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COVER PHOTO BY REBECCA D'ANGELO

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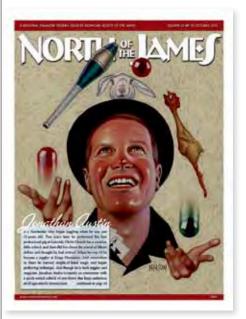
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LETTERS

From Jonathan Austin



I cannot thank you enough for featuring me on the cover of this past North of the James magazine. It was an absolute pleasure to talk to you and be interviewed by you for this. You put me completely at ease and I could not have been happier with the results.

Needless to say, I was a little skeptical at first, as I feel that I have been misquoted in the past with the press. Not the case here at all. I really like how the article made you feel like you were right there with me. You truly captured the essence of what I do and with what I have dedicated my life to.

If there is anything that I can ever do for you, please let me know. I certainly would suggest to all that you interview that you need not worry with you. Thank you so much. I hope to see you soon. I will always treasure my experience of being on the cover and the featured article in North of the James.

Best wishes, Jonathan Austin

From Stir Crazy

Charles,

Thank you so much for the article.

You really captured everything I was hoping for and more. Thank you for everything you do for the community. We truly appreciate you.

Claire McGowan



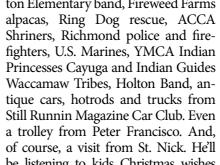
Parade Includes Bill Bevins, Jonathan the Juggler, Holton Elementary School students, Police, Firefighters, U.S. Marines, ACCA Shriners, Fireweed Farms Alpacas, Antique Cars, St. Nick, and much more! Crafts Vendors. Plus Live Music on Stage!

11th Annual Christmas on MacArthur



Jump start the holidays with Christmas on MacArthur, a day of family fun that benefits Toys for Tots. Christmas on MacArthur has become the largest single donor to Toys for Tots—the U.S. Marine Corps annual toy drive. What's more every toy donated locally is given to a local child in need. This year's Christmas on MacArthur runs from 11 till 4 pm on Saturday, December 12.

Christmas on MacArthur kicks off with the Santa Parade down the center of the 4000 block of MacArthur Avenue. This year Bill Bevins, the voice of the Soft AC Morning Show on Easy 100.9 FM, will emcee the parade. Among the participants of this year's parade are Jonathan the Juggler, students of Holton Elementary, John Marshall High School band, Huguenot High School Drum Line, the Holton Elementary band, Fireweed Farms alpacas, Ring Dog rescue, ACCA Shriners, Richmond police and firefighters, U.S. Marines, YMCA Indian Princesses Cayuga and Indian Guides Waccamaw Tribes, Holton Band, antique cars, hotrods and trucks from a trolley from Peter Francisco. And, of course, a visit from St. Nick. He'll be listening to kids Christmas wishes







Above, top: Holton School Principal David Hudson

Above, bottom: US Marines with toy transport.

Left, top: Petting the Fireweed Farms

Left, bottom: Holton Elementary School Choir.

throughout the day, following the parade.

Starting right after the parade, the All Saints School Choir will perform on the stage at Once Upon A Vine, followed by Jason Newcomb and Frank DeAlto at 12:45. Next in the lineup is Amy Henderson at 1:35; Susan DePhillip's and Friends at 2:25; and Josh Small at 3:15.

Christmas on MacArthur also offers great holiday shopping opportunities. Scores of vendors will be on hand with their handmade arts and crafts, all locally made, one-of-a-kind products, which make perfect Christmas gifts.

None of this would be possible without the hard work and commitment of David Hudson of Holton Elementary, the Bellevue Merchants Association, Mike LaBelle, Chris and Cecelia Rich of Rich's Stitches, Bob Kocher of Once Upon A Vine, Teri Phipps and David Schieferstein, Amy Foxworthy and Josh Carlton of the mill on Mac-Arthur, Claire McGowan of Stir Crazy, Bobby Shore and Rich Richardson of Decatur's Garage, Joe Stankus of Classic Touch Cleaning, Chris Egghart, John Whiting, Larry Brown, and scores of other volunteers too numerous to name.

This event is sponsored each year by the Bellevue Merchants Association, North of the James magazine and Holton Elementary School.



