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is an illustrious illustrator. During a career that has spanned decades, his work has appeared on the covers and the inside pages of virtually every American magazine and newspaper of merit—Time, Newsweek, The Atlantic Monthly, The New Yorker, The New York Times Book Review, The Wall Street Journal and so on. Bill is equally well-known for his internationally recognized sculptures and ventriloquist fig-

ures, some of which have ended up in the private collections of Demi Moore, Whoopi Goldberg, David Copperfield, Bruce Willis, to name a few. What Bill Nelson manages to do is this: He captures the essence of character in a face, something that not even the most gifted facial contortionist (a politician, for example) can hide from the scrutiny of his eye the and artful movement of his hands. *continued on page 14*



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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY BILL NELSON

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12th Annual Christmas on MacArthur

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

THE 12TH ANNUAL Christmas on MacArthur held Saturday, December 12 was the biggest ever drawing a crowd of about 3,000 people, and just about as many toys were collected for Toys For Toys, the US Marine Corps annual toy drive.

Hours before the parade began, more than fifty vendors selling hand-made arts, crafts and baked goods set up their tables on both sides of MacArthur Avenue. Folks arrived early and began shopping well before eleven that morning.

The parade, which formed at nearby Holton Elementary School, included hundreds of participants and lasted for almost an hour. The following is an abbreviated list of most of the parade's participants: Honor Guard of the Boy Scouts Troop 498 and Cub Scout Pack 498 along with Bellevue's own Charles Pyle; Marines of Hotel Battery, 3rd battalion; Bob Kocher, the father of Christmas on MacArthur, and wife Vera; the Linwood Holton School Band; the Linwood Holton School Choir; the Tuition Monster; Bellevue Security Patrol; Bellevue Security Dog Walk Patrol; Ring Dog Rescue; RPD K-9 Unit; John Marshall High School Band; alpacas from Rockville Alpaca Farm out in Hanover; "Nutzy" the Flying Squirrel (who's name, incidentally, is JT); Saint Andrew's Legion Pipes & Drums; Benedictines Cadets; Holton Safety Patrol; Holton SCA; North Richmond YMCA's Indian Princesses Cayuga Tribe joined by their brother tribe the Mighty Waccamaws; and the Holton Honor Society.

Then came the ACCA Shriners portion of the parade with ATVs, potentates, clowns, a mini-patrol (large men in small cars that belched a haze of gasoline fumes), a patrol of Harleys and the Million Dollar Band, which is a hundred years old this year.

They were followed by droves of Holton students, donning Santa hats and each one carrying an unwrapped toy they deposited in the dozen Toy For Tots boxes lining both sides of the street. Next came the Parade's Queen Daijah, a third grader at Holton in Ms. Sweatt's class; and Parade King Jace Miles from Ms. Dunson's first grade class. The golf cart toting the kids was



Santa Claus and Bob Kocher announce the winners of seven brand new bicycles.



Clowns from ACCA Shriners.

Christmas on MacArthur Avenue



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And Thanks To All The Participants In The Parade, Including David Hudson, Bill Bevins, Jonathan The Juggler, The Parade King & Queen, Traffic Control Volunteers, Talented Musicians, Vendors, Exhibitors And Everyone Else!

HOLIDAY EVENT

driven by Rob Kocher with Lucy Hogan and Mac the spaniel at his side.

There were lots of vintage cars courtesy of Still Running Magazine and local owners, as well as Amanda Lewis, Miss Black Virginia 2015 and the very heart and soul of Christmas on MacArthur, Holton Elementary School Principal David Hudson, who was dressed to the nines behind the wheel of his Red BMW Z3. Santos of Zorba's Pizza tossed a disc of pizza dough from the backseat of his Mustang convertible. Jonathan Austin, juggler, magician, comedian—the consummate entertainer who was born, bred and buttered right here in Bellevue—wowed the crowds with his unparalleled feats of juggling, lobbing the pins higher and higher as if intent on reaching the sun.

Peter Francisco drove his Lakeside Farmers' Market Trolley with wife Sharon at his side with a hand puppet of Lamb Chop.

There were more cars followed by the RPD Mounted Unit—Dawn Nunnally astride Rio, and Freddie Mason on Samson.

At the end of it all, Snowflake, a miniature horse, pulled a cart that held Bellevue's own Santa Claus and his elf. Snowflake and his kindred were bred to haul coal out of the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia. They've got the build—though not the height—of draught horses and can pull a load of half a ton.

The entire parade was emceed by Richmond legend Bill Bevins, the voice of the Soft AC Morning Show on Easy 100.9 FM.

