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TABLE of CONTENTS

4 NORTH OF THE JAMES NotJ Wins 1st Place VPA Award
North of the James magazine won two awards from the Virginia Press Association at this year's conference earlier this month. The magazine was also featured in a piece in the VPA magazine.

6 BUSINESS PROFILE HOBNOB: Local in Every Way
Hob Nob opened a little over sixteen months, and was an immediate success. Part of it's the minimal interior created by Kristin Thoroman, a professional staff, and the food from master chef and co-owner Tracey Thoroman. But it's also the couple's commitment to keeping it all local.

10 DEATH CLUB Death Takes a Road Trip
Grief is underrated, misunderstood, pervasive and sneaky. I spend much of my time working with people who are angry, not at the ways of life and death, but at grief itself. "Why do I feel this way?" "I thought this would feel different." "Why does grief keep sneaking up on me?" "What is wrong with me?"

12 BOOK REVIEW Real Superheroes: Justice League for the Planet
We've all heard about climate change, but you may be less familiar with the phrase "climate justice." If you want to learn more about this (and trust me, you do), pick up a copy of Mary Robinson's book.

14 COVER STORY The Richmond Waldorf School: Head, Heart, and Hands
The curriculum at this Northside school both nurtures and challenges every dimension of each child. Students begin learning a foreign language as early as first grade. The kids are taught arithmetic, sans calculators, as well as cursive writing. They are also encouraged to be children. And to play.

20 FEATURE Start Creating Memories Now
Victor Ayala is one of Richmond's premier masons specializing in hardscape, those additions that turn your outdoors into an extension of your home. And now is the time to start planning that patio, or fire pit, those raised beds or outdoor kitchens that you'll be able to enjoy this summer, and for all summers to come.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH by REBECCA D'ANGELO

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North of the James Wins 1st Place VPA Award For Feature Writing Portfolio

NORTH OF THE JAMES magazine won two awards from the Virginia Press Association at this year's conference earlier this month.

Editor Charles McGuigan won a first-place award for feature writing portfolio, which consisted of "Anthony Clary: Of Love and Forgiveness", "Chris Brown: Coming Full Circle", and "Kosh McGuigan". He also received a second-place feature writing award for "Kaitly Kasper: Blazing into that Good Night".

North of the James wishes to congratulate all journalists, photographers and designers across the Commonwealth who were also recognized for their work by our press association.



Q&A: Charles McGuigan, North of the James

By William Lineberry/January 17th, 2019

This week we talked with founder, publisher and editor of North of the James magazine, Charles McGuigan.

Charles talks about how he started the monthly out of a garage in Richmond's Northside; the importance of sustaining a hyper-local publication; why he chooses to put a literary slant to the magazine's writing; the Gutenberg Revolution; the parallels between book sales and newspapers and more.

Please introduce yourself:

My name is Charles McGuigan, and I'm editor and publisher of North of the James, a regional magazine serving Richmond, north of the James River. Since founding the company in November of 1994 with my former business partner, Ellen Zagorin, and my former wife Joany Flick, who worked tirelessly to make this dream a reality, North of the James has always focused on the quality of writing, design and photography. It was Joany who gave the publication its unique look. Stories in our pages are fleshed out thoroughly, and written in a narrative style that draws the reader in. Or that's my hope.

From the first time we published, we vowed to serve the local market and its economy. To that end, we only accept advertisements from locally owned and operated businesses—the exceptions being retirement communities and hospitals.

We started the magazine out of a garage in the North Side neighborhood of Bellevue and moved to permanent offices eight months later. One thing that separates us from other free tabloids is that we are home-delivered by our carriers to 10,000 households. We also do drop-offs at more than 100 commercial locations north of the James.

