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#metoo

part two begins on page 12

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH
by REBECCA D'ANGELO

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BRIEFS

Christmas on MacArthur Cancelled BUT Santa at Stir Crazy



Though Christmas on MacArthur was cancelled due to inclement weather, Franklin Massie and Claire McGowan of Stir Crazy opened their coffee shop to Santa Claus, who to children's

Christmas wishes all day long.

The 13th Annual Christmas on MacArthur was cancelled, and all of us affiliated with it would like to extend our thanks to everyone involved with this popular event. We hope to see all participants at next year's Christmas on MacArthur.

US Marines will pick up all the Toy-for-Tots in the coming weeks. Since its inception more than a decade ago, Christmas on MacArthur has become one of the largest single donors in Central Virginia to this worthy cause. Last year, through your generosity, Christmas on MacArthur donated 3,700 toys to the Marine who distribute this Christmas to kids in the Richmond metro area.



True North Yoga And Wellness

True North Yoga and Wellness opens this January in the space formerly occupied by 4025 Yoga on MacArthur Avenue in Bellevue. Owner Aliza Sterling says True North will offer yoga and meditation classes, along with a variety of holistic services including massage, acupuncture and bodywork, as well as workshops with experts like naturopaths, herbalists, and ayurveda practitioners.

The exterior was recently painted, and Aliza plans to remodel the interior. Every Sunday morning at 10:30, True North will offer a complimentary community yoga class.

"I'm really excited to open a wellness center just a few blocks from the house I grew up in," says Aliza. "I'm looking forward to creating a welcoming space for good conversation, healthy living, and bringing neighbors together. I've found yoga and meditation to help with balance in my life. I hope this studio can provide this to others as well."

Launch Your Holidays At Science Museum of Virginia

The Science Museum of Virginia's December events have something in common: all include launching something in the name of science.

On Friday, Dec. 15, the Museum hosts the last Science After Dark of 2017. To summarize the year of science, innovation and fun, and in honor of Ralphie's epic shot from the 1983 classic holiday film "A Christmas Story," the Museum is breaking out eye-themed activities and demonstrations, among them, dissecting cow eyes.

Cosmic Expeditions recaps the year's space news. Special showing of "A Christmas Story" in The Dome.

The Museum continues the tradition of experiments on fruitcakes. Museum educators will freeze fruitcake with liq-

uid nitrogen, burn it with a blow torch, shock it with electricity and drop it down a zip line. Plus, guests can see the Museum's special fruitcake collection which includes a fruitcake that was launched into space. There's even a Virginia-shaped fruitcake baked by Governor Terry McAuliffe.

And launch the New Year at the Science Museum on New Year's Eve day with a dance party, a wish wand crafts and a huge banner for your yearly resolutions. At noon, 2018 bouncy balls along with tons of paper streamers will be dropped from the dome onto the revelers below. Then ring in the New Year early with a toast of apple juice, and exploding ping-pong balls.

For more information visit smv.org.

Concert Ballet of Virginia Presents 42nd Season of "The Nutcracker"

The Concert Ballet of Virginia, the state's oldest continually operating ballet company, presents full-length as well as short versions of "The Nutcracker" during the 2017 holiday season. The company's complete version of this classic family favorite has been popularly hailed as "one of the best renditions in Virginia" and combines beautiful scenery and bright, colorful costumes set off with exciting, enthusiastic performances by dancers from throughout the metro Richmond area and statewide.

"The Nutcracker" will be performed Saturday, December 9, 2:30 pm and 7:30 pm; and Sunday, December 10, 2:30 pm, at Monacan High School

Theatre, 11501 Smoketree Drive, Chesterfield. Tickets \$12-24.

"The Nutcracker" will be performed Saturday, December 16, 2:30 pm and 7:30 pm; and Sunday, December 17, 2:30 pm, at Atlee High School Auditorium, 9414 Atlee Station Road, Mechanicsville. Tickets: \$12-24.

For details, please phone 804-798-0945, e-mail: concertballetofvirginia@yahoo.com, or visit www.concertballet.com.

The Concert Ballet of Virginia is under the artistic direction of Scott Boyer; deVeaux Riddick is the Ballet's designer and technical director; and Kim Gangloff is company president.



Photos by Mary Elfner at Stir Crazy Café

Long-time Northside resident Mary Elfner has been taking, editing and sharing photos since grade school Her work will be on display at Stir Crazy Café through January.

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at Hardywood Craft Park Brewery in Richmond, Virginia. Hardywood will generously donate 5% of all beer sales to WomenMatter.org, and The Richmond Peace Education Center. Featuring local bands fronted by women, woman-owned small business vendors, artists, artisans, woman-owned food trucks, and women's advocacy groups, this event is certainly destined to become a Richmond tradition to be held each year around International Women's Day. Come on out, support your community, and be a part of this wonderful inaugural event!

The band lineup for year one so far includes The MelBays, Janet Martin, The New Misty Centrals, and Suzy and the G-Tones. Vendors include Bikini Panini, Foust, Kim Young, Dogtown Lounge, Cate Fitt, Capital Area Rescue Effort (C.A.R.E.). Women's advocacy groups will also participate. They include Midwives for Haiti, Women Matter, and the Richmond Peace Education Center.

For more information about attending or participating in this event, contact Beth Stanford at [facebook.com/WomenRockHardywood](https://www.facebook.com/WomenRockHardywood).