Just after Santa took to his throne outside of Samis Grotto, an old friend told me that this parade was larger than any Christmas festivity of its kind she'd ever seen in a small Virginia town. But that's what Bellevue is—a town. And for the next four hours people strolled MacArthur Avenue, paying homage to the locally owned businesses, purchasing arts and crafts from the more than fifty vendors that lined both sides of the street, and just chit-chatting and whiling away a sun-drenched afternoon in early December.

Throughout the day great musical artists performed on the stage at Once Upon A Vine. That massive stage comes courtesy of Main Stage Productions and Lee Johnson, a close friend of Jimmy's at Dot's Back Inn. The sound system was donated by David Schieferstein who also operated



Holton Elementary School Principal David Hudson flanked by Parade Queen Daijah and Parade King Jace Miles.



The soulful Josh Small on steel guitar entertains on the MacArthur Avenue Stage.

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HOLIDAY EVENT



Bill Bevens, the voice of the Soft AC Morning Show on Easy 100.9 FM, emceed the parade.



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it. This year's acts included All Saints School Choir, Drew Kullman and Erin Frye, Amy Henderson, Susan DePhillips and Friends, and Josh Small.

Christmas on MacArthur ultimately benefits Toys For Tots. It is now one of the single largest donors to this annual

toy drive in Central Virginia. It's great to give.

Here's what one of our local business owners (Tammy Kelley of Appliances on Lakeside) recently wrote me: "This has become our very favorite Christmas activity. We first started by wanting to



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The Holton Elementary School Band.

match the number of toys donated. As you know these boxes do not always fill up as we would like. That being said, we made the decision to spend a certain amount of money to fill the Toys for Tots box. Upon arriving in the toy department at Target, I got the idea to

get the children in the store shopping with their parents to select toys for our basket. I cannot begin to tell you how much fun it is to watch children shop for others. One year I had a little girl give us her gift certificate."

Merry Christmas. 

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RAINBOW MINUTES

by BRIAN BURNS and JUDD PROCTOR

Benjamin Britten, Prominent British Composer



BORN IN ENGLAND IN 1913, Benjamin Britten began playing the piano at age five and was composing at fourteen. He attended the Royal College of Music. But far more significant to him were his evenings in London's concert halls.

The performance of his 1933 work, "A Boy Was Born," was a twist of fate. He met tenor Peter Pears, one of the BBC Singers set to perform the piece. Their

mutual attraction cemented a forty-year personal and professional relationship.

Many of Britten's greatest works were inspired by Pears, or to showcase Pears' voice, such as the opera "Peter Grimes." Other noted works include "A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," "Spring Symphony," and "War Requiem."

Britten was unable to attend the premiere of his last opera, "Death in Venice," due to failing health. In 1976, he died peacefully in Peter Pears' arms.

The Hard Nut by Mark Morris

What would Christmas be without The Nutcracker, or in this case, its campy counterpart, The Hard Nut? The ballet premiered in Brussels in 1991 and was created by openly-gay choreographer, Mark Morris.

The Hard Nut doesn't take place in Victorian times but in 1960s suburbia, with a subtle gay subtext. Instead of toy soldiers doing battle with the

mice, there are G.I. Joes. The "Waltz of the Snowflakes" number includes male dancers in tutus, throwing twenty pounds of confetti snowflakes per show, followed by a strong piece with Drosselmeyer and his nephew. Men and women dance en pointe, including the prissy housekeeper – a drag queen who nearly steals the show.

It's pure fun, just like the holiday.

Josephine Baker Saves The Children

Josephine Baker was born in New York in 1873. Tragically, her three siblings died during their childhood.

In 1898, she graduated from medical school. Determined to keep Victorian views of women from limiting her ambitions, she dressed in masculine suits.

She came to prominence with her historic breakthroughs in preventative medicine while serving as the first director of New York City's Bureau of Child Hygiene. Her pilot programs on child hygiene, maternal education and

midwife training helped drastically reduce the mortality rates of children under five.

In turn, fellow physicians petitioned the mayor, saying her work "ruined medical practice, by its results in keeping babies well." Josephine wrote she was profoundly grateful for the compliment.