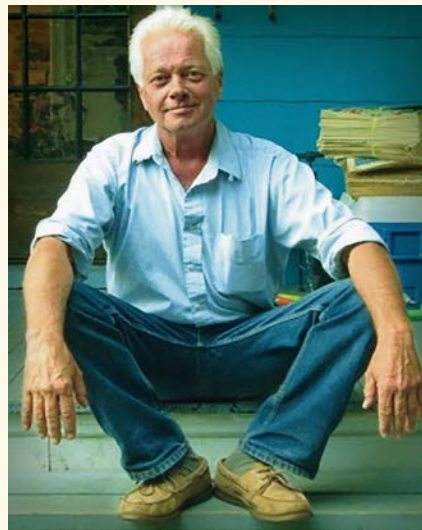
In addition to writing for North of the James, I write short fiction, and write and produce audio documentaries, which can be heard at Public Radio Exchange. I also do a weekly program of audio stories called "A Grain of Sand" for WRIR-97.3FM.

You started in a garage more than 20 years ago. What has it been like to stay with North of the James and watch it grow? What do you attribute the longevity to?

Watching the growth of NotJ was like watching my own children mature—a joy every day, even during times that were economically dicey. I mean this, too. I have a son and daughter who grew up alongside the magazine—one is about to complete college, the other is a junior in high school.

We have extremely loyal advertisers, some of whom have been with us since the beginning. We have managed to keep our rates very competitive and have worked with clients on pricing. More than anything else, though, the quality of our writing, photography and design has sustained us. If you consider the body of our editorial work, you will notice that each article is actually a story with a distinct beginning, middle and end. And everything we write about always contains the human element, and each subject is treated with kid gloves. We do not write about topics. We search out stories that readers will relate to.

I've noticed that you are usually responsible for the bigger features in the magazine and that those pieces tend to have a literary sensibility. Where



"Nothing will ever replace the printed word; the Gutenberg Revolution is far from over."

does this come from and why have you made it a priority for NOTJ?

I generally write the cover stories along with several of the main features. But I also have a pool of exceptionally talented writers who also produce stories for the magazine. My preference for that literary sensibility comes from my own writing of short stories, as well as my deep admiration for many of the writers who are regularly featured in "The New Yorker."

Journalism does not have to be staid and dry. There's nothing new about this idea; just think of Charles Dickens' "Sketches by Boz." Finally, as you well know, a periodical is popular among its readers only if they enjoy the contents. And our readership over these past 25 years has been extremely loyal and continues to grow.

When you look for a story for the magazine, what does it have to have to make you want to write about it?

First and foremost, there has to be a story. What's more, it needs to be evergreen, and resonate with universal truths, or at least hint at them.

What's been one of your favorite pieces and why?

I would be hard-pressed to single out one cover story. We have profiled many people on our cover, from Tim Kaine and Bishop Walter Sullivan to Jay Ipson and Oliver Hill. Not to mention the scores of artists and musicians from Susan Greenbaum and Janet Martin to Tim Harriss and Nicole Randall. And each story is riveting. Of course, other covers are devoted to a single subject, whether hiking the length of the old RF&P tracks from Acca Yard in Richmond to the North Anna River in Hanover County, or canoeing the Chickahominy River from its origin in western Henrico County to the New Kent County line. It really is hard to say. One story does stick out. It was called "Abbie Waters: The Habit of Being," and was about a nine-year old girl's battle with a form of cancer that would ultimately kill her. She was a

classmate of my son's, and she had a rare quality of being that simply astonished me.

Had you always wanted to run a magazine, or was it something that you fell into? Are you glad that you did it?

I always wanted to write, but in the 1990s, as I watched independent publications being gobbled up by media conglomerates, I felt it essential to create another voice in the market. And I didn't want it to be newspaper, I wanted it to be a magazine. Since that first issue hit the streets in November 1994, I have never looked back, or even once regretted my decision.

Are you optimistic about the future of the industry?

Increasingly so. I think people have begun to realize the importance of print media. In this age where anyone can start a blog or a website that purports to be legitimate, many readers are now more careful about vetting news sources. We are, after all, living in an oxymoronic age of supposed "alternative facts." Invariably, the most reliable news sources are still newspapers and magazines like The New York Times and The Atlantic Monthly, The Wall Street Journal and Harper's Magazine—the standard bearers of truth that battle the armies of ignorance and misinformation, lies and outright propaganda.