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SEASONAL OFFERINGS



Concert Ballet of Virginia's 40th Performance of The Nutcracker

For 40 years now Concert Ballet of Virginia has presented Richmond's most beloved rendition of The Nutcracker. Under the guidance of Scott Boyer, this classic has become a Richmond holiday tradition. The Nutcracker Suite, an abbreviated 45-minute version of the ballet perfect for younger audiences, will be performed December 6 at Williamsburg Regional. The full Nutcracker Ballet will be performed at Monacan High School in Chesterfield County on December 12 and 13, and at Atlee High School in Hanover Country on December 19 and 20. Adults, \$24; children and seniors \$20. Please call (804) 798-0945.



Model Railroad Show Pulling Into The Science Museum of Virginia

Dust off your conductor's hat and get ready for the 38th Annual Model Railroad Show this Thanksgiving weekend at the Science Museum of Virginia.

The Museum invites families and friends to join an annual holiday tradition beginning Friday, November 27 through Sunday, November 29. Guests are encouraged to explore the Museum and enjoy a diverse collection of model train layouts during this special holiday celebration.

Intricate landscapes and miniature cities adorn the Museum, with layouts ranging from traditional to unique and quirky. All weekend, guests can watch a blacksmith in action or visit Clydesdale horses—the transportation of choice before the dawn of the iron horse.

Stop by the Challenge Lab to uncover the science of trains, from creating circuits to building an electro magnet; or join a workshop to uncover the magic behind model train displays. Guests are encouraged to take a trip outside to the tracks for self-guided tours of several historic train cars and enjoy an exclusive tour of the luxurious Car ONE.

Weekend activities include live science demonstrations and special performances by the Carpenter Science Theatre Company. The Dome Theatre will feature Humpback Whales and special live Cosmic Expeditions, Dark Universe and Wildest Weather in the Solar System over the holiday weekend.



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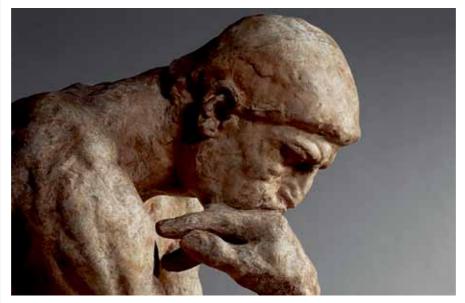
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The Thinker by Auguste Rodin.

Rodin: Evolution of a Genius At The VMFA

rganized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Musée Rodin in Paris, this exhibition will feature nearly 200 works by the greatest sculptor of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This show reveals this sculptor's evolution, examining his techniques, materials, models and assistants, while exploring

the process behind some of his most notable works. Through March 13. Read more at vmfa.museum/exhibitions/exhibitions/augusterodin/#q8eoz40v0WyCEFzV.99

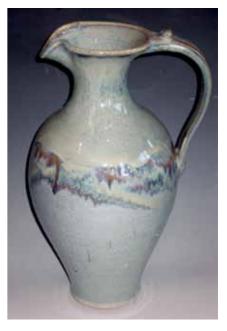


Pottery by Nga Nguyen-Weaver one of the featured artists on the Artwalk.

26th Annual Northside Artists' **Holiday Artwalk**

Starting at 3323 Gloucester Road this event features the works of more than 40 local artists showing their creation in five historic Northside home, all within a two block radius. From hand-thrown pottery, artful etchings, photography, and much, much more, there is something for everyone. November 21, 9-5 pm. For more information call 804-833-5044.