She spent the rest of her life as an advocate for children, with support from her female partners and a legion of feminist friends. **NB**

Fruitcake Season On Grace Street

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



SIMPLICITY IS KEY TO THE compelling beauty of this story—A Christmas Memory, adapted as Holiday Memories to the stage almost 40 years after it first appeared in Mademoiselle magazine. Set in rural Alabama, it's the American (or more precisely, Southern) equivalent of A Christmas Carol. But Truman Capote didn't need the ghosts of Charles Dickens, nor an elaborate cast of human characters. He accomplished it with just two cousins and a handful of townspeople. The cousins, separated by a wide gap of age, embark on an annual quest to make fruitcakes. When finished, these fruitcakes are given freely to folks they hardly know and others they don't know at all. It is in the gathering of the pecans and the bargaining for whiskey that prosaic moments congeal into profound memories. Part homage to the sacredness of the ordinary, part revelation about the nature of innocence; Holiday Memories is ultimately about time's ineluctable passage.

Director Jan Powell must have slept with the script for many nights because her knowledge of this play is downright intimate. She uses four actors only, keeping it minimal and tight—it only lasts an hour, so it's ideal holiday fare.

Eddie Webster portrays the author himself as an omniscient narrator who propels the action along when prodding is required. Webster plays the role well, meaning he does not attempt to mimic Truman Capote, but rather creates a stylized young writer, slightly withdrawn from the land of his upbringing, which is apparent in his nuance of speech. Webster also plays local juke joint owner, Haha Jones, and

a couple other peripheral locals.

Jody Smith Strickler, in the role of Miss Sook, embodies the essence of this woman who is almost sixty years her cousin's senior. Her dialect is flawless—not too heavy, none too thick, just about right—and this adds dimension to her character. I think we've all cringed to distraction at Southern speech as portrayed in many Hollywood offerings. Consider A Simple Twist of Fate, based on the Mayor of Casterbridge and set in Virginia's horse country. The accent employed by John Newland who plays Gabriel Byrne is so utterly wrong that you are tempted to slash a screen or shatter it, depending on the venue. In this production the regional speech is tempered and plausible. Refreshing, not feigned.

Henry Boyle, a product of SPARC, plays Buddy (the young Truman Capote) with startling ease. He makes you believe he is country-born, and it's not just the dialect he uses, it's his mannerisms and an easygoing sense of self.

Maggie Bavalack again reveals herself as a versatile performer as she plays several roles, often back to back, from the Woman to assorted characters and animals, including Queenie, the terrier, who figures prominently in the story.

Subdued lighting and a workable set with just the right amount of props encourages the imagination while original music by Drew Perkins and Glenn King performed by Dennis Elliot offers a soft bed of sound for this Christmas story that is damned near perfect. And certainly easy on the ears. **NEJ**

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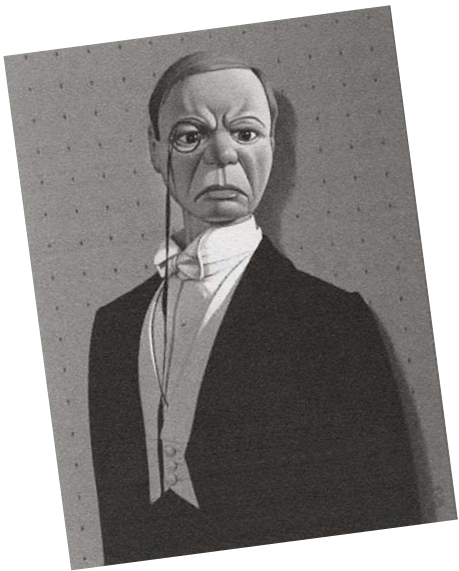
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Bill Nelson

COMING HOME

I DON'T KNOW IF EYES ARE REALLY WINDOWS TO THE SOUL, but I suspect faces are mirrors of both the heart and the soul, as well as road maps of experience. Bill Nelson has spent much of his life studying faces and then re-creating them in a fashion so memorable that they become more real in some ways than the human faces they represent. He is both sculptor and illustrator, working with Prismacolor colored pencils, Super Sculpey polymer and oil-based clay. What he does is not caricature, which much too often is highly exaggerated and, more often than not, outright cruel. Bill's pieces, which he calls push portraits, are categorically respectful of each and every subject.



Bill Nelson's living room is decorated in Arts & Crafts style furnishings, some authentic, others reproductions. Which is fitting, because the house he occupies in Bellevue is a classic Craftsman bungalow and from the back yard you can pretty much see the house a block away where Bill grew up and made his first attempt at the art of reimagined human faces.

Though born in a house on Avondale, Bill's parents, Sandy (William Nelson, Sr.) and Olive, moved the family over to Fauquier a couple years later. "My mom and dad told me that when they first had me they couldn't afford a crib so I slept in a dresser drawer," he says.