The internet is an invaluable tool, and always will be. But print, I believe, will endure. When radio was first introduced as a medium, the demise of newspapers was predicted. Just decades later, with the advent of television, many predicted the twin deaths of both print and radio. I think all media will ultimately co-exist, and give greater dimension to the stories they tell. Nothing will ever replace the printed word; the Gutenberg Revolution is far from over.

Here's something, too. Throughout the country independent bookstores have seen a significant spike in profits, while e-book sales have steadily declined. Kindle seems to be fizzling out, while actual books have regained popularity. I think this has happened for two reasons. Real books—with spines, covers and pages—require nothing more to operate than a human hand. The other cause is something less palpable. There is an undeniable pleasure in holding the book, just as there is in opening the pages of a magazine or newspaper. There's even a smell to books and periodicals, and visually, nothing can compete with black type on white paper.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Only this: I earnestly believe we are living at a critical juncture in history, and it is more important now than ever before that writers challenge what they know to be wrong and false. The press needs to diligently call out every half-truth and lie promulgated by politicians and supposed media outlets, which are actually nothing more than propaganda machines.

We are called the Fourth Estate for a very specific reason. (Incidentally, it was the Irish statesman Edmund Burke, father of modern conservatism, who first used the phrase to describe a free press.) What it means today is that we watch the watchmen to ensure members of the other three estates—the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government—never act above the law.



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HOBNOB

Local in Every Way

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

SO I HAPPEN INTO HOBNOB, completely by accident, during a seasonal staff meeting, where the owners explain to the employees every item on the upcoming menu. They change the menu out every three months or so to coincide with the seasons, which guarantees the freshest products available.

All fourteen staff are seated at the tables, facing the far end of the bar, a sort of center stage, where Tracey Thoroman stands with a pad of paper and begins explaining what will go into every dish this Lakeside restaurant, just off the main drag on Hermitage Road, will be serving up for the next few months.

And here's the thing: the bar itself has become a groaning board lined with about twenty different culinary delights perfectly presented on HOBNOB's signature white plates and bowls, blank canvases for gastronomic masterpieces.

"We changed over the ground beef that we use, it's from Seven Hills out of Lynchburg," says Tracey. "We use a lot of local purveyors. We're using Idle Hands bakery for sourdough, and, of course, we use Early Bird biscuits." He mentions that the sorghum hot sauce used on the Nashville chicken sandwich is made by the Shack out in Staunton, Virginia. "We try to keep everything as local as possible," he will tell me later.

Tracey explains the king oyster BLT is a vegetarian sandwich. "The king oyster mushroom is a hearty, meaty kind of mushroom, that's the bacon part of it," he says. "So, it's the mushroom, lettuce, tomato, basil mayo, and red onion."

He then lets the employees know that though the all-American will no longer appear on the menu, it will still be available. "It will be like the secret HOBNOB burger for all our regulars," he says.

After describing the crab cake sandwich, packed with a hefty five ounces of backfin, Tracey says, "We ran out of all our crab cakes yesterday."

He moves rapidly through another dozen or so menu items from the fried



Owners Kristin and Tracey Thoroman

oysters, to crab Benedict, chicken and waffles, spinach and gruyere strata, zucchini pancakes, beef brisket hash, chicken pesto pasta, shrimp and grits, lemon ricotta fritters, smoked trout deviled eggs, and so on.

"The lunch menu mirrors the dinner menu more than it ever has," says Tracey. "All the starters, soups, and salads are the same. The entrees are the same."

All the while Tracey has been whetting the appetite of the employees, and the moment he finishes his running commentary, all gathered rise, and make their way over to the bar. There's a clatter of dishes and a jangle of flatware, and they move down along the countertop of the bar as if it's a buffet line, and they load their plates with samples from the spread, and return to their seats to dine.

I return the following Monday—the only day of the week HOBNOB is closed—to meet with the owners, Tracey and Kristin Thoroman, for an extended interview. Tracey works at the restaurant full-time, heading up the kitchen and tending to the business side of the restaurant, six days a week; Kristin works evenings, managing the front of the house, while during the day she serves as director of education and exhibitions at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. The pair lives just off Dumbarton.