*The New Misty Centrals,
The MelBays, Janet Martin,
and Suzy and the G-Tones.*



Heavy Shtetl At Stir Crazy



Heavy Shtetl performs at Stir Crazy Café December 21 from 6-8 pm. Formed after a discussion on Rosh Hashanah in 2016, Heavy Shtetl was created by vets of the klezmer big band Klezm'Or'Ami'm to make a small, intimate, but still lively and dynamic ensemble capable of giving high energy performances and playing a wide repertoire of Jewish music. With material ranging from the European shtetlekh of long ago, the tenements of New York City, the jazz influenced golden age of klezmer, and the modern torchbearers, Heavy Shtetl aims to entertain, and make you dance the Hora. Stir Crazy Café, 4015 MacArthur Ave, Richmond, 23227 (804)864-0264. **NJ**

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WHAT'S NEW

Return of the Prodigal Son Early Bird Biscuit Back in Northside

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

BRING HITHER THE fatted calf, for the prodigal returns . . . to Northside.

When Early Bird Biscuit Company moved off Lakeside Avenue a couple years back there was a palpable void left in the Northside, a hole so deep you couldn't fill it. Not with anything. The biscuits were perfection, golden brown on the outside and light and airy within, and the housemade pimento cheese coupled with Applewood smoked bacon was to die for.

Back in July of 2014, Tim Laxton opened the first permutation of Early Bird Biscuit Company in a very small space (just a little over 250 square feet) at 5411 Lakeside Avenue, and every day thereafter a steady stream of customers waited each morning for the doors to open. Often, Tim would step outside, take orders, return to the kitchen to make the biscuits, and then deliver the purchases to his customers standing in the parking lot. He remained at that location for about a year and a half, and then moved to 119 North Robinson Street, a boon for the Fan District, a letdown for Northside.

Just recently, in early December, Tim opened Early Bird Biscuit at 1221 Bellevue Avenue (the Robinson Street venue will remain open). Tim had planned to open the Bellevue store last July, but there were, as usual, problems with the city.

I drop in to see Tim the day after his soft opening, and he is behind the counter pressing his weight down on a rolling pin to flatten a ball of dough from which he'll cut perfect circles for small apple pies, one of his specialties. That rolling pin was carved from a single block of wood in the 1800s by Tim's great-grandfather, Pa Harrison, whose wife made legions of biscuits over the years using the same tool Tim now wields. It passed through the generations doing its appointed work, and ended up in the able hands of Tim Laxton. "I use it for every single biscuit that I make here," Tim told me years ago.

The interior of this space has the same



Tim Laxton has his hands on every part of the process.

feel of that first Early Bird Biscuit Company on Lakeside Avenue. The walls painted a pale yellow; floors covered in black-and-white linoleum tiles, one-foot squares like a checkerboard; three enamel-topped tables just like the one in the kitchen of Tim's grandmother where her husband would sit before a platter of fresh-baked biscuits and ritualistically split one open and mash warm butter into it, then slather it with blackstrap molasses. Also this: there's a green screen door between the front and the back of the house. A real screen door made of dense wood with layers of paint. And it doesn't have one of those pneumatic pistons that lets the door shut with nothing more than a whisper. This screen door closes with the help of a simple mechanism—a spring, and each time the door slaps shut and the spring twangs, I am in my grandmother's kitchen overlooking her flower-rich backyard at 28 Catharine Street in South Philly.

Though Tim will do all the baking here himself, the store will be managed by Sam Denny, who started off as a loyal customer. "Sam was one of my

biggest fans," says Tim.

Tim's menu includes all the old favorites from the flaky buttermilk biscuit with housemade jam to biscuits with sawmill sausage gravy, and others. And for the lunch crowd there are biscuits with Tim's unique chicken salad, or bacon and Benedictine, or apple, bacon and cheddar, or sundried tomatoes with organic greens and balsamic vinegar. One featuring Reginald's peanut butter and housemade jam. And, of course, pimento cheese and bacon—a food of the gods.

Tim's planning to introduce a build-own-biscuit. "I want my customers to have what they want to eat," says Tim Laxton, as he wipes his hands on a cloth towel, then begins spooning the apple mixture in to one of the pie crusts. "It's important to touch every part of the process," he says. **NE**

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BOOK REVIEW

It All Began With A Single Drop

by FRAN WITHROW

WHEN I GO ON A trip, I much prefer someone else drive. But at least I have a choice about getting behind the wheel. Some women don't have that option, and that is the focus of "Daring to Drive," Manal al-Sharif's brave account of bucking Saudi Arabia's moral code by deciding to drive a car.

Al-Sharif is one of many Saudi women who, through the years, have fought for more freedoms in their beloved country, including the freedom to drive.

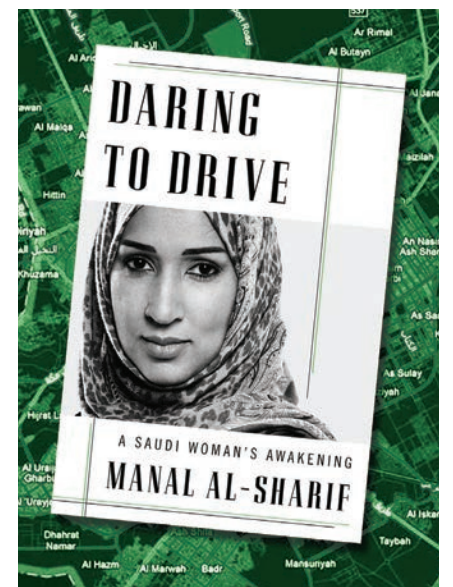
It's been a long time coming. As far back as 1990, forty-seven courageous Saudi women defied the ban on women driving. They all suffered the consequences of this civil disobedience for the rest of their lives. Job loss, harassment and humiliation dogged them repeatedly. And despite their defiant act, nothing changed.

Fast forward about 15 years. Al-Sharif was a radical Islamist who, as an adult, did a complete about-face to become a women's rights activist. Her account of how this remarkable transformation came about is informative and enlightening.