As soon as Bill was able to hold a pen he began to create art. He was just four years old at the time.

"It was my very first drawing," he says with broad, beard-trimmed smile. "I took my mother's graduation year book from John Marshall and I got a black ballpoint pen. I put moustaches on all the guys. I blacked out the eyes and the teeth of everyone in her entire graduating class, including her."

He pauses, his smile further widening. "And I got my first critique from that, too," he says. "I got spanked, but from then on, drawing is all I ever wanted to do."

Bill attended Ginter Park Elementary, Chandler Junior High and John

Marshall High. What he could not fathom is why he had to learn things he sensed were superfluous. "I couldn't understand why I had to learn Math and English and History and nobody ever explained why to my satisfaction," says Bill. "I said, 'I'm going to draw; why do I need to know all this stuff?' And my father said, 'Well you'll need math if you take measurements in your drawings.' And I said, 'I'm not going to take any measurements.' I was a hard-headed little bastard. I learned history on my own. You could not force feed me history. And, you know, biology, for instance, why did I need biology except for the obvious reason which I leaned on the street and through on the job experience."

In school he took every art class that was available from first grade through senior year. "It was like recess to me and I was encouraged to the point that I thought I was really good."

After graduation, Bill was accepted by Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University). "I went in thinking how good I was and, oh brother, what a rude awakening that was. Because there were people there that were so much better than me. It was a real eye-opener, but I needed to learn it."

Bill learned technique and excelled and he noticed something about a number of his fellow students in the arts school. "They lacked the drive I had," he says. "You can teach technique, but the stick-to-it-ness you can't teach."

Bill had already tried his hand as a cartoonist for *The Monocle*, John Marshall's student newspaper. At RPI he became the college paper's cartoonist and his work was universally liked. Except, as it turns out, for some of the art faculty there, who saw such efforts as low-brow and not quite ethereal enough. "I found out years later when I taught at VCU that my instructors were having meetings at night to try and get rid of me because they didn't consider cartooning an art form and they were embarrassed that somebody in the art department was doing cartoons," Bill tells me.

For a time there, Bill really thought he would become a political cartoonist. "That is until my father said, 'Bill in order to be a political cartoonist you've got to understand and know all about politics,'" Bill recalls. "And I thought, well forget that."

Instead, Bill decided to go the freelance route with ad agencies and magazines, and create movie posters and record covers. In college he was already employed in creative services at the Richmond newspapers, doing paste-up and ad design. And when the *Richmond Mercury*, a heavily funded but short-lived independent tabloid, appeared on the streets, Bill went to work for them. "I worked full-time with them for a year and it was grueling and they couldn't afford to keep me on," he says.

But one of the *Mercury's* former employees, Frank Rich, went to work for *New Times* magazine in New

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN

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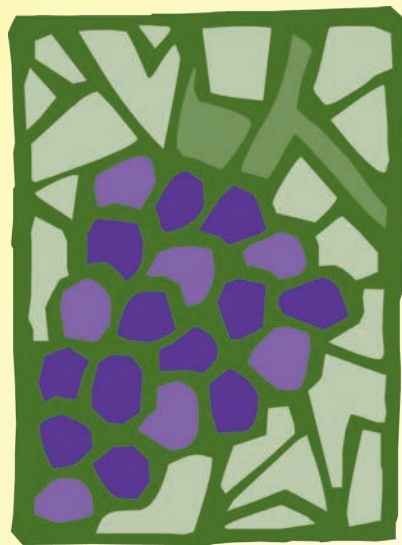
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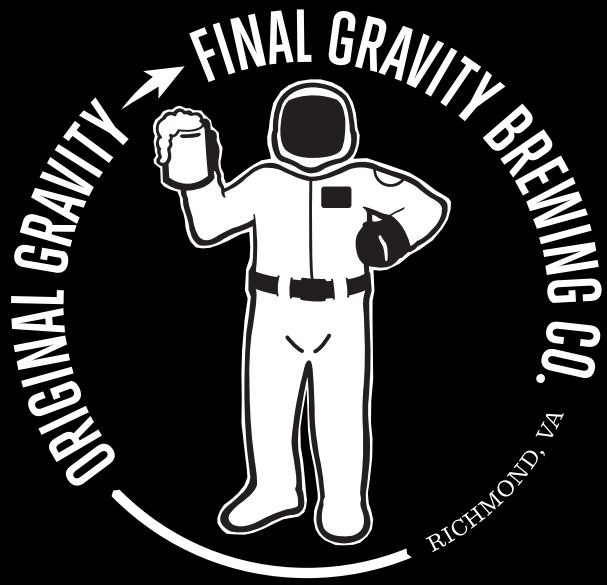
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York, a biweekly that featured great writing by many of the leading New Journalists of that era. "I asked him to get me an interview and he did and I flew up to New York and met with the art director and started working for them," says Bill. "I ended up doing eleven covers and interior drawings for them, and that was the nucleus of my career."

