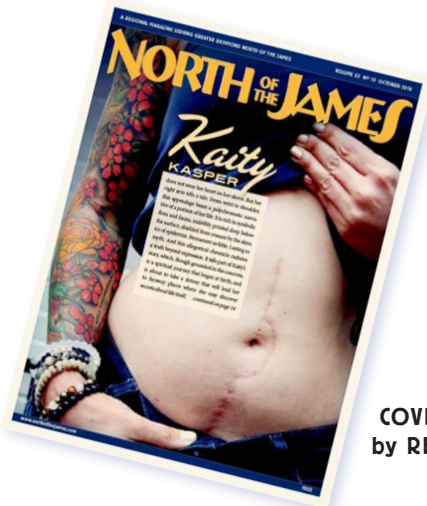
In 1825, at eight years old, Jordan Anderson was sold into slavery in Tennessee as a servant of Colonel P.H. Anderson, and worked as a slave on his plantation for 39 years. With his family he escaped during the Civil War, and his former owner asked him to return. Jordan Anderson dictated his response, which was subsequently published in a newspaper.

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She does not wear her heart on her sleeve. But her right arm tells a tale. It tells Kaity's story, which, though grounded in the concrete, is a spiritual journey that began at birth, and is about to take a detour that will lead her to faraway places where she may discover secrets about life itself.

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH
by REBECCA D'ANGELO

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ARTS

Arts October 2016



CURRENT: ART FAIR IN SCOTT'S ADDITION

CURRENT, Richmond's first contemporary art fair, a joint venture of ADA Gallery, Candela Books + Gallery, Glave Kocen Gallery, Page Bond Gallery, Reynolds Gallery, Quirk Gallery and 1708 Gallery, will be held October 20 through 23 at Hohman Design, an industrial design firm located at 3409 West Leigh Street in Scott's Addition. The fair will present opportunities to collect art by local favorites as well as nationally and internationally acclaimed artists.

CURRENT is sponsored by Markel, Pam and Bill Royall, Rick's Custom Frame + Gallery, McKinnon and Harris, and Fultz and Singh Architects. The CURRENT logo was designed by legendary street artist, Shepard Fairey.

Visit currentrichmond.com for more information

STUDIO ART 1229 PRESENTS FALL CLASSES

Artist Brenda Stankus is again offering a painting classes at Studio 1229 on Bellevue Avenue. Fall classes begin in October and run for nine weeks.

"The classes are for anyone who wants to paint," says Brenda. "I will work with you to fill in the gaps, talk painting and move you ahead to the next place you want to go."

In addition to the painting class, Brenda will also offer a two-day workshop on putting faces into mixed media. "We will learn about drawing an accurate anonymous face, male or female, the proportions, and exaggerating the proportions for effect," Brenda says. "For the background you will be encouraged to use your (or my) mixed media bag of tricks, as well as how to make the entire piece work together."

For more information call Brenda at 804-564-6979 or e-mail her at studio-art1229@gmail.com



CRAZY LOVE CAFE W/ BJ KOCEN, SUNDAYS AT STIR CRAZY CAFÉ

BJ Kocen will be playing every Sunday afternoon from one till three at Stir Crazy Café. It's a great way to end the weekend—music, friends, food and beverages of all sorts. BJ Kocen has been on the Richmond music scene for decades. His first solo release, "The Breaks", was produced by Paul Curreri, and received critical kudos. It took BJ three years to finish his next project called "Searching for Signal/ Old Lake." This double album features more than twenty musicians, including Brad Tucker of The Taters, Jeff Bunn of Funkadelic, Steve Bassett and Jackie Frost. **NJ**

Painting by Brenda Stankus





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RESTAURANT REVIEW

Liberty Public House

by ANNE JONES

NEVER LET IT BE SAID that I take my food review assignments lightly. I do my homework. So when it was decided that Liberty Public House would be my next subject, I had to visit 3 times in 3 days. Two lunches, one dinner – just to be thorough.

I had high hopes from the beginning. Liberty is run by the same trio that has The Mill on MacArthur: Amy Foxworthy, Josh Carlton and Chip Zimmerman. In fact, The Mill helped make MacArthur Avenue into the busy and charming gem of Bellevue that it is today, when it joined long-time anchors Dot's, Zorba's and Stir Crazy several years ago. MacArthur Avenue is turning into a regular little mini-Carytown, or maybe a two-block piece of it. I have always loved the fare at the Mill: healthy comfort food is how I would describe it, fresh, locally-sourced, and just the right amount of innovative. The only problem with the Mill is, like Yogi Berra said, it's so crowded that nobody goes there anymore. On a busy night, the quarters can be a little close.