The newly awakened al-Sharif went to college and then was offered a coveted job at Aramco, Saudi Arabia's oil company. She needed a place to live, but women could not rent an apartment by themselves. She needed to get to work, but could not drive and was not permitted to use the male-only company transportation. I'm not sure I would have her fortitude in the face of so many obstacles. Yet Al-Sharif ingeniously solved every problem, obtained her job, and became a successful employee.

In 2009, as part of a professional exchange program, al-Sharif went to New Hampshire, an eye-opening experience and a place where she learned to drive at last. When she returned to Saudi Arabia, she bought a car. Yet she could not legally drive it in her own country.

Frustrated by the relentless, unend-



ing ways Saudi Arabia stifles women, and wanting to make a difference for women everywhere, al-Sharif made a daring decision.

She would drive her car around the city. She did so in 2011, as a friend sat beside her and taped the excursion, and the ensuing YouTube video went viral. She went to jail for "driving while female," and her description of the conditions for imprisoned Saudi women are horrifying. Disappointingly, nothing changed. Most people would have given up, but not al-Sharif. She told herself, "The rain begins with a single drop," and never lost hope.

I discovered this book just as the news came out that Saudi Arabia plans to allow women to drive sometime next year, seven years after al-Sharif dared to drive and 28 years after the first group of women got behind the wheel. What an incredible achievement at last for these dedicated activists.

If you are in the mood for a memoir about overcoming oppression, about a woman's transformation, and about the sacrifices and risks people take to stand up for freedom, look no further.

And be grateful next time you choose to drive. 

Daring to Drive:
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#metoo

FIVE WOMEN, OVER A COUPLE OF WEEKS, and in a number of different locations, shared their stories of micro-aggressions, sexual assault, abuse, molestation and rape. Their names are Mary Carpenter, Didi Tremblay, Melissa Gray, Terry Menefee Gau and Kathi Shiff. These are vivid descriptions of deplorable actions that may be inappropriate for younger readers.

JUST TO THE EAST

of the city limits there's a village that burst into suburban sprawl when the integration of Richmond public schools began. It was white flight, clear and simple, and these former Richmonders descended on Mechanicsville like a flock of snow geese.

That's where the Tremblays found themselves living, an entire universe away from their native Montreal. French Canadians in those parts were about as rare as hen's teeth, still are. So there was more than a little joy when the Tremblays found that another family in their neighborhood of Spring Meadows were also French Canadians.

"Our families became fast friends with them," says Didi Tremblay. "So every Christmas and Thanksgiving we would be at each other's houses, and they had a daughter who was close to my age, and we were really good friends.

One Christmas when the Tremblays had visited their neighbors, Didi was playing in the parents' room, when the father walked in and closed the door behind him. Didi's life was about to change forever. She was under six years old, not much more than a baby girl.

"He sits me on the bed and pushes me to lie down on my back," Didi remembers. "And he begins to rub my genitals. There were a few more holidays when that happened."

And then one summer morning as she played in the backyard of her friend's house, the father invited her inside. This pedophile's grim game was about to escalate.

"He came out and asked his daughter to stay outside," says Didi. "He took me inside the house, he took me in the bedroom." And she heard the snap as he locked the door behind him. Then he tied a handkerchief over her eyes as a blindfold, and told her they were going to play a game. He would place candy in her mouth, and Didi would guess the flavor.

In an instant she knew this was no game. She heard the metallic rasp of his zipper, and then she felt

something soft and damp on her tongue. And then the man pressed forward, and her mouth was full. It wouldn't be until many years later that she found out what it was. "He tapped his penis on my tongue after he asked me to open my mouth, and then he shoved it in my mouth," Didi says.

At that precise moment the phone rang, and the man answered, before it rang again. It was apparently his wife. Didi, still wearing the blindfold, moved terrified toward the door in darkness, feeling her way along the wall, until she found the doorframe, then the door-knob and unlocked it, then bolted and ran home. She told her siblings, who in turn told their mother, but the response was anything but satisfactory.

"We don't really know what happened to you because you were blindfolded so we're just not going to spend time with them anymore," her mother told her. There was no anger, no harsh words, no threats, and no call to the police.

Yet Didi has never held this against her mother. "My mom was one of the sweetest people you'd ever want to meet, and she would never intend any harm on any one," Didi says. "She was very conditioned by her upbringing. You are pretty, you are classy, you're intelligent, and you don't rock the boat. You keep it to yourself."

But her father's reaction was hard on Didi. "My father stopped hugging me and being physically affectionate with me after I was molested," she says. "It freaked him out. He couldn't understand it. I think he was guilt-ridden. I think that he emotionally could not deal with it at all."

Didi's big brother was another story. "He was very protective of me, and it was very healing for me," she says.

When Didi looks at photographs of herself from that time, she can see marked differences in her countenance, year by year, as the molestations progressed. "That little spark is still there in kindergarten and first grade photos," she says. "In second grade it's different.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

These stories are not sanitized in any way. They are graphic accounts of hideous acts against women. If you believe you will be offended by the content, please refrain from reading.



BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
ILLUSTRATION BY CATHERINE MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO

(part two)

In third it's gone." After that sexual assault, Didi cut her hair into a shag; before then it had been long and straight. "It's like hiding," says Didi. "It's like a new identity. What we do even as children to cope is amazing. And what it ends up being is dissociative disorder."

When Didi was in seventh grade she had a quick-tempered gym teacher, who would sometimes make unusual comments. This man was in early thirties, and Didi was all of eleven years old. "Would your mom let you go out on a date with me?" he asked her once. "I bet she wouldn't let you stay out to one in the morning with me."

One afternoon, Didi, who had left her purse in the gym teacher's classroom, returned to retrieve it. Didi, who had already started her menstrual cycle, was more than a little surprised to find her gym teacher riffling through her purse, examining her menstrual pads. When he was discovered, this peculiar man said in a booming voice: "You should be careful about leaving your purse behind given what you have in it."