When Bill was 18 he wandered into a pharmacy in downtown Richmond and behind the counter saw "a cute, bubbly, and lovely" young woman who happened to be the owner's daughter. Her name was Linda and she was just sixteen at the time. Bill was smitten.

"At the time my sister had acne so that was my excuse to talk to Linda," Bill says. "I must have bought about eight hundred dollars' worth of acne stuff just so I could talk to her."

The two later married and ultimately bought a house on Wilmington Avenue where they would live together for more than thirty years.

Not long after his interview with New Times magazine, Bill got a call at five one evening. "It was the art director at New Times and they wanted me in New York that night," he says. "So I got there and the whole staff was waiting and they told me they wanted me to do the cover." What they wanted was a portrait of Richard Nixon who was on the verge of impeachment. What's more they had no references in the office, not a single photograph. The staff left him there alone and through the long night, Bill worked away with his Prismacolors. "I had to make it up out of my head

and I sat there and drew all night and in the morning they came in to see the finished cover," says Bill. "I was scared to death. But they liked it. That Nixon cover, that first national cover, was the hardest one I ever did. It was full color with no references. It was frightening, let me tell you."

A few weeks after he finished the Nixon cover, Bill was again called to New York for another assignment. As he sat in the office waiting for the assignment editor, someone showed him a letter New Times had received about Bill's depiction of Nixon. "The writer of the letter had taken the cover and folded it up about twenty times and had written something really nasty about me and I was really hurt," Bill says. But just then, the publisher came out and gave Bill some truly sage advice: "Bill, you don't understand. Any response is good. Just realize that today, and never forget it."

Armed with his first national cover, Bill began sending copies of it to Newsweek, Time, Rolling Stone, The New Yorker, The Wall Street Journal and just about any other periodical you can think of. And over the years he would free-lance for all of them, many of them, time and again. "I did so many drawings of famous people for The Wall Street Journal, tons of full-color illustrations, that it was almost a weekly assignment," says Bill. That is, until Rupert Murdoch bought the paper. "He fired the editorial staff and I went right along with them," Bill says.

When I ask him his favorite portrait subject of all time, he says, without a thought: "Alan Greenspan. What



a face. I've drawn him three or four times. I just love that fish face and those Coca-Cola glasses and the few strands of hair he tries to comb over. There are just so many planes to draw. That is a face that has character."

Not so with more perfect faces. "Right now I've got to do a ventriloquist figure of David Beckham, the soccer star, and I've got to make it look exactly like him," says Bill. "I'll tell you this, I'm not going to have a good time doing it. I love doing craggy faces. And I use a different word than caricature for what I do. I call them push portraits because some caricatures can be rather cruel and I just simply change things a little bit. I lean toward the respectful. Everybody that's earned a station in life had to go through some kind of hell and so I leave them alone. They've lived a life, they've paid their dues. I don't tear them apart."

The biggest challenge Bill ever faced was doing a portrait of one of the most beautiful women of the 20th century. "I was up for the postage stamp of Marilyn Monroe," Bill says. "And the post office art director said, 'I want you to make this thing so sexy and beautiful that people are going to want to kiss the back of it when they lick it.' I did my best, but I didn't get the Marilyn Monroe stamp. That was my biggest challenge, to make her that luscious."

He did create other stamps for the United States Postal Service, though, including a Big Band series, and a 1950s series that featured the tailfin of a Cadillac on one stamp and a vintage jukebox on another. "The art

director lived outside of DC and he just liked my work and we got along great," says Bill.

Bill's also illustrated books, including one he also wrote, a lush coffee table book on Lon Chaney, titled "The Man of a Thousand Faces".

For many years, Bill Nelson created many of Richmond's most popular theatre posters. One of the best remembered was the one he did for the Barksdale's production of "Sweeney Todd". It turned out, though, Bill had misspelled the playwright's first name. "I got Sondheim right, I spelled Stephen with a 'V' instead of a 'PH'," he says. "So I decided that I should write Sondheim and I sent him a copy of the poster with an apology and I got back the nicest letter from him. It was typed and he had misspelled almost every word and circled each misspelling in red ink and then he wrote at the very bottom of it, 'You're not the only one who can't spell.' That was awfully nice of him."