So I was happy to see the interior of Liberty. On 25th Street a couple of blocks north of Broad, it's in the old East End Theatre building, still with the marquee and all. Inside there's a roomy, urban-industrial feel, with lots of open space, easy and comfortable. I was also hoping the fare would be similar to that of the Mill, and I was not disappointed. It's not identical, but it does have the same feel. Just like the space, the Liberty menu seems bigger and more varied, and pretty much perfectly covers any taste craving you might seek to fill.

Dipping sauces! They jump off the menu at you first thing. Sold. I hardly know what they are, but I want them. Smoked gouda cheese, smoky whole grain mustard, country gravy, ranch – just a few of the choices for a dollar! We tried the smoked gouda dipping sauce with the sweet corn fritters starter (\$8) and they were scrumptiously fried, both tangy and sweet, good consistency.

On to the lunch entrees, both under the "Bowls" section. Day one: vegetarian chili and grits (\$10) hit the spot - made with sweet potatoes and toma-

toes, smothered with melty cheddar cheese, a few spring onions and crème fraiche, it would have been only close to perfection had it not been served with the best cornbread I've ever tasted. That pushed it over the top. This was sturdy triangular cornbread, grilled in a skillet and a study in contrasts: moist and crumbly, buttery and light, downright sweet but savory. C's scrumptiously hearty beef stew was also enhanced with the side of warm artisan bread. Day two: hearty beef stew for my mother (based on C's stellar recommendation) and spinach Caesar salad for me. Not overly adventurous, but spinach in a Caesar salad was a welcome variation for me. Again, fresh, top-grade ingredients - baby spinach, red onions, tomatoes, croutons and shaved parmesan with truly delectable dressing.

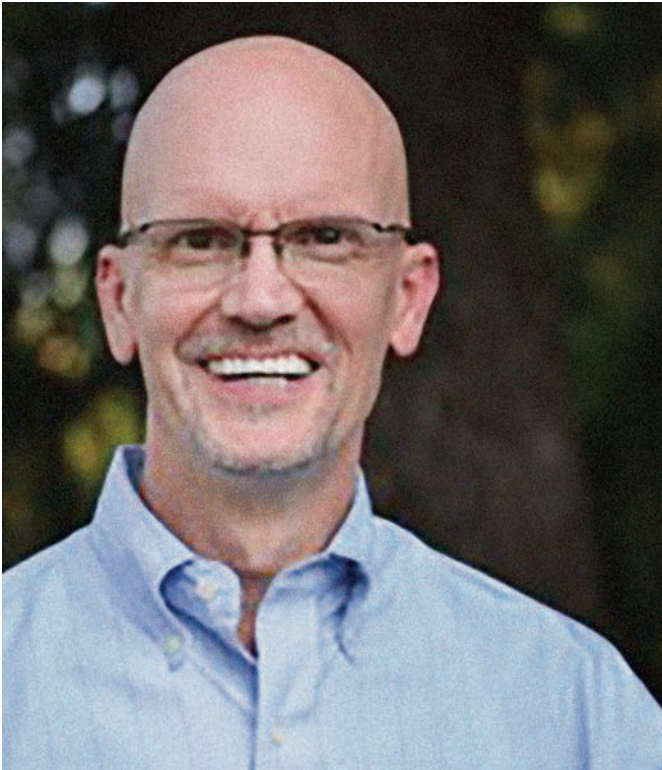
A quick 5 hours later and my carnivorous friend and I were back for a late dinner. M plunged into the full rack of slow-cooked, baby-back ribs smothered in bourbon bbq sauce (\$20) and heartily approved, taking half of them home for the next day. My shrimp and grits were sautéed with bacon, garlic, mushrooms and onions, lazing on a bed of creamy Byrd Mill yellow corn grits. Even though I'm a pseudo-semi-faux vegetarian, I opted not to substitute veggie sausage for the bacon, refraining from consuming the bacon pieces but savoring that flavor anyhow. True to form, the tastes were exquisite.

Added personal bonus: Arnold Palmers on the menu as a specialty, a pleasing blend of fresh-brewed tea and lemonade. Craft brews, craft cocktails, and a smart selection of wines are also offered; so are root beer floats with Bev's ice-cream.

Amy, Josh and Chip have done it again. The Liberty Public House (named in honor of nearby St John's Church and Patrick Henry's speech) should get so popular that nobody goes there anymore.

Liberty Public House
418A North 25th Street;
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 - Slashed Mayor's Security Detail, putting more officers on our streets

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- Support our schools to reduce poverty in our City
- Increase funding for infrastructure improvements in our neighborhoods
- Ensure a transparent process in the redevelopment of the The Boulevard

I humbly ask for your vote, so that together we can continue to build on the progress that we have made over the past 12 years

If you share this vision, please contact Chris
at chrisforcouncil2016@gmail.com

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RAINBOW MINUTES

by BRIAN BURNS and JUDD PROCTOR

Purple Hands



I T WAS THE EVENING OF October 31, 1969—Halloween night. About sixty members of the Gay Liberation Front and the Society for Individual Rights were staging a protest. They stood in front of San Francisco's Examiner, holding signs and shouting slogans, demanding an end to the newspaper's discriminatory editorial policies. The paper had recently run news articles disparaging gay people.