"And to this day," says Didi. "I don't fully understand all the layers of how weird that was. You're being sexualized, you're being shamed for being a woman, and for having a cycle."

About a year later, Didi was at her best friend's house for a sleepover. This friend had older twin brothers who were polar opposites.

"They were like Cain and Abel," Didi says. "One was incredibly sweet, very sensitive, and the other was broken. Incredible parents, beautiful family, no abuse, no neglect, nothing going on in that family."

As it turns out, something was going on in that family. The night of the sleepover, Didi was applying makeup, when the evil twin, Cain, well call him, entered the upstairs bathroom unannounced and blocked Didi's exit.

"He corners me and feels me up," says Didi. "I froze, I completely froze. Doesn't ask, just takes what he wants."

But another family member came up the stairs and startled him, and Cain beat a hasty exit from the bathroom. Didi never went there for a sleepover again, and about eight months later would learn that Cain had sexually molested a little girl he babysat.

A couple years later, both Didi and her brother were working at the McDonald's right across from Lee-Davis High School on Mechanicsville Turnpike. Didi'd been working there awhile and had come to know the regulars. One of the other girls who worked there, a classmate of Didi's at Lee-Davis, told her someone had been in asking about Didi's work shift. He had said he was relative of hers, and the co-worker described the thirty-year old man in detail. He wasn't

one of Didi's relatives; they all lived up in Canada.

"So I would say within two weeks, he was at my counter and he said, 'I asked a friend, and it all clicked,'" Didi remembers. After taking his order, Didi went to see her brother who was working the line in the back of the house. She told him what had happened, and he held the burger up, and called the sheriff's department.

Seconds later, there was a symphony of sirens, a flash of spinning blue lights, as six squad cars bounded into the parking lot. Eight deputies rushed through the door and apprehended the man, who, it turns out, was a repeat sex offender.

In high school Didi became a punk rocker and discovered The Clash and after graduation, spreading her wings, driving her super Beetle, moved to the Fan District. One afternoon, as she made her way west along the 800 block of Grace Street, just outside the old Biograph Theatre (long since gone), a pickup truck drove by, the cab filled with three grown men in their thirties, or older. The driver, looking at Didi, yelled, "I'd f*** that."

"That was my first catcall," she tells me. "And I remember my first reaction was I was pissed." As she walked toward Harrison Street, a thick wave of sadness washed over her. "It broke my heart that a man that age can yell, 'I would f*** that' to a child, and get away with it," says Didi. "And everybody in that pickup was laughing. So these remarks about how we should be flattered about being told how you're a** looks great, are wrong. It's aggressive, it's demeaning. And if you're in your thirties you can't tell me that you can look at an eighteen year old girl and not see that she's fresh out of high school. She's a kid."

A little over a year later, Didi, who had just gotten off work, was going to meet her boyfriend over on Parkwood Avenue, a fairly sketchy area at the time. It was two in the morning, and her boyfriend had fallen asleep and Didi had no key. She walked down the alley and threw pebbles at his bedroom window, but to no avail.

She left the alleyway and began walking down the sidewalk. A man was walking toward her, and she avoided making eye contact, but as soon as she passed him, he put a chokehold around her neck and lifted her off the ground. Didi held on to his arm, pulling herself up, because she feared he was going to snap her neck.

Just before she passed out, Didi knew she was dead. In nanoseconds, a hundred books and films depicting rape flashed through her brain. "But you are not prepared for the instant piece of meat you become," says Didi. "The way that you are grabbed, your psy-

che is telling you, you're a slab of meat."

When Didi regained consciousness, she thought, for one unreasoning moment, that she might be in her own bed. But when she raised her arm and her hand pressed against what should have been a smooth plaster wall, she felt the grit of brick and mortar, and it all came back to her. She was now between two buildings, and the rapist was above her, with a drawn knife at her throat. She had apparently yelled, but had no recollection of it.

"If you scream again, I'll kill you," the rapist said. He peeled off her shorts and her underwear, then raped her.

But there was someone listening from the porch of one of the houses nearby. "Take that somewhere else," he screamed into the night. But Didi must have cried out, because this man on the porch understood that someone was being raped, so he called the police.

The rapist ran, and Didi's mind slowed down in a thick fog where time seemed to have ceased. She put her underwear and shorts on, and made her way out of the alley.

Didi chose not to file a police report, and the rapist was never caught. She didn't want to deal with the interrogation and the rape kit. But her anger grew.

"It really started to come to a head when I was nineteen," she says. "I was very, very quick tempered. If I saw you lack empathy for somebody else's suffering you'd hear a mouthful from me about how you lack empathy"

When she tells me this, I ask if after the rape she became even more compassionate, and Didi nods. "It's the silver lining," she says. "You understand what it's like to be hunted. Whether it's the Holocaust or a southern lynching, we've all looked the same predator in the eye."

All these predators seem to share one trait.

"They're all narcissists," Didi says. "They all feel inferior, they all hate themselves, and the victims are who they project all that self-hatred on. And they have probably been abused as well. It's an ugly, ugly vicious cycle. Breaking the chain is how it's dealt with."

Since that first group session before Halloween when all five women were present, a thought clear as crystal, undeniable as climate change, has been churning in Didi's mind. Two words, separated by a single consonant, turn out to be one and the same.

"These are the same people who yell n***** out of car windows," she says. "It's the same sickness. That same predatory entitlement. Racists do that to people of a different religion or color or culture. Rapists

do it to women. They objectify you so they can kill you, throw things at you, because you're just an object. You're f***** nothing else. That's what sexual predators do. The racist who yells n***** out the car window goes home and beats his wife or molests the kid next door. It's the same sickness, it's bullying. That's why with the NFL, you know I'm on their side, it's the same predator. I will kneel."