He remembers the production Theatre IV did of "Little Shop of Horrors" and the poster he created for it.

"The kids who were in it were still students at VCU and were cast in the leading roles and they wanted to come down to my studio and see me doing the drawing of them," he says. "They couldn't believe they were going to be on the poster. If you know the play, the blonde always has a large bosom, well the girl playing that role didn't and she was going to have to wear a push up bra. Anyway they came to my studio and when she saw the drawing of herself with this large bosom, she said: 'My hope chest.'"



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Nobody could stop laughing.”

In the late 1980s, Bill began experimenting in a new medium. “I started getting interested in three dimensional stuff and I think the thing that did it for me was I’ve been faking a third dimension on a flat plane for so many years that I just had this desire to reach around behind a nostril or behind an ear and I thought, ‘Wait a minute I can do that if I sculpt,’” he says. “I found my own medium, Super Sculpy, and at the same time I started subscribing to Doll magazine to see what other people were doing.” He had mentors along the way, including Bob McKinley of New York, who died of AIDS.

Many of Bill’s sculptures are of elfin or hobbit-like creatures, minutely detailed with more than a little whimsy. “I got the images directly out of my head,” he says. “They were dying to come out; I think they were always in there.”

Newsweek even commissioned Bill to do a Super Sculpey version of President George H.W. Bush and though they paid him for it, they never ran it on the cover. “They realized Bush was on his way out and they didn’t want it on the cover,” says Bill. “But I sent a photo of it to a Doll magazine and they ran it.” Among those who saw it, was Demi Moore. “She bought it for Bruce Willis who was a Republican and then she came to our house on Wilmington and commissioned a Barbara Bush and bought a lot of other stuff while she was there,” he says. “She’s a very nice person.”

Over the intervening years, Demi Moore has purchased fifty-nine of Bill’s sculptures, which can run anywhere from three to five thousand dollars each. She commissioned Bill to create one of Bruce Willis as his character in “Last Man Standing”. And there’s a coda to that purchase. “After their marriage broke up I got a box in the mail and it was that doll of Bruce with the legs smashed to smithereens,” Bill says. “It wasn’t done by the post office, either. Somebody had taken a hammer to it and smashed the legs. There was no note. I think she did it and then sent it back to me.” As if the flawed being was returned to its creator for proper disposal.

Somewhere in there, Bill also began making ventriloquist figures. “I’ve always loved puppets and marionettes,” he says. “But I’m no engineer, so I have a partner who does all the stringing. Ventriloquists buy them, but so do collectors. There’s a guy in England who’s bought two or three

from us and who just commissioned us to do God and I wrote him and said, ‘There’s not a lot of reference material out there on that particular deity,’ and he said, ‘God looks a lot like a sculpture you did years ago of Albert Einstein.’ Another guy just commissioned me to do a Donald Trump ventriloquist figure just for the heck of it. I do about three ventriloquist figures a year.”

About 15 years ago, Bill and Linda decided to pull up stakes from Richmond’s Northside and to head South for the Outer Banks. It was not the best of decisions.

They had a house—a la Frank Lloyd Wright—built on Roanoke Island and not long after they moved in, the couple separated. “It was a hard time,” says Bill. “Manteo was a wasteland for me. There’s no art community down there, there are no art galleries. They call them art galleries, but they’re just gift shops. If you don’t draw or paint boats, the sea or fish, they don’t accept you and I wasn’t accepted. And in the wintertime it’s even worse down there; it’s barren, there are no people.”

He spent a lot of time with himself holed up in the house. “In my house I was happy, but outside of my house there was nothing. I went to things, but I wasn’t happy.”

What’s more there had been a sea change in the industry Bill had worked in since he was just out of his teens. “Computer illustration began to take over and my career was just dying so I didn’t have any work,” he says. “It was a tough time.”

And mainly, there was no Linda, the love of Bill’s life.

Finally, about a year and a half ago, Bill made another decision that would change his world. “I had to get out of there for my own sanity and I missed my hometown, Richmond,” Bill says.

We step out on the front porch and look up and down the street. The gutters are clean, cars rubber down Brook Road, but it’s just a slight murmur. “Thomas Wolfe said, ‘You can never go home again,’ but here I am,” says Bill Nelson. “There’s something quaint about this place and the old homes. Time hasn’t touched any of it. You know the other thing about Northside: it doesn’t seem to be as snobby as other parts of town. Everybody seems to be accepting of each other. I feel so much better now.”