"It's fun that both of my jobs are right around the corner from one another,"



says Kristin. "We live, work and play in Lakeside."

HOBNOB opened a little over sixteen months ago on Saint Patrick's Day. "It's been a whirlwind since we opened," Kristin says, and her husband nods.

Though they weren't creating an entire universe in seven days, the Thoromans achieved something almost miraculous in about four and a half days, working round-the-clock. They utterly transformed the restaurant.

"Hermitage Grill closed that Sunday after brunch," Tracey remembers. "We spent Monday and Tuesday painting, we redid the floors, we did the back of the bar, and opened that Friday."

This past December, overnight, they replaced all the tables and the chairs, and added banquet seating. "The tables were all done by Old Dominion Wood out of Lynchburg," says Tracey. And this further enhanced the dining room.

Kristin, not only manages the front of the house, but she is responsible for the space's aesthetic—clean, black-and-white, minimalist design, with a few wall hangings, including a pair of staghorn ferns.

The rear of the house is Tracey's domain. He and his wife, both of whom love everything about food, are also firm believers in dovetailing with the community in every way possible.

"I think our goal is always fresh, affordable, and local, as much as possi-

ble," says Tracey. "And we're growing that all the time, using more and more local products. We also try to offer a good variety on the menu so there's a little something for anybody who comes in here. I try not to be so chefey with my own ideas."

As the season progresses, Tracey plans to work with food providers just a couple blocks away at Lakeside Farmers Market. "As we hit the end of the spring season I plan to go over there," he says. "I would love to just work with the local farmers as much as possible. Certainly, Cavalier Produce, which we use as our main produce purveyor, utilizes local as much as possible, too, but I think we could even get a little bit closer in."

"We use D & I Seafood," says Tracey. "They're been real supporters of ours from the very beginning. They worked with us on payment while we got going, and they're always here as quickly as possible. If I say, 'You know we ran through more scallops than I expected last night, and we're out,' they'll do their best to have them here by lunch."

Seafood specialties at HOBNOB are among the most popular selections on the menu. "I think some of our biggest sellers, and our most reliable fan favorites, have been seafood," Kristin says. "On this past winter menu the rockfish just went bonkers. Everybody loved it."

Tracey used a straightforward recipe with one of the Chesapeake's most rapid visitors. "We just pan-seared it and did a lemon-butter on top of it, and D & I sourced that, and it was locally fished out of the Bay," he says. "We also did a rockfish BLT sandwich with bacon, Old Bay mayo, avocado, lettuce and tomato. We went through fifty to seventy-five pounds a week the entire winter. And that's an example of an item that's very seasonal."

When I ask about other popular menu options, Kristin smiles at her husband. "We can always talk about the roasted cauliflower," she says. This dish, an appetizer, is served with a pistachio gremolata, and has become one of HOBNOB's signature creations.