The newspaper countered their peace-

ful protest with Examiner employees dumping a bag of purple printer ink from a third floor window onto the crowd below.

At that point, a few protesters used the same ink to scrawl slogans like "Gay Power" onto building walls, and stamp purple hands throughout downtown San Francisco. The police arrived and knocked protesters to the ground, ending what would be known as the "Friday of the Purple Hands."

National Coming Out Day

Celebrated by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and their allies every October 11, National Coming Out Day is aimed at bringing visibility to a once-hidden community. It's done through workshops, speak-outs and rallies.

The idea materialized just four months after the second March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights on October 11, 1987. A hundred LGBT activists met in Manassas, Virginia,

and worked out the details, choosing the date of the second march, October 11, to mark the day.

Specifically, the idea came from Jean O'Leary, then head of National Gay Rights Advocates; and Rob Eichberg, a founder of the personal growth workshop, The Experience. Even Keith Haring donated his now-famous image of a person dancing out of the closet for the event.

James Whale And His Pictures

British-born theater and film director James Whale expressed an early interest in art. He learned to stage plays while a prisoner in World War I.

In 1930, after having moved to the states, he met handsome assistant story editor David Lewis in Hollywood. They openly shared a home in Pacific Palisades for twenty years.

Whale is known for directing horror films such as Frankenstein, Bride of

Frankenstein, and The Invisible Man, which were all blockbuster hits for Universal Pictures.

Whale retired in comfort and pursued his first love—painting. A stroke left him depleted, and he committed suicide in 1957.

The 1998 film, Gods And Monsters, depicted a fictional account of Whale's final days. The role of James Whale was played by out actor, Ian McKellen.



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Benjamin Crump, attorney for the families of Treveon Martin and Michael Brown, and a leading civil rights lawyer in the nation, with Joe and Myrna Morrissey

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paid for and authorized by Elect Joe Morrissey

Letter from a Freedman To His Old Master

by JACK R. JOHNSON

WE TEND TO think of relations between races in relatively binary terms—especially in historical contexts. If you quiz a conservative of the far right about the relations between blacks and whites prior to the civil war, many answer with a cliché trope from the misty wings of Lost Era nostalgia: they assert that Afro-Americans were relatively content in their positions on plantations where they were housed and clothed in exchange for daily labor. Quiz a liberal about the same period and they might answer with an equally cliché trope that harkens back to the worst of Uncle Tom's misery from Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel. Of course, the truth varies greatly depending on the plantation, the owner, and a thousand other complicating factors. The unfortunate circumstance for historians is that there's not a lot of primary source evidence—especially not from the slaves. In many states (including Virginia) slaves were actively discouraged from reading and writing if not legally reprimanded for doing so.

Occasionally, however there were exceptions. A good example is the following letter from ex-slave Jordan Anderson.

In 1825, at eight years old, Jordan Anderson was sold into slavery in Tennessee as a servant of Colonel P.H. Anderson, and worked as a slave on his plantation for 39 years. In 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, Jordan took advantage of the Union army sweeping into the area to escape with his wife and make it safely to Dayton, Ohio where he began a new life as a free man.

About a year later, in July of 1865, Colonel Anderson wrote to Jordan and asked him to return to work on the plantation because he needed help to make it productive again.

Jordan Anderson dictated his response, and it was subsequently published in the Cincinnati Commercial newspaper under the title:

"Letter from a Freedman to His Old Master"

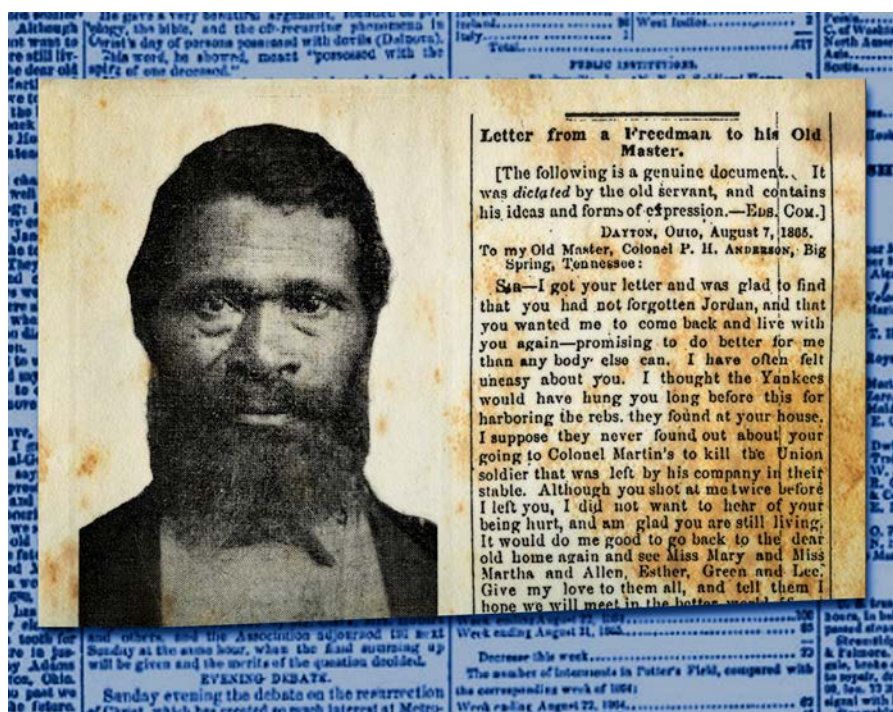
It is a masterpiece of irony that serves both to entertain and edify. Enjoy.

Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865

To My Old Master, Colonel P.H. Anderson, Big Spring, Tennessee

Sir: I got your letter, and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jordan, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this, for harboring Rebs they found at your house. I suppose they never heard about your going to Colonel Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable. Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living. It would do me good to go back to the dear old home again, and see Miss Mary and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working in the Nashville Hospital, but one of the neighbors told me that Henry intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here. I get twenty-five dollars a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy,—the folks call her Mrs. Anderson,—and the children—Milly, Jane, and Grundy—go to school and are learning well. The teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday school, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks; but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many darkeys would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master. Now if you will write and



say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost-Marshal-General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years. At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred and eighty dollars. Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the money by Adams's Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors

in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night; but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the negroes any more than for the horses and cows. Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.

In answering this letter, please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up, and both good-looking girls. You know how it was with poor Matilda and Catherine. I would rather stay here and starve—and die, if it come to that—than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters. You will also please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood. The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

From your old servant,
Jordan Anderson **NS**

**VOTE, TUESDAY,
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KIM GRAY

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Kim Gray is a dedicated public servant, committed civic leader, and devoted mother. A native of Richmond, Kim has represented the 2nd District on the Richmond School Board since January 2009. Prior to serving on the School Board, Kim was appointed by Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine to work on transportation, social services, health, and education policy for the Commonwealth. Kim is a 2010 graduate of UVA's Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership, which promotes trust, civility and respect in politics.

Kim believes that Richmond's leaders must be responsive to the needs of its citizens. She will focus her efforts on the following issues:

- **Sound Fiscal Management**

The City must be a thoughtful and transparent steward of our tax dollars. While on the School Board, Kim increased the level of transparency in all school operations and eliminated wasteful spending. As your City Council representative, she will do the same for the City.

- **Quality Schools**

Kim is passionate that every child deserves a quality education. As an eight-year veteran of the School Board, she will make the right funding decisions on City Council regarding our children's collective future.

- **Clean and Safe Neighborhoods**

Taxpayers expect—and deserve—basic services performed in a timely manner. Kim knows that we must address these basic needs before money is spent on non-essential projects.

- **Sensible Economic Development**

Kim will support business development projects that create new jobs, increase tax revenues, and benefit the City as a whole.

***"Gray has the fire of a rookie
mixed with the savvy of a veteran."***

—Style Weekly, Power List. August 19, 2014

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PAID FOR AND AUTHORIZED BY GRAY FOR CITY COUNCIL

KIM GRAY

FOR CITY COUNCIL



Kaity Kasper

RAIN HAS LIFTED

after a week of drumming, and the sun is mostly out, but the lawn chairs still wear a slick of water that Kaity Kasper sponges up with a towel before settling into her seat across from me on the damp deck in her back yard. Traffic out front grinds along Brook Road, and Hope hovers around Kaity, inscribing a circle that none should pass. Hope is Kaity's dog—bronze coat, brown nose and the same brown eyes of its owner. Hope is extremely protective of Kaity, wouldn't let anyone bother her, ever, and Hope means business.



FIFTEEN YEARS

ago, Kaity met a young man named Evan. He was studying in Richmond, a brilliant young candidate in the MD PhD program at MCV, doing research at the Massie Cancer Center. In July he took Kaity down to Florida to visit his parents. During that trip both Kaity and Evan contracted strep throat.

"And we had swollen glands and got on antibiotics," Kaity recalls. Where Evan's symptoms vanished quickly, Kaity's was an obstinate case. One of the lymph nodes in her neck refused to deflate.

"So everybody just thought it was this colony of strep that had just built itself up and wouldn't go away," says Kaity. "My doctor in Baltimore gave me another round of antibiotics. The node would get smaller, and then it would get big again."

By October, Kaity was able to find a job in Richmond and move in with Evan. She talked with Evan's dad, a radiologist, about that one lymph node. "This shouldn't be happening," he told her.