And then there’s this: Linda and Bill are together again. **NS**

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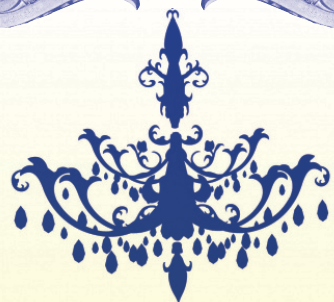
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HIDDEN HISTORIES

Cancel Christmas!

by JACK R. JOHNSON



CERTAIN RIGHTWING pundits like to make much of America becoming too secular and not honoring with sufficient spirit our Christmas tradition. But if you want to find the first real Grinch in history, you need only travel back to the time of some of the first real conservatives: the Puritans of England.

In 1647, during the rule of Oliver Cromwell, the celebration of Christmas was banned in Great Britain by an act of Parliament. For a time, shops were actually ordered to remain open on the holiday. Even the consumption of mincemeat pie was outlawed.

Cromwell became ruler after the execution of King Charles I, eventually taking the title of Lord Protector. Cromwell and his faction in Parliament, called the Godly Party, were Puritan Protestants who challenged many of the practices of the Roman Catholic faith. The boisterous and more than slightly Pagan celebration of Christmas common at the time affronted Puritan sensibilities, who preached a more reserved and staid life. While the Christmas ban remained on the books until the resto-

ration of the monarchy by Charles II in 1660, it was difficult to enforce and some people continued to celebrate Christmas when no one was looking.

Whether Cromwell actually ordered the Christmas ban or merely endorsed a decision by his parliamentary partisans appears to be in dispute though many scholars pin responsibility for the Christmas ban on Cromwell.

In that Cromwellian age, gone were such Pagan symbols as Christmas Trees and evergreen decorations, along with the practices of feasting, merrymaking and caroling. Nativity scenes were banned as the worship of idols. Indeed, even the word Christmas was frowned upon as taking the Lord's name in vain. Plus, as a contraction of "Christ Mass", it called to mind the "old religion".

One thing that the Puritans objected to in particular was the idea of wassailing, in which the underclass would go from house to house, caroling, or was-sailing, in exchange for treats or a bowl of wassail—hot, mulled cider. Wassailing sometimes got out of control and drunken revelry ensued, which is why the Puritans objected so strenuously.

The ban was lifted in 1660, after Cromwell was finally ousted. **NJ**

Into That Good Night

by **FRAN WITHROW**

WE DON'T LIKE TO think about death, but "Being Mortal" invites readers to explore critical issues surrounding the end of life.

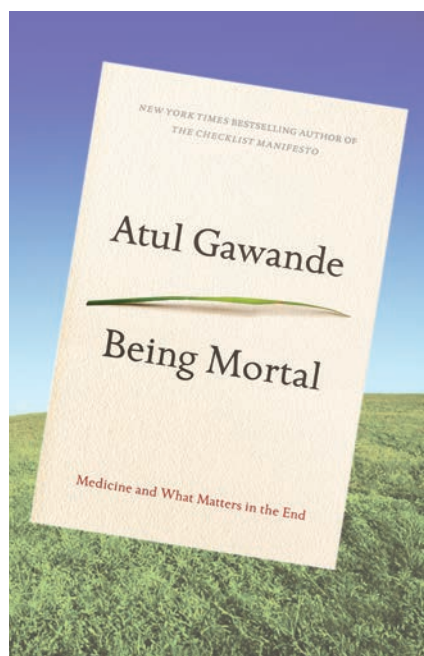
Author Atul Gawande says we have made death and dying into a medical problem, relegating family members to hospitals and nursing homes and tucking death away behind closed doors. We ignore what our loved ones find most valuable about life and have focused solely on their safety and survival, whatever the cost.

But death is not a medical matter, and Gawande explores how the medical community succeeds—and fails—in maintaining quality for those at the end of their lives. He explains how assisted living communities arose as an alternative to nursing homes. He discusses hospice. And he offers many engrossing case studies of dying people of all ages and how their doctors both helped and hurt them.

Small things can make a difference, as demonstrated by one physician who asked to see an elderly woman's feet. Could she clip her toenails? It doesn't seem like much, but healthy feet can make a difference for those wanting to live independently.

Gawande maintains that doctors can help patients by asking crucial questions, since a doctor's job is not to ensure survival but to enable "well-being. And well-being is about the reasons one wishes to be alive." Medical staff should be asking those facing life-threatening illnesses about what makes life meaningful for them. What trade-offs are they willing to make to stay alive? Which ones are not worth it? What options are available to support the patient's long-term goals?