30th Annual 43rd Street Gallery Handmade **Open House**

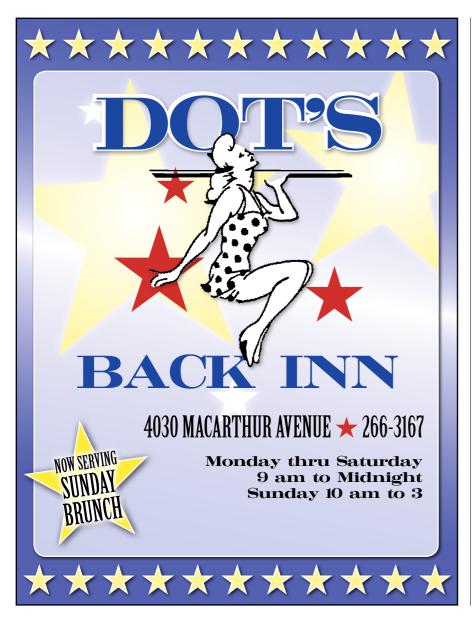


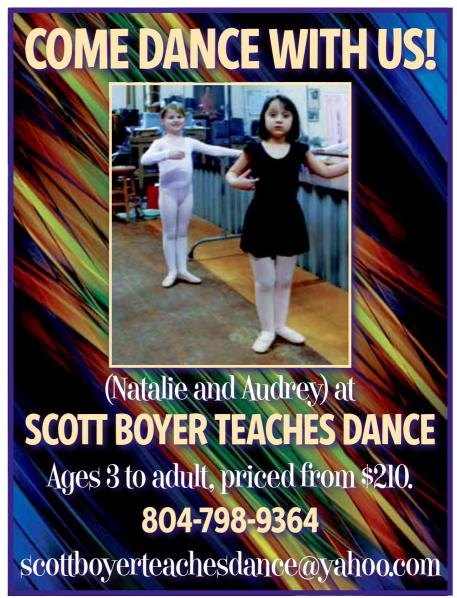
Pottery pitcher by Robin Cage at 43rd Street Gallery.

This is a great way to get over Thanksgiving. Annual open house begin 10 am, Friday, November 27. Local and American artisans have created an array of fine crafts and affordable gifts for the holidays. Enjoy cider and refreshments as you shop for pottery, jewelry, and other unique items. Open daily in December with extended hours. Monday-Friday, 10-6; Saturday, 10-5; Sunday 12-4. 1412 W. 43rd Street, 23225. 804-233-1758

12th Annual **Ginter Park Arts And Crafts** Show At LGRA

It's become a Northside tradition! The annual fine arts and crafts show features over 50 artisans on December 5 from 10am-5pm at Lewis Ginter Recreation Association, 3421 Hawthorne Avenue. Stir Crazy Café will again be serving up delicious sandwiches, salads, wraps and coffee. Live music and free parking at All Saints School. Featured works include pottery, jewelry, fiber, works in oil, metal and much more. For more information, contact Diana Vicenti at sewdianavicenti@ gmail.com 🕦







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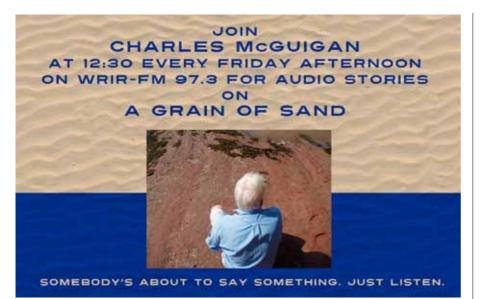


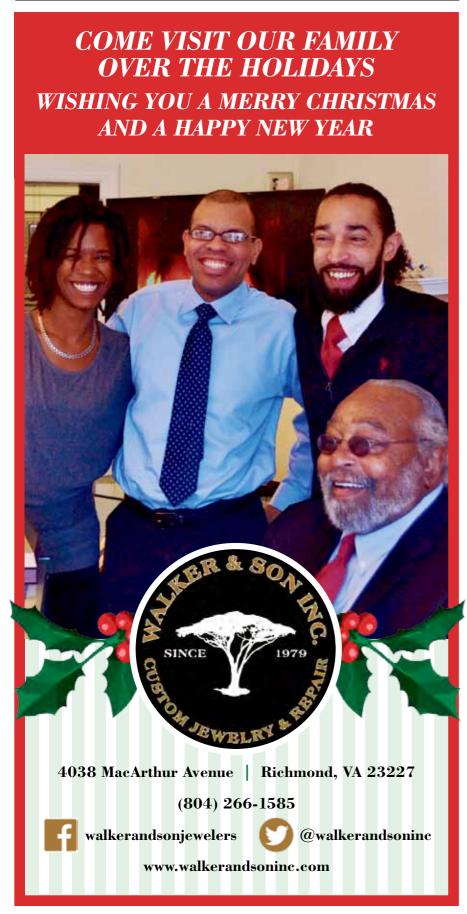
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MUSIC

Taters for the Holidays



November 30, 5 pm, Tree Lighting at The Jefferson Hotel, 101 W Franklin Street; December 5, 7 pm at The Tin Pan, 8982 Quioccasin Road; December 8, 12:30 pm, Lunchtime Concert at VCU Medical, VCU Medical Center Gateway Building, 1200 East Marshall Street; December 16, 7 pm, Positive Vibe Café, 2825 Hathaway Road; December 19, 8 pm TaterSons Christmas Show! at Ashland Coffee & Tea, 100 N. Railroad Ave Ashland.

Joe Enroughty And His Royal Virginians, Big Band Christmas In The Air December 6, 3-5pm Christ Ascension Episcopal Church, 1704 West Laburnum Avenue.

For more information visit www.guylombardomusic.com or call (804)-864-1040.