In Richmond, her new primary care physician prescribed more antibiotics, and, time and again, the lymph node would get smaller, then swell up. That February, Evan and Kaity went out backpacking in Canyonlands National Park. Kaity, who had always been athletic, was having trouble keeping up with Evan on the trail. She was easily winded and would tire out after slight exertion.

While the pair rested at one point, Kaity dropped her water bottle and Evan went to retrieve it. During that short time she set up her camera, set the timer and prepared to take a photo of herself. After snapping the picture,

she went to retrieve the camera and brought her fingers to her neck to scratch an itch, and she made a discovery that would be the first step in a journey that is still just beginning.

"I have the last picture I ever took before cancer became a thing in my life," Kaity says. "When I itched my neck that day, I felt a second lymph node."

When Evan returned, with water bottle in hand, Kaity told him what she had found. Evan knew a thing or two about cancer. He knew how to read the signs.

The couple packed out that day and flew back to Richmond. Within a week, doctors performed surgery and removed the first lymph node and biopsied it. She and Evans sat in the ENT's office and awaited the result.

"Your biopsy came back and it's malignant," the ENT specialist told them.

Kaity smiled, and turned to Evan. "That's the good one, right," she said.

"No," he said. "That's not the good one."

The doctor gave Kaity a slip of paper with the names of three oncologists on it. As she and Evan left the office and moved to the back of elevators, Kaity handed the paper over to Evan.

"Which one do I call," she asked. Her voice was low and quavering.

Evan eyed the names, then balled up the paper, and said, "You don't call any of them."

At that time, Evan was working in the lab of Dr. Gordon Ginder, the director of Massie Cancer Center and a leading specialist on lymphomas. Evan called Dr. Ginder and set up an appointment almost immediately.

"Dr. Ginder has been my oncologist for the last fourteen years," Kaity tells me. "And I fully credit him with saving my life that go around. He made sure I had the best care possible. I spent the better part of that year doing chemo and radiation therapy under Dr. Ginder's supervision. It was stage 2B Hodgkin's lymphoma. The diagnosis was at the end of March and I finished the radiation the day before Thanksgiving."

It was a complete and utter cure. Which is not terribly surprising. There is, according to Kaity, about a 90 percent cure rate for Hodgkin's lymphoma especially for someone in their early twenties. At the time Kaity was just twenty-three. "It was scary," she says. "But I don't think I ever thought death was on the table with that one."

During that year of treatment, Kaity chose her profession. After every round of chemotherapy, Kaity received a care package from her sister-in-law, Pam, who lived in Arizona. In the box, following the second round of chemo, there was a blanket, some slippers, a book and a couple of CDs. Among the film offerings was "Legally Blonde."

"Evan would get me set up for the day when I was recovering from chemo and then he would go down to Massie for a couple hours and then come back home in the mid-afternoon and spend some time with me" says Kaity. "This one particular day I watched 'Legally Blonde' and by the time he got home I had used what was left of my savings to register to take an LSAT prep course."

She did better than expected on the LSAT's and started law school at University of Richmond ten months after her final treatment for Hodgkin's. After the first month in law school, she and Evan were married. Once she passed the bar, Kaity went to work for Hancock Daniel, Johnson and Nagle, the firm where she's worked ever since. "I've been there my whole career," she says. "I do commercial litigation, so I specialize in insurance coverage work."

The couple later moved to Durham so Evan could do his residency at Duke. Kaity commuted, working a few days each week in Richmond, but doing the majority of her work from her home in North Carolina.

Seven years after their marriage, the couple divorced. "When Evan and I started dating, I was still very much who I was in high school," says Kaity. "I was still painfully shy, very nervous, unsure of myself and just really wasn't comfortable in who I was. I think the

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO

FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD



experience of going through cancer and going through law school changed that a lot. We loved each other, but I couldn't promise him the thing he really wanted. I didn't see myself as a stay at home mom, and he wanted someone in that role."

She raises her left arm, which is inscribed with a smattering of tattoos. "I joke about this arm as being a scratch pad of my life," she says. Kaity points to a tattoo with three simple words—I love you—in the ditch of her arm where ulna and humerus join. "That's where the infusion site was for my chemo," she says.

Another tattoo describes two birds in flight. "I heard a sermon a couple years ago about how God doesn't want us to stay close to our tree where we feel comfortable, he wants us to fly away from the tree and out of our comfort zones to do work there," she says. "So it's a reminder to go fly and do the work where I'm not comfortable all the time."

And there's also a single semicolon tattoo, as in Project Semicolon, founded in 2013 by Amy Bleuel, and inspired by her own struggle with depression, mental illness, suicide attempts, and the loss of her father to suicide. "It's a pause, instead of stopping the sentence," Kaity explains. "You have to pause and realize the story's going to keep going on. Don't put an end to it with a period."