Gawande faced these issues when his father was diagnosed with cancer. The family struggled to make decisions about how to proceed, despite the fact that they were all physicians themselves. What was the best way to address his father's illness without sacrificing what was important to him? This personal story was, for



me, the most poignant example of the challenges facing patients and their families.

Increased awareness of these issues by the medical community, support for palliative care and hospice services, and a change in attitude about how to treat serious illness can make a difference for those facing the end of life. No longer is the conversation between doctor and patient only about the choices available. It is a doctor's responsibility to support patients "in their struggle with those limits" of life.

It's not easy to read a book like this. I tossed and turned, sleepless, for a few nights, thinking about my own mortality, and that of those I love. But now is the time to consider what is crucial and how to manage as old age and its inevitable losses creep closer. What really matters? Independence, the sense that one's life has meaning, the assurance that one will be heard when hard choices need to be made? "Being Mortal" means facing those questions, with the support of a medical community that feels the same way. Let's hope this book becomes required reading for everyone, whether or not they have an M.D. after their name. **NJ**

*"Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End", by Atul Gawande
Holt, Henry and Company, \$26.00,
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WHAT'S NEW

Gypsy Traders at Nomadic Attic

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

TAMMY AND JOHN Mather are wed at the hip. Since their marriage more than two decades ago, they've seldom left one another's sight. "We really enjoy working together," says John. "Out of the twenty-three years we've been married, we've worked twenty years together, side by side in everything that we've done. When we work together, it's more harmonious; when we're not working together, there're more rifts. We're just happier when where together."

They're back behind the counter of their new shop on Lakeside Avenue, a place called Nomadic Attic, a store where you're apt to find anything, an old curiosity shop sort of place, though it's clean and well-lighted.

Not long after they took over the lease back in October, someone inadvertently shattered one of the panels of their storefront window. "So we (not the landlord) replaced all the plate glass with tempered glass because the plate glass was horribly dangerous," says John. "We opened the business right before Halloween."

For most of their professional lives, the Mathers ran and operated a direct-mail business down in Chesterfield County, most recently in one of those innocuous office parks that mysteriously appear overnight in suburban communities. "We started doing this on the side last August," John says. "And we were doing a lot more of this than the mail work after a while, and it was a lot more fun." But the office park wasn't a good fit for a retail shop so the couple scouted out the Richmond area and decided on the Northside on Lakeside Avenue.

John remembers how the business first started. "Tammy started buying and selling different things that we were picking up here and there," he looks over at his wife and smiles. "Tammy came up with everything, she is creative person behind everything. She came up with the name of our shop."



Tammy tells me that whenever the couple moved they would either lighten their load for a smaller place or simply get rid of the old and usher in the new. "And then what happened," says Tammy. "Somebody said, 'Y'all are a bunch of gypsies.' and I said No, we're Nomads.' So when I was trying to think of a name for our shop I thought Nomadic Attic."

John looks adoringly at his mate. "She picks everything out," he says. "She hunts everything down and she looks for everything and it all has purpose or meaning."

"That's right," Tammy says. "I want to cater to everyone, not just one type of person. I wanted the retro vibe, but I also wanted to be eclectic with an artsy and music undertone to it. So that's what I'm looking for."

They hunt for their quarry in just about any environment. "Estate sales, auctions, yard sales, private sales," John says.

"But we don't do consignment and we don't take donations," says Tammy. "We're hand-picking what we're selling."

And they have a sort of rule when it comes to pricing merchandise. As John explains: "Everything we have is priced where we think we would buy it ourselves if we were out shopping. We don't want to have anything that peo-

ple would pass over. We'd rather somebody buy something, get a good deal, come back three or four more times, than have somebody get one piece and say, 'Gosh I really regret spending that money.' Everybody says to us we don't charge enough."

And to keep customers coming back week after, Tammy insures that there are always new items on the floors and shelved. "We get new things in twice a week. We're always looking for interesting stuff," she says.

A couple weeks back, the pair moved to Northside into a house on Westbrook Avenue up in Bellevue. "The people over here take a lot of pride in their community, and we like that," says John.

"We want people to come in to our shop and relax and just enjoy their time here," Tammy says. "So we offer free coffee and we have a little book section and comfortable chairs. We're trying to make it very homey. So people can just come in and relax and stay all day if they want to."

"Everybody comes in with a smile on their face," says John.

"And the leave with one, too," Tammy says. **[NB]**

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