Didi has other stories to tell, but right now, she puts unrelenting pain into perspective.

"We need to teach boundaries, and to teach empowerment," says Didi. "Because every single episode strips, like acid, at your self-esteem and at your self-image, and it gives you anxiety disorder, and it makes you depressed, and then you have the shame of the byproduct of your trauma. You have to hide that as well, and it's amazing that we're all still here. I think the predators and the racists will never end. I think how they are dealt with has to change. There has to be more than an eight year, reduced down to six to three for raping a woman and ruining her life and any possibility of a functioning relationship with a man because she's pissed off half the time. This is being in a relationship with a woman who has post-traumatic stress disorder. You're with a Vietnam vet. That's the woman you're with. She has flashbacks, she can't do s*** because she's afraid. The percentage of women who have been raped that believe it will happen again is eighty percent. When that veil is ripped off, you cannot put it back on."

Despite all the trauma, this unbelievably compassionate woman, who calls herself "a silver linings gal", sees more than a glimmer of light on the edge of the darkness. "That's the thing about developing empathy," she says. "We understand the suffering. We see the pain behind the action. That empathy that somehow survives all that anger, creates a magnificent human being on the other side. It's not an easy path, but I have to believe we're the new bud of evolution."

Abuse can claim a host, devouring it, until the victim herself is subsumed, absorbed by the malevolent parasite. Didi had spoken about this earlier when she talked about the byproduct of trauma.

Melissa Gray knows a thing or two about this byproduct. We had talked in the conference room at Stir Crazy Café.

"We relieve ourselves," she says. "When I was being beaten, I would beat my dog. It was just the worst thing when I realized that's what I was doing. My outlet was the dog and I tried so hard at the end of her life to make up for it. It wasn't me, it was me being take over. And I was someone else."

"I was someone else." Let those words sink in, penetrate your core. Sexual abuse is so damaging it can destroy your sense of self, and create a monster under your own skin.

When she was in high school, Melissa visited her boyfriend over the holidays, and things were anything but festive.

"I was raped for Christmas Day night," she says. "I think I blacked out because the next thing I remember is him driving me home."

Two weeks later this young man called her. He was sobbing into the phone, begging Melissa to forgive him. Melissa, who has a kind heart, forgave him. She was a junior at the time, and the man was a year or two older. "He later went to prison for something," says Melissa.

The damage was done, and Melissa began to self-medicate.

"After I was raped in high school, the remainder of junior year and senior year I was not to be found in high school without a small bottle of Jack Daniels," she says. "I was dropping LSD. F*** what just happened, I am going to go to someplace else. I was on so many drugs just to make it from point A to point B."

Since that time Melissa's been in her share of abusive relationships, but they didn't look like that when they started out.

"It starts slowly," she says. "It looks like care. The attention you get from someone who is controlling your life looks like care, because they're so on top of you. He would erase my own family's messages to me, and not let me know when they called. My friends weren't good enough for me. The noose closed in tighter and tighter every year. The good clothes were gone. He kept me from dressing up. He threw away my makeup."

Ultimately, Melissa would leave this man, and literally never look back.



"For two weeks I lived in my car," she says. "I had a Honda Civic at the time, and socked everything I owned into a storage unit. It was the most freeing moment of my life, going over to Starving Students and saying, 'You need to be at my house at ten thirty, not ten o'clock, not eleven.' I told my parents the same thing, and I had packed up everything."

It's been years now since Melissa pulled herself out of the wreckage of that abusive and controlling relationship. And, in a way, it's made her almost indestructible, a sort of super woman. She remembers when she was on the sidewalk one afternoon and there was a hail of gunfire, bullets ricocheting over concrete.

"I reached the point of being unf***withable," Melissa says. "You can't touch me anymore because the worst that I can think of has already happened. That's why I didn't bother picking myself up off the sidewalk when someone is shooting bullets down the sidewalk. You can't kill me. You can't! I'm already dead."

There may have been death, but there was also a sort of resurrection.

"It feels like the body I had before had to collapse and burn several times," says Melissa. "I had to build up and recreate, and shut it down. Nowadays I am so in love with my friends and I have the freedom to love on them exactly the way I see fit without the perimeters of a male companion telling me what I need to be doing with my relationships."

Among other things, Melissa is a hair stylist, and by default, a sort of counselor, a listener.

"Part of why I'm such a great therapist is because I walked through hell," she says. "I've already seen it. I can pick it

out of someone. I can draw it out. If I can't tell by spending five minutes in silence with you, I will pull it out of you later."

Melissa's also tried her hand at standup comedy, and plans to do more of it in the future.

"I have taken all the awful s*** in my life and used it as fodder for standup comedy that I do behind my chair," she says. "You have to find the ridiculousness. I've done three standup shows. I don't lift anybody else's jokes. They're mine, and of it's kind of dark stuff."

But there's also light stuff that Melissa spreads wherever she can.

"Even just complimenting men, and helping them become softer beings," she says. "There's a clerk at the check-out and he's really nice to people. I was like, 'Hey I see that you're really nice to people. I appreciate your picking up the slack when I can't be here.'"

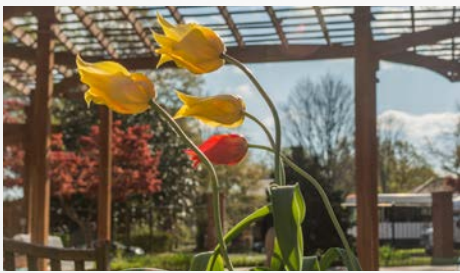
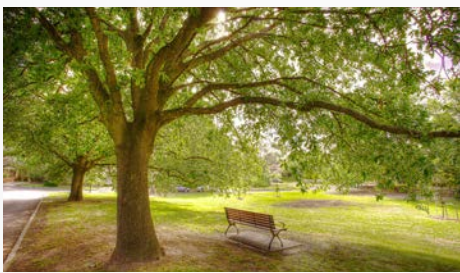
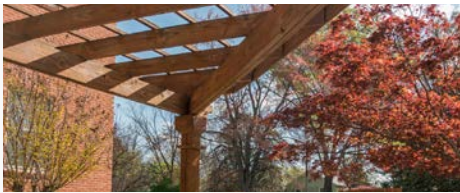
And then there's an almost blinding radiance in Melissa's life.