As they were planning their first

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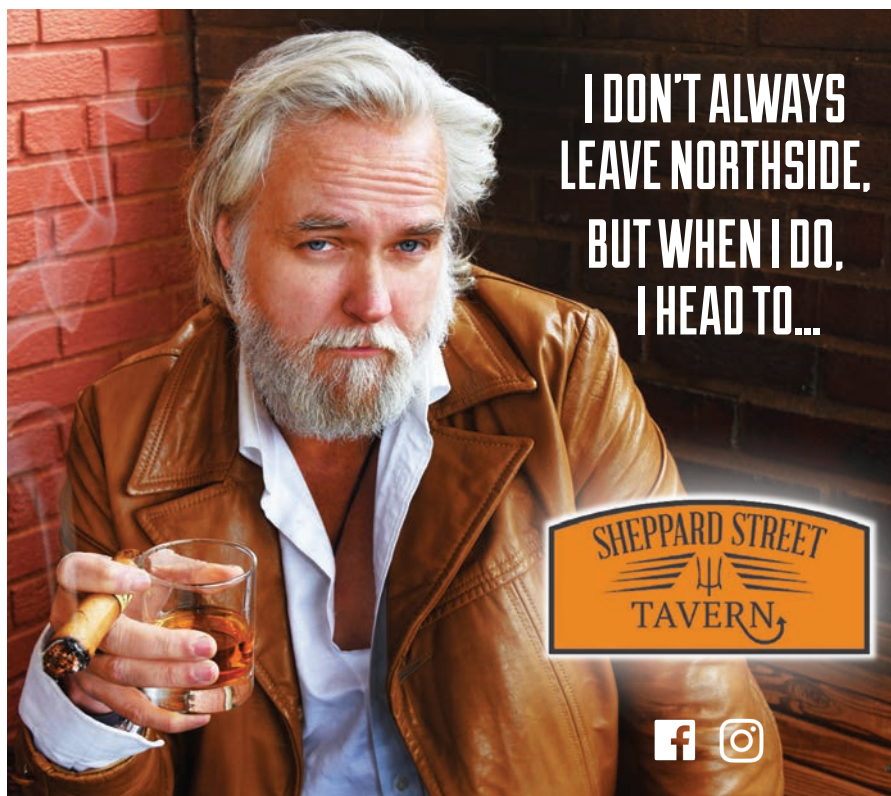
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menu, Kristin recommended putting the roasted cauliflower on it. But her husband wasn't too sure how popular the dish would be.

"Tracey didn't want to put it on there," says Kristin. "He ended up putting it on, and the very first day we were opened it sold out, and ever since then it's been on the menu."

Tracey nods, smiles, laughs, and then talks about another favorite made with a vegetable not always popular. "One hit over the winter menu was frizzled Brussel sprouts," he says. "You cook them in bacon fat, and then you add bacon crumbles and garlic, and top it with toasted walnuts, and that was definitely popular."

Midway through the interview, a woman knocks on the front door. Kristin unlocks the door and tells the woman that HOBNOB is closed on Mondays, but she recommends this woman and her friend try SB'S Lake-

side Love Shack over in the nearby HUB Shopping Center.

When Kristin snaps the lock shut, and returns to her perch at the bar, Tracey talks about the owners of the Love Shack. "They're just like us," he says. "In fact, Sarabeth and Joe were in here Saturday night, and we talked about how we might be able to cross utilize employees when one of us is a little understaffed. We want them to succeed just as much as they want us to succeed."

And succeeding they are. HOBNOB has a massive following, with more than a few regulars. "We have a few folks who have standing reservations," Tracey says. "We have one group of four people who have a standing Tuesday night reservation at seven o'clock. We have a couple of standing reservations for brunch. And then there's a group that comes in every week on Thursday nights."

People obviously come back again and


again for the food, but it's more than that. "I feel like people really recognize us as being part of the neighborhood," says Kristin. "They love that atmosphere, and I think for people, even if it's their first time in, they see the way that we recognize people and are chatting, and between tables people are chatting, and it's friendly. So even if it's their first time in, they feel that kind of warm welcoming."

Tracey and Kristin both acknowledge that their staff are some of the primary keys to HOBNOB's success. Some of them have been with the restaurant since the beginning, and Kristin notices that they sometimes fill multiple roles. "So our lead bar manager right now, Amanda, she's helping with some of that behind the scenes management in terms of ordering and inventory and other details," she says.

"We've found, just through the process of now owning a business for sixteen months, that people actually step up to take those roles," says Tracey. "Amanda has been here for over a year. She's taken complete ownership of it, and is doing a great job."

That philosophy, in part, harkens back to one of Tracey's first jobs at The Crossings Golf Course. "The general manager, Carl Filipowicz, was really good at letting me do my own thing," he says. "He pushed me to be better, and he realized that's what I wanted. We have an employee now that I think is kind of an example of that. Addie, our sous chef, is like that. I give her space to be her own person. It gives people the space to utilize their talents and bring their own spin on what we do here."

They consider the success of HOBNOB. "I think we're completely blown out of the water as to how great the reception has been," says Tracey. Right now, their seating capacity inside, including the bar, is forty-two. There are another eighteen seats out on the front patio. At some point, the Thoroman's may expand the restaurant with an enclosed patio off the north elevation of the building. "We want to make sure we do it the right way and at the right pace," Tracey says.