Small Merritt



November 21, 9 pm, Iron Horse, Ashland; December 3, 8 pm, Rare Olde Times; December 4, 7 pm, JJ's Grille; December 10, 6 pm, Daddio's Grille; December 12, 8 pm, O'Bank's; December 13, 6 pm, Aunt Sarah's.

Gellman Room Concert Series Feature Christmas Music

Finnsbury Minstrel Guild performs Christmas, Klezmer, and other music of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. December 5, 2 pm; Richmond Boys Choir performs their 19th annual library concert December 12, 2 pm. Richmond Public Library, 101 East Franklin Street.



It's become a Northside tradition!

The annual fine arts and crafts show features over 50 artisans Saturday Dec. 5 10am-5pm. Back again this year is Stir Crazy Cafe serving up delicious sandwiches, salads, wraps and coffee. Live music and free parking at All Saints School.

We began 12 years ago with 10 artists in one room and now take over Lewis Ginter Recreation Association's entire historic building at 3421 Hawthorne Ave., RVA 23222.

Featured artisan's works include pottery, jewelry, fiber, works in oil, metal and more. Come out and visit with our veteran artisans, meet some of our artists new to the show this year and catch up with old friends as this is a wonderful social event as well. As one shopper stated last year, "It's my favorite day of the year!"

For more information, contact Diana Vicenti at sewdianavicenti@gmail.com











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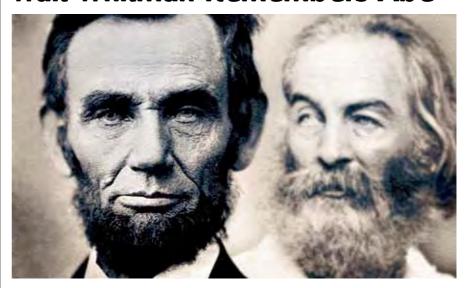




RAINBOW MINUTES

by BRIAN BURNS and JUDD PROCTOR

Walt Whitman Remembers Abe



N APRIL 15, 1865, poet Walt Whitman opened the morning paper.
Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated. Like millions of Americans, he was utterly stunned

Peter Doyle, with whom Whitman shared his life, had been at Ford's Theater and relayed eyewitness accounts of the shooting to Whitman. Later, Whitman gave lectures about his treasured President, detailing his tragic, final moments.

The depth of Whitman's grief spoke of his affinity for Lincoln. They had suffered together through the most obscene crime in history, the Civil War. So many comrades, literally and figuratively, had been violently destroyed.

Whitman penned the last great poem of his career honoring Lincoln, which he titled, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." The heart-shaped leaves of the lilac bush had symbolized his love for the fallen President.

The AIDS Awareness Stamp

On World AIDS Day, December 1, 1993, the U. S. Postal Service joined the American Association for World Health, the Centers for Disease Control and the Point of Light Foundation in raising awareness about AIDS. It issued a 29-cent AIDS Awareness stamp. Historically, World AIDS Day is an international observance designed to provide education and awareness on issues surrounding HIV/AIDS.

The stamp, designed by artist Tom Mann of Warrenton, Virginia, features a red ribbon – symbolizing compassion and awareness. The Postal Service issued 25 million booklets of 10 stamps nationwide, with AIDS hotline and referral numbers listed on the booklets. Sheets of 50 stamps were also put on sale.

Other public health related stamps include ones related to public health, public hospitals, polio and cancer.

Vito Russo and the Flicks

Author and gay activist, Vito Russo, was born in 1946, and later studied cinema at New York University. In 1970, he staged the first-ever gay film festival, to raise money for the Gay Activist Alliance.

His life's work was an analysis of gay portrayals in Hollywood movies of the past. "In a hundred years of movies, homosexuality has only rarely been depicted on the screen," he said. "When it did appear, it was there as something to laugh at, or something to pity, or even something to fear." In the 70s he gave lectures all across America, asserting that these gay stereotypes in movies have perpetuated the oppression of gay people.

In 1981, Russo's groundbreaking book, "The Celluloid Closet," showcased his work. In 1996, it became a television movie narrated by out actress, Lily Tomlin.





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Robin Cage

KISSED BY FIRE

IT'S A RAMBLING SHOTGUN OF A BUILDING

on a side street in Woodland Heights, a clapboard with large storefront windows on the front elevation. In past incarnations it was a woodworking shop (short-lived), a barber shop (part of it, at any rate) and a grocery store (a place called Gill's Market, where neighborhood kids would ride their bikes on steamy summer afternoons to buy a Co-Cola or a Nehi). Thirty years ago, Robin Cage bought the place from a man named Earl. After the papers were signed, Robin transformed all 2,500 square feet of the building into the 43rd Street Gallery, which houses her pottery studio and kiln, along with a violin shop, which occupies the rear of the building.