Then her hand brushes a quote that reads, "It's so awkward to be a Phoenix," which was written by one of Kaity's favorite authors, Seth Haines. "It's a line he wrote to his wife during his first ninety days of sobriety," she

says. "I got that one shortly after I got into the Al-Anon program, and realized the twelve-steps would be one of the key things that helped me in my journey of really rising again from those ashes."

If that arm is a scratch pad, its sister on the right is a finished canvas. "It's the story of my Hodgkin's experience," says Kaity. "I worked with Katie Davis at Salvation Tattoo Gallery to do it."

It features the billowing petals of ranunculus and cherry blossoms, three birds and a New Testament quote. "Ranunculus has always been my favorite flower and cherry blossoms symbolize the beauty and fragility of human life," Kaity says. She rubs her right shoulder, and by so doing, touches the head of an owl. "The owl is for the wisdom that we gain from the experiences in our life," she says and then moves her hand down to her lower biceps. "The dove represents the Holy Spirit," she says. "I feel the Holy Spirit guides me in my decisions in the way that I try to lead and live my life. And just from the way I found my way to Dr. Ginder and through my diagnosis and that experience, the Holy Spirit was entwined in that."

At the bottom is a hummingbird. "He is there for love and laughter and lightness," Kaity says. And then she reads a passage written on her arm. "It's half of a quote from Jesus," she says. "The full quote is 'You do not realize now what I'm doing, but later you'll understand.' It's about those times we don't know what it is God is doing through us, but when we look backward later, we understand."

From the time Kaity Kasper was a child, she had a keen sense of the Divine. She was raised a Catholic in a small town in Connecticut, though her parents weren't particularly devout. "I don't remember going to church as family very often," says Kaity. "But I do remember there was this small church you could walk to from our house and I remember taking myself there and I couldn't really figure out why. At an oddly young age I would go to the self-help section of the library and get these books out by rabbis and I would lay in the backyard and underline them in pencil. I was probably twelve or thirteen when I started doing this. I was just interested in what they were saying and what they were talking about. It always felt to me like God was doing something here." When her parents divorced, her mother took a job as a gym teacher in the local parochial school. "So the class would go to first Friday mass together and I remember very clearly I would always pray while I was there that you'd hear about all the sacraments and you would hear about Holy Orders and I would always pray that God would call me to a nun," Kaity says. "I would always say, 'God, that's

what I want to do, please call me to be a nun.' I remember being so disappointed and thinking something was so wrong with me because God didn't want me to be a nun and I couldn't figure it out. But I've always had, from a very young age, some connection to that, and an unwavering knowing He was there for me."

Kaity had converted to Judaism, the faith of her former husband, and she stuck with it for a year after their divorce. Then she tried returning the religion of her birth, but that didn't work. "I felt stalled and I felt like God kept saying to me, 'There's something else that has to break out here, and you're not going to find it in this cathedral,'" she says. "And so I ended up exploring some other churches throughout Richmond during that time, and that was really when things got a little bit more serious for me."

That's when she began to view yoga and meditation more seriously. "I think through those disciplines He (God) was able to speak to me more clearly," Kaity says. "I was learning the value of listening in prayer. How it can be a two-way dialogue. Once that happened it became the no turning back

point. It was a stirring that kept getting louder and louder."

That was about five years back, when Kaity learned what yoga is really about from Dana Walters of Om On Yoga on Libbie Avenue. "Through her I really started to discover the ways that yoga can change not just our physical body, but our spiritual and emotional bodies," says Kaity. "Once I got there, it became really apparent to me that the connection I had been looking for was going to come from God and one-on-one time."

On March 21 of this year Kaity was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

"It came completely out of the blue as ovarian cancer is wont to do," Kaity says. "I had a partial hysterectomy. They were able to keep my uterus, but I lost both ovaries, my fallopian tubes, my appendix, seven lymph nodes, the tumors I had developed, and a ton of fluid that had built up over about a month."

She was enrolled in a clinical trial down at Massie Cancer Center, where she had done years of volunteer work. It was a grueling chemotherapy, one week on, one week off, a total of six rounds, and each bout left Kaity annihilated.

The prognosis for her kind of ovarian cancer is not good. "Ovarian cancer only has a twenty percent cure rate," says Kaity. "And less than fifty percent of women that are diagnosed with it are expected to live for five years. I'm thirty seven and I was like, 'I already did cancer, what the hell is going on?' I could not even get my head around the fact that this was happening again, fourteen years after I did it the first time."

When she returned to her home in Bellevue she assumed a number of her close friends would be there for her. But that was not to be the case. "My very best friend lives in California—he's like my brother—and he couldn't even talk to me because he thought I was going to die. I thought people were going to be in the mud with me and I was really, really pissed with God for a while. 'What are you doing? You're taking all my people away.'" And then she breathed deeply and opened herself up.