"We're thrilled and excited and overwhelmed, all at the same time," says Kristin. "And we're just so grateful for everyone's support." 

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“Some things make you stronger.
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by ALANE CAMERON FORD



GRIEF IS UNDERRATED, misunderstood, pervasive and sneaky. I spend much of my time working with people who are angry, not at the ways of life and death but at grief itself. “Why do I feel this way?” “I thought this would feel different.” “Why does grief keep sneaking up on me?” “What is wrong with me?”

These are all common questions for grieving people, particularly those who are just now aging into the generations where death is more common. The roar of these questions often becomes loudest around the three-month anniversary after a loss, or at the time of the first vacation. What these two timeframes have in common is that they are when we have a chance to slow down and rest. Grief sees the resting season as an opportunity to remind us of our feelings that had been lurking beneath the surface.

My family and I just had the luxury of a five-day vacation. My husband, the two teenagers and I piled in the car for a multi-state road trip which included stops for us to do some research for my radio show, “Death Club Radio.” Each day was packed with a combination of exercise, history, and overeating. We had been looking forward to this for several months and had something fun planned for each of us.

Imagine then my surprise when I became tearful upon discovering a picturesque view. Or walking through historic cemeteries. Or over a lobster roll. I knew better than to question why this emotional upheaval was

there. Somewhere between the swim trunks and driving snacks we had packed grief in the car.

My darling, mouthy Aunt Eleesa died December 27, 2018. We hit the road for vacation on March 29, 2019. Of course, grief had hitched a ride with us.

Many people feel frustration and shame at the bubbling up of grief when they do not expect it. There are few cultures within this country that welcome tears in public, but grief doesn't care about cultural norms, lack of tissues, or who is watching. When the time comes to face your losses, there is no rescheduling.

In my case, tears threatened at the sight of vulnerable and fleeting, lovely family moments—my kids laughing at each other's jokes, me holding my husband's hand, watching a beautiful sunset. Each delight would put a little tadpole in my throat, and my lip would tremble. The floodgates finally opened at, of all places, the Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, Connecticut.

We were at the museum to see an exhibit on the failed Franklin expedition of 1845. The ships *Terror* and *Erebus* and their crew of 129 men were lost during an attempt to navigate a Northwest passage. Until 2014, when the first ship was found, historians puzzled over what had happened for generations. It is a tragic story, but one that I have known for years.

My tears, although triggered by the exhibit, were far more personal. Our family expedition took us to new places, but reminded me of recent losses. The weight of grief made me feel “old”—that

word we use to describe everything from the health of our connective tissues, to how others see us, to a sense of weariness about life and death.

The museum lobby sob-fest was uncomfortable, but as far as grief is concerned, all of this is completely normal and right on time. The deaths of our loves make us take stock of who we are and where we seek our happiness. Grief makes us reassess our priorities and pay attention to our memories. Sentimental longing is to be expected. Ruminations on one's own age and life expectancy are predictable.

“Yeah, yeah,” my heart grumbled. “This still stinks.”

Indeed, the grieving process does stink at times. Losing the generation who came before you is a rapid trip in a time machine that insists on taking you to a future including your own ultimate demise. But grief isn't all bad. Tears often dry in the naming of the pain and in recognition of all the good a life can bring. I loved childhood trips with my Aunt Eleesa. She had abundant energy, wry humor and relished new experiences. She possessed a laugh that could get us kicked out of every library in the nation. And that fine woman knew good food. Perhaps it was the company, but I don't recall ever sharing a bad meal with her. She was and will always be a treasure in my life. When I remember her I sigh, but I also smile.