"My child is absolutely beautiful," she says. "He is magnificent."

And Melissa doesn't gloss over reality with her eleven-year old son.

"There is hope in this future," she says, as she considers her son. "Not only am I brutally honest with the things that have occurred to me, but also my part in the work that I do to rebuild, and the work that I do to keep my mind safe and healthy. My son sees me going through it. And I'll turn to him and I'll say, 'Hey, I'm going through it right now, I'm so sorry. I'll be back with you soon. Give me about half an hour so I can go and stare at my toes and then I'm gonna come back down here and I'm going to be an exemplary mom.'"

Melissa's love for her son, and her



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friends, is thorough and unconditional. You can sense it radiating from her.

“Here’s the thing that goes on in the back of my head,” says Mary Carpenter when all five women gather around the table in my living room. “I have no problem speaking out, and you guys have no problems speaking out. I’m not saying there aren’t good guys, I love men. It’s that feeling internally that I imagine some black people go through where they can look around a room of white people and know that if they weren’t there somebody might use the word n****r, and even if we were uncomfortable the white people wouldn’t say anything. I wonder what men say behind our backs.”

Men sexually assaulted Mary numerous times when she was still a child. At the age of eleven a doctor molested her on a bus. When she was twelve and thirteen, ministers assaulted her. A street vendor got her when she was thirteen, and then at just fifteen years old a whole group of grown men sexu-

ally attacked her.

Mary’s father was a man of the cloth, a Presbyterian minister, and back in the 1970s, the family lived in Ecuador’s capital city.

“We were missionaries in Quito,” says Mary. “And I had been in the country for just two weeks.” The car she and her siblings were traveling in from the Pentecostal camp where they lived outside of Quito broke down, and they had to catch a bus.

It was an old bus, 1950s, vintage GMC, and though the capacity was fifty-five, close to one hundred people were packed in tight as a deck of cards. It was impossible to find a seat, but finally Mary, a petite girl of twelve, managed to wiggle into a small space next to a doctor. She was dressed like a girl from “Little House on the Prairie” covered from wrist to ankles, and her hair was pulled up in a bun.

Two or three minutes after she settled into the seat, Mary felt something



under her dress. “The doctor had his hand underneath my dress, on my leg, and slowly moving upwards, and I had no point of reference for any of this,” Mary says. “I just knew that his hand did not belong on my thigh.”

In her lap she held onto a thick stack of schoolbooks. “I kept looking at him like, is this real, is this happening?” she remembers. “And he just kept staring straight ahead like I wasn’t even there,

and that hand kept going further and further up my thigh.” Thinking with an intense logic for someone so young, Mary grabbed those schoolbooks and placed them on the doctor’s hidden hand, then pressed down with all her weight concentrated on the books. “That was enough to get his attention I guess, and I guess he knew he wasn’t getting anywhere, and he got off at the next stop,” says Mary. “That was horrifying to

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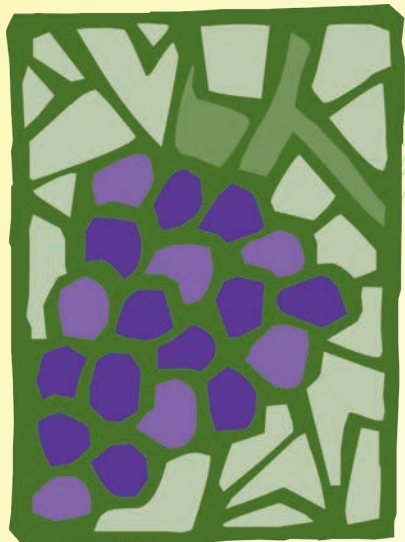
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me. I was a child in a new country.”

She recalls another time three years later as she was walking down a city street when a construction crew of half a dozen grown men surrounded her. There was no possibility of escape. “They just threw me up against the wall and had it at me, and they groped me and tried to kiss me and felt me up all over. You just kind of got used to it. It was something you had to look out for.”

Mary shakes her head as much in disgust as in disbelief. “As a woman you learn you’re not safe walking down the street,” she says. “You are open season. That was in Ecuador, but I get it here, too. I’ve had men at Wawa go, ‘Oh baby I love you.’ And this goes on on a regular basis. I’m now fifty-six years old and this is forty plus years of this crap, and it’s exhausting. Anybody who thinks this is complimentary just doesn’t get it.”

Now Mary returns to an early evening in the autumn of 1990. Just off work, she had gone to a neighborhood

grocery store on Strawberry Street in the heart of the Fan district where she picked up quite a few things. Her purse swung from her shoulder, and her arms held the large bag of groceries tight to her chest. She heard leaves rustling in her wake, felt the chill of an autumn wind, and the light was fading fast and she could smell wood smoke. It was a short walk to her apartment and she listened to the lonesome clack of her own heels on the sidewalk. And then a man, creeping out of the shadows, approached her from the opposite direction.

“And it was unusual because he got in my physical space, he did not try to walk around me like any normal human being, he kind of bumped me as I walked by,” she says.

Mary thought little of it and continued on her way. She could see the door to her apartment building. But thirty seconds after this man passed her, one large hand covered her eyes, while another clamped down on her mouth.