"God created this situation where I was forced to be alone with him in this," Kaity says. "God could not have done the work that he needed and wanted to do with me in this space, if I was not alone. I have a lot of child-

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hood trauma around abandonment and so this triggered those abandonment issues when my people didn't show up. I think that's what plunged me directly into the dark. You take a cancer diagnosis and add abandonment on top of it, then you will plummet to darker places than you thought possible."

In those dark nights of the soul—and there were many of them—Kaity learned something that most of us will never begin to understand. "Regardless of what other people may do, God is never going to abandon me," she says. "God gave me just enough support so that I always had food, I always had someone to talk to if I really needed, I always had the thing that I needed provided for me, but what I needed was the experience of realizing that I won't abandon myself and God won't abandon me, and that's actually enough. You can get through the worst kind of crap if you know those two things."

Not long ago, Katy came to a startling revelation. For many years, after the cure of her Hodgkin's lymphoma, Catie became a spokesperson for Massie Cancer Center for their fun-

draisers. She said the following more than one hundred and fifty times: "I am someone your donation would help because I have a greater than one hundred percent chance of developing cancer again." She said this because she carries the BRCA1 gene mutation, has endured radiation and chemo therapy, and, of course, had had Hodgkin's. Last month, while attending a yoga function in Floyd County, something occurred to Kaity that caused her mind to reel. "I have been learning about the power of our words, and the things we say and I was thinking of the times I said, 'I have a hundred percent change of developing cancer,' and it smacked me in the face in Floyd that day. I said that out loud almost two hundred times over the course of four years. I'm pretty well convinced I manifested this thing."

The moment that thought crystalized, Kaity felt her stomach drop. "Oh my God," she thought. "I did this to myself. What in the world?"

It took her a time to regain composure, and then she began to understand that she was learning something from this. "It's disturbing on multiple levels," says Kaity. "But it's also really

encouraging to me because it demonstrates to me so clearly that if I could manifest it into existence, I could manifest it away. I have the ability to make sure it doesn't happen again."

Recently, Kaity made a decision that some might think unwise. For many cancer patients, doctors administer a CA 125 test to monitor the patient's blood to ensure cancer has not recurred. The normal range in healthy patients is 5 to 20; Kaity's CA 125 was 208. Through the course of the chemotherapy those levels dropped to between 198 and 134, but they fluctuated within that range after each chemo treatment. One doctor recommended that Kaity receive chemotherapy for the rest of her life as long as her body could endure it. This same physician told her the cancer was incurable.

But Kaity was hearing another voice that she had become accustomed to.

"I heard God's voice, clear as day, say 'Do not do any more chemotherapy, that's not what you need,'" says Kaity. "I am someone who hears a voice that's not mine when it's God communicating with me. God to me is a man. It's a slightly deeper voice than how I hear my own voice, and it

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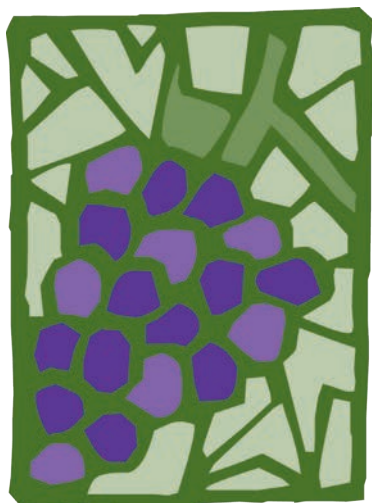
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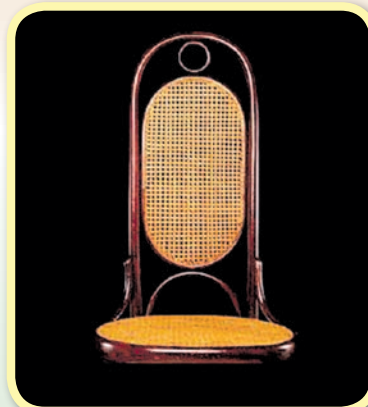
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comes from a different place. When I hear my own thoughts they come from the brain. When I hear something that's coming from God it's coming from my core."


So she opted out of chemotherapy. And she prayed to God that here numbers drop by at least five points. A month after she stopped treatment, Kaity's numbers had dropped from 198 to 68. "It still boggles my mind," she says, and she cries in a burst of joy. "This was just last August."

Soon, Kaity will embark on a journey of discovery and bring back secrets that will help others heal themselves. "This is going to be an eighteen-month exploration," she says. "God wants me in certain spots. Sedona, Ojai, Big Sky, Lourdes, Costa Rica, the Holy Land. Those are some of the places, there will be others and I will be guided to them."

It is as if God had plucked her for this purpose. "I think what He wants me to do is to bring this stuff back and through writing and speaking and working with people one-on-one to help people learn how we can walk in faith in such a way that allows us to tap into the voice of the Holy Spirit,

Creator, Universe, Source, whatever you want to call it," she says. "If you're attuned to God, He will show you where to go and what to do and he'll deliver you, but you have to be willing to listen and to hear it"

Through the afternoon some clouds have moved back in, but they don't seem to threaten rain, they just block out the sun. Kaity's dog Hope nestles its snout in her lap, and she strokes its ears.