Perhaps it would be helpful if we begin to think about the grief process as being like a family vacation. We can't plan for everything, and there will always be some discomfort on the journey. There will be difficult days when carefully laid plans are torn asunder. We may be exhausted at the end of it, but just like vacations, there is an end. Grief is a necessary and often inconvenient moment, but life will interrupt and move us along when it is time. And even if we cry at a museum, we can get up and head out into the sunshine ready to accept the next adventure. **NEJ**

Alane Cameron Ford is a hospice chaplain, grief counselor, writer, and the host of Death Club Radio on WRIR 97.3. She and her husband have three children and live in Northside where they encourage revelry.

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BOOK REVIEW

Real Superheroes Justice League for the Planet

by FRAN WITHROW

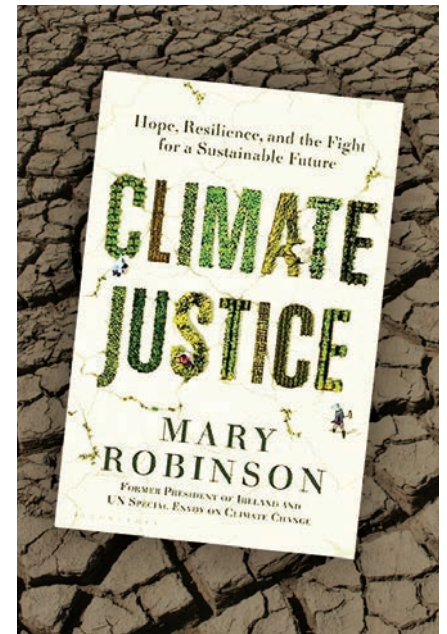
WE'VE ALL heard about climate change, but you may be less familiar with the phrase "climate justice." If you want to learn more about this (and trust me, you do), pick up a copy of Mary Robinson's book. I stayed up late into the night to finish this quick read, and I am convinced this term should be part of everyone's vocabulary.

Climate justice, according to Robinson, is "putting people at the heart of the solution" to climate change. She observes that countries and communities that have contributed the least to the problem of climate change are the ones most likely to suffer from its effects. Yet all of us will have to work in concert to address this urgent crisis, and we must be fair and just around the world in sharing the good and the bad of climate change.

Robinson, a former president of Ireland, has always been an environmentalist, but it was when she held her first grandson in her arms and tried to imagine the world he would inherit that she truly began to work to save the earth.

In addition to her own efforts, Robinson introduces us to different brave people from around the world who are addressing, dealing with, or battling climate change. (It was not lost on me that many of the leaders fighting for climate justice are women.) A Swedish reindeer herder explains how indigenous people need to be "at the table" in climate control discussions since she is presently witnessing firsthand how changing weather patterns are reducing her herd. A Vietnamese professor is working with local communities to protect forests because illegal logging is affecting the livelihood of women.

An Australian businesswoman decided to reduce her carbon footprint, and followed that move by starting 1 Million Women, an online movement to combat developed countries' wasteful approach to energy usage. The president of poverty-stricken Kiribati, a Pacific nation consisting of low-lying islands, is being forced to purchase land from Fiji for the time when his entire



country will no longer be above water.

It feels like an uphill battle, but there are glimmers of hope. Costa Rica produced an incredible 99% of its electricity supply from renewable energy in 2015. Many of our own country's local cities and states agreed to follow the protocols of the Paris Agreement despite Trump's refusal to sign this critical document. China and India are working diligently to utilize solar power. They have specific goals for reducing fossil fuel use and using renewable energy. Even Ethiopia, a place where few people have access to electricity, has pledged to reduce its use of fossil fuels and increase its consumption of renewable energy.

While those who live in poorer nations and communities will feel the effects of climate change first and foremost, this crisis will have implications for us all. Those of us who blithely consume much of the world's wealth, who nonchalantly fill our trash cans without a second thought, who assume that it's not our problem, would do well to read this book. The time to act is now, in hopes there will be a world worth living in for our children and grandchildren. **NR**

Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future

By Mary Robinson
Bloomsbury Publishing
\$26.00
176 pages

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RICHMOND

Waldorf School

HEAD, HEART AND HANDS

COLOR IS THE FIRST THING THAT STRIKES ME

as I cross the threshold and enter The Richmond Waldorf School on Robin Hood Road. The painted walls seem to pulse with a gentle light, warm and embracing, alive and calming. It's called lazure, and consists of layers of paint applied thin and transparent as watercolors. And the hues change as I move along the corridors. The halls outside kindergarten through the lower grades are pink and rosy. In the upper school corridors, the colors shift to the other end of the spectrum—blues and pale purples. This method of painting was developed by the man who founded the first Waldorf School exactly one hundred years ago in Stuttgart, Germany, a man named Rudolph Steiner. Emil Molt, director of the Waldorf Astoria tobacco factory, asked Steiner to create a school there for the children of his factory workers. And from that rose a system of education that has spread the globe over.