The groceries fell, and she was being dragged off the sidewalk into an alley between two row homes. “And I’m wearing a shirt and a top, and he starts pulling down my panty hose and digitally penetrating me,” she says.

Mary’s brain flared up with warnings, but her own instinct would then kick in.

“I just thought. ‘Oh my God, this guy is gonna rape me,’ and all solid advice that was in my head since age twelve of don’t fight just let it happen, don’t get killed over this, all of that immediately went out the window,” says Mary. “And I just started fighting like hell, I started moving around.”

As the rapist dragged her up the alley between two row homes, he drew a ski mask out of his back pocket and pulled it over his face. All Mary could now see were his eyes. She managed to get her left arm free, and she could see the small white circles of his eyes through the holes cut through the ski mask. Mary took aim, cocked her arm back like a catapult, stuck out two

fingers, rigid as knives, and thrust her arm forward just as hard as she could. Her fingers pushed into the soft wetness of the rapist’s eyes. Up until that moment the man had been completely silent, but when Mary’s fingers struck their mark, he grunted. Then he grabbed her left hand and shoved the pinky finger into his mouth and bit down as hard as he could, but wasn’t able to bite it off. And then he simply walked away toward the main alley between Park and Monument. But Mary wasn’t having any of that. Despite the bruises and the fear, she stood up, pulled herself together and screamed after him at the top of her lungs, “You son of a bitch.”

She immediately called the police and her boyfriend. “The police came and took my statement and I went over to Retreat Hospital and went through everything there,” she says.

Two weeks later, near the spot where she had been abducted, Mary saw her assailant again. She was with her boy-

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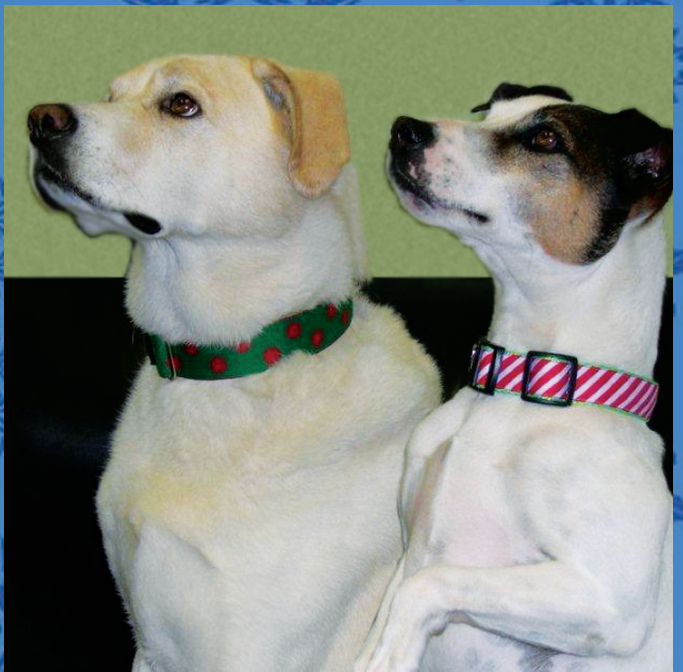
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friend who had said he would beat the crap out of the rapist if he ever encountered him. "That's the guy," she told him. "That's the guy that attacked me." But her boyfriend did nothing. "He just didn't have it in him to do anything at that point," says Mary.

So Mary went to the neighborhood grocer, who was an old-school sort of guy. He kept the names and addresses of people who wrote checks to him in an index card filing box. When Mary gave him a description of the rapist, the grocer flipped through the cards and said he knew exactly who he was. The grocer even knew where he lived on Grace Street, just two blocks away from Mary's residence.

Mary turned this information over to the Richmond Police Department, and what's more, because she is an artist, gave them a perfect rendering of the perp.

This is where it gets even weirder. It also illustrates how women seem to be under almost constant assault. Unbeknownst to Mary, or the Richmond Police, there was another rapist at large in the Fan and Museum District at the time. He used the same modus. Grab a woman, take her down an alley between two buildings, and sexually assault or rape her. The Richmond Police finally got a break in the case.

"I was assaulted in November, and so by April they caught the individual on the other side of the Boulevard," says Mary. "He was a larger guy with red hair, and there was a huge article in the Metro section of the paper that was like, 'Ladies of the Fan you can sleep well, we got him.'"

Mary knew otherwise. "Well, you may have gotten one, but you didn't get my guy," she thought.

The police had been pretty insistent that Mary was wrong about the identity of her assailant. They felt sure they'd apprehended her rapist. Mary knew better. Not a week after the story about the arrest of the rapist ran in the newspaper, Mary's suspicions that there still was a rapist attacking women in the Fan were confirmed, and an RPD detective apologized to her and ate a healthy side of crow. It was very bad police work, worthy of Inspector LeStrade.

"I was driving my car downtown to go to work at eight o'clock in the morning and I looked over to my right and

I saw this young woman gesticulating wildly and talking to a police officer," Mary says. "She was pointing in between two buildings, and all I could think was, 'He struck again.'"

She called the police left a message, and later received a call back from the detective who was working her case. "He did call me back and he apologized to me," she says.

And then the officer said what far too many men say when women tell their stories of rape or sexual assault. "He told me point blank, 'Mary, we did not believe you,'" Mary says. "We did not think there were two people doing the same thing."

Though the cops knew where Mary's assailant lived, the man was never charged or convicted of rape, or sexual assault.

She tells other stories about sexual harassment and assault, as do these other women gathered at the table. It's both communion and group therapy, and I am honored to be witness to it.

"What we need are safe spaces," says Terry Menefee Gau. "And everybody needs this. Our immigrants in this country need this right now. African-American men and women and children need this right now. We need this. We need to create intentionally safe spaces. As it is there is no safe space for a woman. When we walk into a restaurant or a meeting, we're always looking for the one person who might hurt us, who might block the exit."