Robin Cage greets me at the door and we pass through the gallery, which is neatly appointed with shelving and racks filled with hand-thrown pottery from a variety of artists along with hand-made jewelry and other crafted wonders. We work our way into the back rooms where Robin makes her pottery. These are working rooms where everything is coated in a pale red dust like a Martian landscape. Robin rubs her hands down along the pale blue apron she wears. Her forearms are sinewy. There is a low and constant hum, which is the kiln, "the beast" as Robin calls it. Out of its belly that same evening it will surrender finished pottery after twelve hours of constant firing at a temperature around 2300 degrees.

Robin takes a seat on a stool in front of a work bench and gently presses the tip of a foam rubber brush against the edge of a bowl that is a chalky, pale orange. It has already gone through the bisque fire, prepped now and solid, so Robin can adorn it. This clay, dry and porous, sucks up the pigment like a sponge. The bowl sits on a banding wheel that spins slowly so the rim receives an even coat of this watery pigment that is pewtercolored. When fired, after the glaze is applied, it will turn a rich cobalt blue.

"Kissed by fire," says Robin. It is a transformative kiss, the stuff of fairy tales that alters the very nature of clay, pigments and glaze.

When she completes the lip of the bowl, Robin selects a bamboo-handled brush with an elk hair tip, dips it into another cup of pigment, and with rapid flourishes of her wrist creates a structure like a tree, and then a slender stem sprouting leaves.

"I was strongly influenced by Asian brushwork because it's some of the best around," Robin says. "I studied in Vermont with Malcolm Wright for a time and he studied in Japan. I've been doing this kind of brushwork for thirtyfive years now."

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO



Robin's mother, Barbara, enters the shop. She still lives in the town where Robin was born and at eighty-eight still drives up to Richmond to help out at the gallery. "It's probably the only reason the dust level stays down to a dull roar out front," says Robin.

Robin grew up in Halifax, a town of about seven hundred, in the heart of tobacco country near South Boston. Her father, Robert Fielding Cage, was a tobacco auctioneer and he plied his trade around the country and the world, from Kentucky to Rhodesia. While in Rhodesia he took some art classes and later took another class at the Corcoran Gallery up in Washington, D.C. "He was a painter and sculptor on the side," says Robin. "Being an auctioneer gave him a lot of flexibility with his time so he was able to pursue other things, but he really loved the auctioneering. Mostly he was a self-taught artist and most of his work was abstract." On the side of the 43rd Street Gallery, in the center of an informal garden, stands a twelve-foot high chalice, a sculpture Robin's father created out of old leather cutting dyes that came out of the defunct Craddock-Terry Shoe Corporation, which had once been the largest single employer in Lynchburg.

Robin acknowledges that part of her creative impulse probably came from her father. But more than that, both her father and mother gave her support and an understanding that what matters most in this life is finding your passion and pursuing it. "I think that when you grow up in a family that supports you being an artist or being independent, it makes it easier for you to live that lifestyle," says Robin. "My dad was definitely not an accountant so he didn't expect me to get a job and I never really did."

When she left Halifax, Robin did her undergraduate work in sociology at William and Mary and after graduation followed her main professor out to Bowling Green University in Ohio to earn a master's in corrections and criminology.

But her education in the social sciences would end there. Her professor's wife, Roxie, had something in her basement that would change the course of Robin's life—it was a pottery studio-and the moment Robin threw her first pot, she knew what she would be doing this for the rest of her life. "That's where I started out," she remembers. "I was just fascinated by the process and we got along really well. I had a very good time doing it and found it so much more interesting than crunching numbers. I was sort of worried that if I went ahead and took a real job I wouldn't be able to shift back, so I never did. If you don't make any money it's easier to live off not too much when you're getting started. I just ended up getting sidetracked and never looked back.

When she returned to Richmond, Robin did a two-year apprenticeship with John Freimarck. "I worked in his studio and at one point lived in his house up on Atlee Road," she says. "He paid me a little bit to be an apprentice because I was doing it fulltime with him and learning the trade as best as possible."

When the apprenticeship ended, Robin headed north to study with Malcolm Wright for a year. "Once you put your hand on clay you never look back," she says. "It's intangible, but I do know enough people that have the bug and that it's hard, if not impossible, to let go."