"I would never pray to have cancer, but I got it, I needed it, and I've learned tremendous amounts through it," says Kaity Kasper. "If you really can surrender things, that's when beauty starts to happen. It just doesn't appear in the way we want it to. I did not want my healing to take the form of a partial hysterectomy and chemotherapy and all the various things I've gone through in the past six months. That is not what I pictured in my head. Would I trade it now? No, because there's been so much beauty brought in through that horrible time. If you ask me if I would willingly go through this again, I would say no, but I wouldn't take it back." 



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BOOK REVIEW

Creating Family Anew Amidst Unending Sorrow

by FRAN WITHROW

IN 2008, WHEN OWEN Gerson was eight years old, his family went on a river trip in Utah. His mother, father and older brother made it back home, but Owen did not. He drowned in the Green River at a place called Disaster Falls.

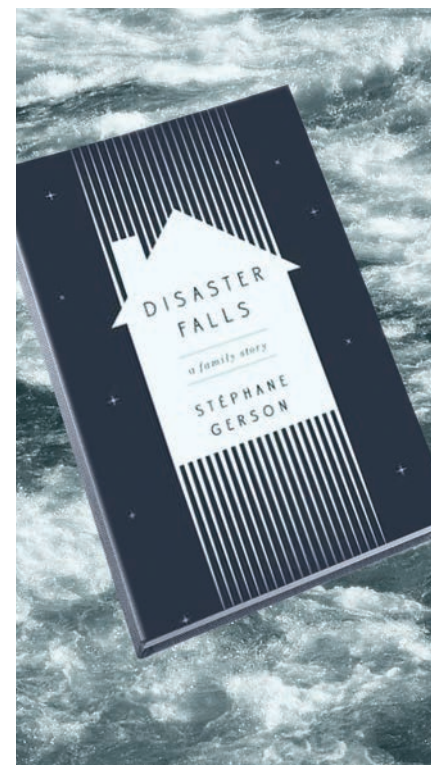
Owen's father, Stephane Gerson, a cultural historian and professor of French studies at New York University, wrote a haunting memoir about how his family journeyed through this most devastating of losses. Gerson's account is filled with understated grief, written with unabashed honesty in a way that is moving without being maudlin.

This beautifully written book goes far beyond the expected heartache, giving us a real life, no-holds-barred picture of Gerson's new life. With clarity and insight, Gerson writes not only about himself, but his wife Alison and older son Julian. He maintains a compassionate respect for his family, including Owen, even questioning whether sharing this story is an appropriate response and not an exploitation of Owen's life.

Slowly, gradually, Gerson reveals how the accident happened. Each glimpse is followed by Gerson's astute observations of life without Owen, and the inevitable questions a parent might face in this situation. Is there any way he could have saved Owen? Is it okay to acknowledge that Owen was not a perfect child, and is it okay to laugh again? How does a marriage, a family, survive when the unthinkable becomes reality?

Gerson is also objective in his descriptions of the very different ways he and his wife Alison came to terms—as best one can—with the loss of their son. Gerson turned to writing (“I write because there are no words,” he says, though he acknowledges it is more than that), while his wife “could not stop moving.” Alison jogged, worked out, and took long walks. He explains her thinking: “If she remained immobile, she would plunge to the depths of the river.”

Every parent understands that feeling.



Yet this lyrical book is more than a chronicle of Owen's accident and the immediate aftermath. Gerson, born and raised in Belgium, deftly weaves his family history into the narrative: from his Jewish grandparents' experiences during World War II to his troubled relationship with his father. As his father and he delve into an exploration of the past, Gerson gains further insight into the life he now leads. When his father and he visit their Belarus homeland, he is able to look into the past as well as the future. His father “had brought me to a land in which those who had failed to save loved ones did not necessarily live in shame or guilt.” That is no small thing.

“Disaster Falls,” coming out in January, is a story of reclaiming hope, of finding comfort, and of creating a family anew amidst unending sorrow. It is a carefully crafted treasure. Read it slowly, in part because of the subject, but also to savor the loving way Gerson honors Owen while finding a path back to peace. **NJ**

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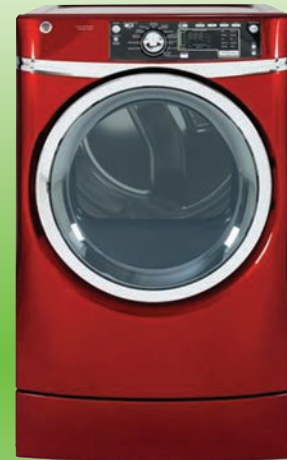
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