Terry's words keep pouring out her as if from a spring, and I look around the table as the other women speak and eat and drink and laugh and cry. Each lady is intelligent and compassionate, honest and lovely, and so kind to one another and the world at large that it makes it unimaginable that anyone would ever want to hurt any woman in any way. But men have hurt women for millennia, have subjugated and brutalized them. Those are facts, and they need to change. And human beings, both men and women, can make this a reality, make the world one enormous safe space.

Since that late October night, I've listened to the tapes of these women's stories over and over and over again, and I've talked with scores of other women over the years who have shared their stories of this same sort of abuse. As

Didi Tremblay had said of men who attack women in one way or other, 'It's like they're everywhere.'

And they are.

The current occupant of the White House has been accused of sexual assault by more than a dozen women, and, of course, he denies it. He also denies the Hollywood Access tape in which he bragged about sexually assaulting women. Regardless, what he may claim, the tape is real, and so are his words.

In Alabama they almost elected a man to serve in the United States Senate who was called out by an assortment of women, all claiming the same thing—that this man, as an adult, tried to force himself on girls. Pedophile is the term we use to describe people who destroy the innocence of children and permanently mar them, kill part of them, fracture their psyches beyond recognition, all to gratify some perverse and criminal impulse. Yet still, a good number of Alabamians voted for him, and the current occupant of the White

House endorsed him wholeheartedly.

There are other men in political power, Democrat and Republican alike, who have committed the same atrocities against women, even a former president who teetered on the brink of impeachment because of the lies he told regarding his own inappropriate behavior toward women. He, of course, was a liar, and a Democrat.

Heads of business, entertainment moguls, film stars, and men in virtually every conceivable position of power and authority are being called out, and it's bringing them down. And at long last, some men are finally listening to women. I would say these are "real" men.

Men and boys have got a lot of work ahead of them. For the safety of the human race, for its very preservation, things have to change. And I believe women will save our country and world from ruin. Or, at least, they will lead the charge. For their courage is inexhaustible, and they bear the human race. **NSJ**

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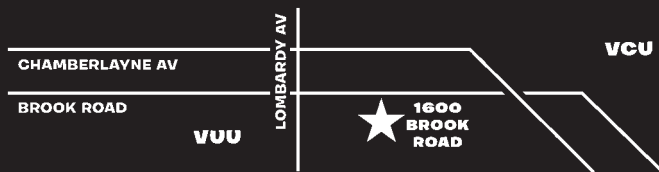
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RAINBOW MINUTES

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Angel of the Waters

CONSIDERED THE FIRST notable American woman sculptor, Emma Stebbins was born in New York City in 1815.

Her family encouraged her studies at various American studios. A trip to Rome would secure the love of the highly-successful and charismatic actress, Charlotte Cushman, who was involved in the bohemian and lesbian-feminist scene. One of Stebbins' early commissions was a bust of Cushman herself, completed in 1860. Five years later, her bronze statue of educator Horace Mann was installed outside the State House in Boston.

By far, Stebbins is best known for "Angel of the Waters," located on the

Bethesda Terrace in Central Park in New York City. Taking center stage, the "Angel of the Waters" fountain is a gathering place for those who want a place to sit and contemplate. The three-tiered fountain, topped by the sculpture of an angel, was unveiled in 1873.

Stebbins designed the neoclassical winged sculpture to celebrate the fresh water that the new Croton Aqueduct supplied both the fountain and all New Yorkers. The angel holds a lily in one hand, representing purity, with the other hand outstretched to bless the waters, which were until then unsafe to drink.

Unfortunately, when her beloved Charlotte Cushman died of pneumonia in 1876, Stebbins' days of creative inspiration were over.

Henry Gerber, Gay Rights Founder

Henry Gerber was born in Bavaria in 1892. In 1913, he emigrated to America and settled in Chicago. He became inspired by Magnus Hirshfeld's courageous work for gay rights in Germany, while stationed there.

After returning to Chicago's emerging gay subculture, he and several friends founded the first official gay rights organization in America, called the Society for Human Rights.

Gerber created the first underground

gay publication, called "Friendship and Freedom." But it was short-lived. Acting on a tip, police discovered papers from the society and arrested all its members. After three costly court cases, the charges were dismissed, but Gerber lost his job and his life savings. In the 1960s, he resumed writing for the Mattachine Society.

Henry Gerber lived just long enough to witness the Stonewall Rebellion - the birth of the gay liberation movement.

Keith Haring Mural Saved

On November 2, 2013, hundreds assembled at 22nd and Ellsworth streets in Philadelphia to celebrate the restoration of Keith Haring's "We the Youth" mural. Haring and a group of teens from CityKids in New York created the mural in 1987 in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution.

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania, Haring moved to New York City where he

thrived as an artist and social activist. The mural is his only collaborative public mural still intact at its original site. Sadly, he died from an AIDS-related illness just three years after creating it.

The restoration was made possible by a \$30,000 grant to Mural Arts from the Keith Haring Foundation to hire Kim Alsbrooks and a crew of artists to restore the mural, using the most durable paints available.



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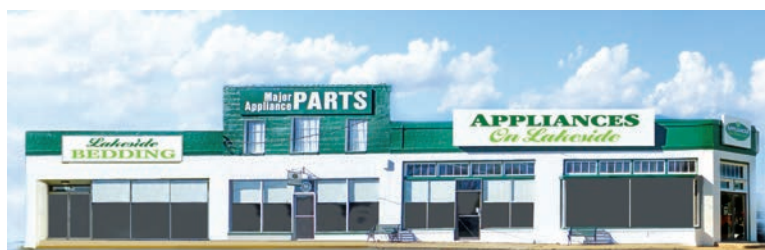


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