With the training under her belt, Robin returned again to Richmond and set up a studio down on Second and Stockton Streets years before there was any gentrification there. "Now it's the new arts district, but back in the 1980s it was still completely manufacturing," she says. "I mean I'd be working at night and walk outside and feel like I walked into a Hopper painting or something."

And though she kept the space for five years, it had a lot to be desired. "It was a very small space and you'd have turn the heat on when you got there and when it was cold in the morning the pots would be frozen," she says. "Clay does not take kindly to being frozen when it's wet, so it just flops."

In those early years, Robin spent

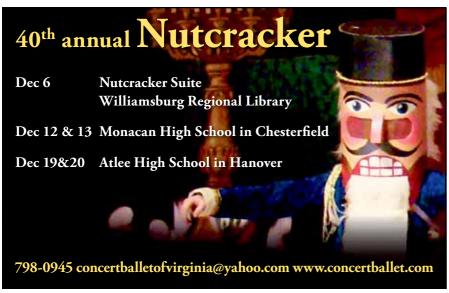
much of her time getting her name out there, along with her work. "You just start applying to shows and once you get enough work together you go on the circuit," she says. "I was probably doing fifteen and twenty shows a year. I was going up to Connecticut and down to Florida and out to Ohio and Michigan. That's just what you did to get going."

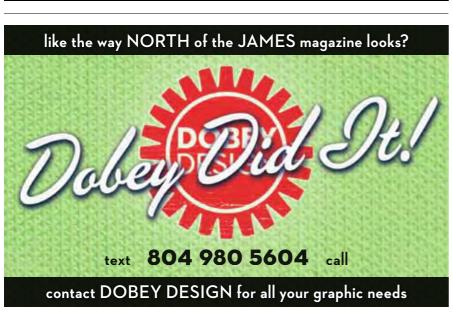
Sometimes her work would sell, other times it wouldn't. "On the good days you get a hotel and on the bad days you sleep in your van," she recalls. "It's much easier to do that when you're young than it is as time goes on. The market's changed a lot over the years and I think it's a much tougher living on the road now than it used to be."

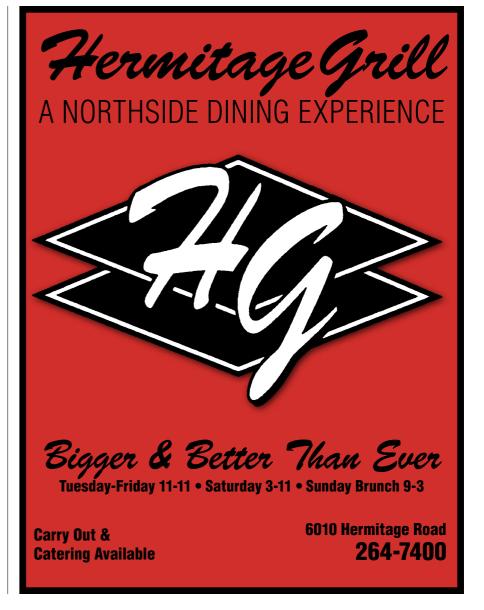
When she finally purchased the shop, things began to change. "The advantage of having a brick and mortar location like this is that my emphasis was getting people to come to me instead of going to them," Robin says. "I could also sell other people's work. Today, I probably have twenty to twenty-five local artists whose work I sell."

And there are a number of galleries most of them within a few hours' drive of her home—that now carry her work. "My primary gallery is Appalachian Spring in Washington, D. C., they've got four locations up there so it's a nice steady stream with them," she says. "I also have A Touch









of Earth in Williamsburg and Matrix Gallery in Blacksburg."

Robin leaves the studio for a minute to check the kiln which has been purring along all morning. When she returns, she says, "I'll have to go back in about fifteen minutes because there's a certain part in the firing called body reduction where you change the settings on the kiln a little bit so that it pulls the iron out of the clay body and gives some of the richness of color that I get out of the firing."

And with that she sits down and begins working on another tray of clay pieces. These are small, long trays, that are crimped every couple inches—olive trays, Robin tells me, what she calls bread and butter items. "They're great for the holidays," she says. "The prices are reasonable."

For the next couple weeks, Robin will be turning out a lot of pottery for her annual open house which starts right after Thanksgiving. As she finishes each olive tray she returns it to a six-foot length of pine board. When they're all finished she balances the plank on her palm, like a server with her tray, and carries it over to shelving that contains row after row of bisquefired pottery waiting to be painted. In

all, she'll finish painting over a hundred pieces of pottery today and then dip each one in a specific glaze.

"I have a large propane kiln," Robin says. "It's big enough to walk in, it's called a car kiln. It holds a lot of pots-maybe two hundred-per firing. I'll spend most of the remainder of today doing brushwork and glazing this load and tomorrow and I'll load them in the kiln." And then she'll fire them for twelve to fourteen hours. "I'll leave it overnight and slowly start opening it the next morning," she says. "Then I'll be in the kiln by noon or two o'clock that afternoon to see how it came out. I'll probably have four large firings by Thanksgiving, with any luck."

Over the years, Robin has experimented with every kind of pigment and glaze imaginable and she has gotten the temperatures just right for successful firings. Yet things sometimes don't turn out the way she expected. "I still mess them up," she says. "So when I have my open house in November we have what's called our annual adopt a pot sale which is all my scratch and dents. I sell them all at one time. I collect them all year long. They have cracks in them. I did glaze experiments that didn't work. But people love them

and some of them are actually quite nice but they just don't fit in with anything else I do."

As Robin speaks, her hands are in constant motion, dipping brush in pigment, touching the tip of the brush to the dry clay. When I tell her I am amazed by the deftness of her handiwork, no brushstroke wasted or miscast, she says, "You get faster, but it doesn't get easier. I've been very fortunate to have a strong body that hasn't been hurt by doing this." And she hoists another pottery-laden plank up to her shoulder and moves over to the shelving.

When she comes back to the work bench, she picks up a stoneware coffee mug made by another artist and takes a sip. She holds it up for my inspection. "A mug is the best example of something you don't make money on," Robin tells me. "I found this thing a potter had written up when I was in Cape Cod. What he said was something like this, 'You wedge the clay. You throw the pot. Then you trim it, then you have to put a handle on it and you have to dry it very slowly or the handle's going to fall off.' But you never make one mug, so I make twenty. Then I have to clean them. Then they have to go in the bisque and I have to have enough of everything to fill a bisque so sometimes it will be a month to six weeks from the time I've thrown something to the time it's finished. So after it comes out of the bisque, I clean it off, get all the dust off, wax the bottom, then I do the brush work. I put the glaze on it, clean the bottom again, put it in the kiln, fire the kiln for the second time, twelve hours, unload the kiln, clean the bottoms, decide which is going to wholesale, which is going to go in the gallery here, price them and out on the shelf." She says this without stopping and you get a feel for just how much work goes into the creation of a single mug.

And stoneware mugs and plates and olive trays like Robin makes will last a lifetime. Because there is a permanence in pottery and something very personal in each piece Robin Cage makes with her own hands. "I've got some great customers who have remained constant over the years along with new ones all the time," she says. "That's just amazing to me that folks I just love appreciate my work and that they enjoy taking it home and living with it. I still can't imagine anything else that I could have done this long and enjoyed this much."



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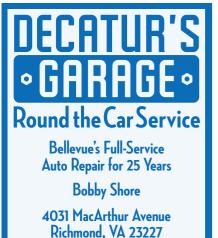
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HIDDEN HISTORIES

Remember, Remember the Fifth of November

by JACK R. JOHNSON



PARE A PENNY FOR THE old guy?

That disarming phrase has a marvelous arc of history behind it.

November 5th is so called "Guy Fawkes Night," the annual celebration of a failed 1605 Gunpowder Plot, an attempted assassination by a group of provincial English Catholics, foremost among them Guy Fawkes, against King James I of England.

According to Reuters, on Guy Fawkes night children traditionally made an effigy of "Gunpowder Plot" conspirator Guy Fawkes and paraded him down streets, asking passers-by to "spare a penny for the Guy." They would then use the money to buy fireworks and burn the effigy on a bonfire. The remembrance of the fifth of November has been reinvigorated lately because of the 2005 film V for Vendetta. In it, the film dramatically retold the story of Guy Fawkes. One of the more memorable moments was the recitation of the traditional rhyme:

Remember, remember the Fifth of November,

The Gunpowder Treason and Plot, I know of no reason

Why the Gunpowder Treason Should ever be forgot.

Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes, t'was his intent

To blow up the King and Parli'ment. *Three-score barrels of powder below*

To prove old England's overthrow;

By God's providence he was catch'd

With a dark lantern and burning match.

Holloa boys, holloa boys, let the bells ring.

Holloa boys, holloa boys, God save the King!

And what should we do with him? Burn him!

And thus the children sing for pennies to burn the old Guy.

The theme of rebellion that the movie inspired and the iconic mask the protagonist wore have since been appropriated by activists ranging from the Occupy dissidents at Zuccotti Park to the hacktivist group, Anonymous.

THEATRE



Holiday Memories

AT QUILL THEATRE

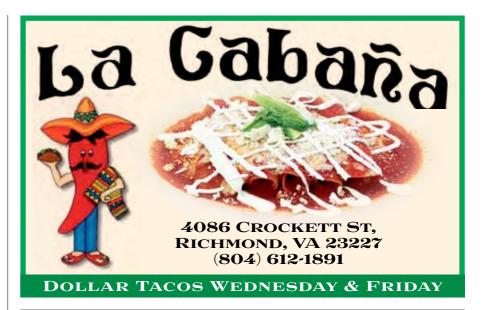
Quill Theatre is proud to present Holiday Memories by Truman Capote as adapted for stage by Russell Vandenbroucke. Adapted from the stories Truman Capote regarded as his greatest works of short fiction, Holiday Memories recalls Capote's 1930's Southern boyhood. One of America's finest memoirists, the author weaves a mesmerizing blend of youthful sensitivity and adult recollection in this loving tribute to his cousin and "best friend," Miss Sook. Charming, hilarious and moving, this will warm the heart and deepen the meaning of beloved holiday rituals. Featuring original country Christmas music by Drew Perkins for this production and directed by Dr. Jan Powell, this delightful family friendly play runs December 3-26 at Grace Street Theatre, 934 W. Grace Street, Richmond 23220.

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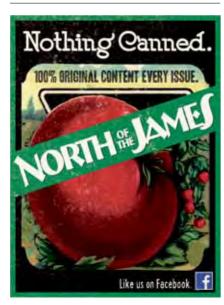
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BOOK REVIEW

A Case History Of Oliver Sacks

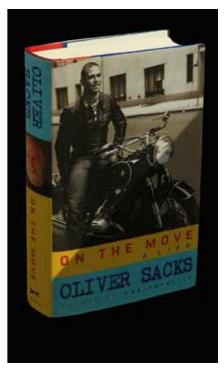
by FRAN WITHROW

LIVER SACKS. the famed neurologist who was a prolific writer throughout his life, published a second memoir just before his death this past August at age 82. (His first was "Uncle Tungsten," and focused on his childhood.) I have been smitten with Sacks since first reading "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat." His books explore a wide range of issues related to the brain: autism, Tourette's syndrome, and Parkinsonism are just a few. I find his chronicles of people with severe neurological impairment to be fascinating, so when I discovered his memoir I eagerly took it home to devour. What would I learn about the man behind these intrigu-

Sacks starts off by sharing his love of motorcycles, swimming, and weightlifting. He speaks fondly of his native England and talks about why he never became a U.S. citizen. We meet his family, which includes a schizophrenic brother and a mother who was one of the first female surgeons in England.

While his reflections are generally chronological, beginning with young adulthood, they are interspersed on a regular basis with musings, sketches of people he has known, and case histories (which I found the most fascinating part of the book). He is candid about his personal life: health issues, his homosexuality, and his joy at finding love at last at the age of 75. He discusses his explorations with drug use and his struggle to overcome his addiction. He confesses to being shy and reveals that he has face blindness (an inability to recognize people by their face).

I always had the impression that Sacks was a highly sought after neurologist who practiced dedicatedly and wrote on the side. However, it seems to me from this reading that Sacks saw himself first as a writer, keeping copious notes and journals from the age of 14. He worked hard



as a neurologist and cared deeply for his patients, going so far as to be available 24 hours a day at Beth Abraham with his post-encephalitic patients (those affected by the "sleepy sickness") who were often awake at odd hours. These patients were the subject of his book "Awakenings," which was later adapted into a movie starring Robin Williams and Robert DeNiro. Everything he experienced in life was potential fodder for a book: a severe leg injury ("A Leg to Stand On"), meeting an amnesiac musician ("Musicophilia"), and his experiences as a doctor ("Migraine").

Sacks' outlook on life is a positive one, at least according to his memoir, even when faced with debilitating sciatica, the loss of his beloved parents, or melanoma in his eye, which caused partial blindness. His massive notes and journals (over a thousand, according to him) were crucial sources for his books. Sacks spent his life exploring what it is like when the mysterious and surprisingly fragile brain misfires. His memoir is honest and unpretentious, a candid look back at a life fully lived. Sacks' reflections are a compelling read. NJ

"On the Move: A Life" by Oliver Sacks, 416 pages, Alfred A. Knopf.



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