"The premise of Waldorf education, I think, has three main points," Roberto Trostli will tell me later. "One is looking at the human being as a spiritual being. So, we've come to earth for a reason. We're doing things in this lifetime that we've come to earth to do, so looking beyond the physical and mental to this eternal part of us."

Roberto should know. He's worked at Waldorf schools for thirty-eight years. What's more, he attended Waldorf schools first in his native Sao Palo, Brazil (his parents were Jewish, Austrian refugees who found safe haven in South America during World War II), and later, after his parents emigrated to the States, in New York City at 79th and Fifth Avenue.

Secondly, Roberto would tell me, Waldorf education emphasizes that every student goes through different stages of development. "So each age has a different approach, different methodology, different curriculum, even different sets of relationships."

And then there's this, according to Roberto: "Education really should be an artistic process. The best way to engage with that is for the teacher to be a learner so if the teacher's actively learning, then when you're teaching you're trying to get children to learn, and the more you can engage them in every part of learning and the more artistic that is, the more alive it is."

Valerie Hogan, director of marketing and enrollment, greets me at the front office and we make our way into a conference room. "At Waldorf, we want children to love to learn," she says. "We want to honor childhood, and that's a huge component of our program. That, and allowing children to develop at their own pace. Waldorf is based on a developmental approach of human development."

From the time the children enter kindergarten here, they are introduced to the art storytelling from fairy tales to ancient myths, and it really is all fun for the kids as I will discover when we visit the classrooms. "There's this feeling now that we need to push kids to be involved in academics earlier and earlier and earlier," says Valerie. "And Waldorf says children need to be playing, children need to be outside, children



need to learn social skills. They need to learn emotional skills, so that they have a foundation to then move into academics."

Throughout the day, I'll witness evidence of all of these tenets.

Letitia Amey, a seasoned Waldorf teacher, joins us. Along with her duties as the class teacher for sixth grade, she also helps run the bicycle program. Letitia's husband, also a teacher at the school, works with the younger kids. "My husband is teaching them how to use a pedal bike so they're in the gymnasium a lot of the time, but if it's a nice day they sometimes go out to the black top, and onto our course that we're creating" she says.

Two years ago, Letitia took her students on an overnight bike trip along the Capital Trail. It was part of their geography class, which focused on Virginia. "We actually

biked from Charles City to Jamestown," she says. "We spent the night at Chickahominy Riverfront Park."

In the Waldorf method of instruction, there is a continuity that benefits students and teachers alike. "From first until eighth grade the class teacher moves up through the grades with the same class," says Letitia. "So this teacher is developing himself or herself just as the class is, and the subject matter is really new and fresh, and the teacher is inspired by this new material every year. The teacher is learning as well as the student, and I feel that the students really see that, and see that we're all learning together, and I think it makes it a little more engaging and interesting."

And unlike other schools that threw the baby out with the bath water, Waldorf held fast to skills that have proven beneficial to a student's intellectual development.

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO



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“In this technological world it might seem the use of mental arithmetic is no longer really necessary,” says Letitia. “But we in the Waldorf School strongly disagree with that. It’s an important skill to be developed from first grade through middle school, and so we feel that if it’s practiced regularly in the classroom it really strengthens the student’s sense of numbers. It challenges their memory. It increases their ability to focus. And it also really helps to develop those general cognitive capacities. The use of calculators, on the other hand, really weakens this ability to do mental arithmetic, so we discourage the use of calculators until eighth grade.”

Waldorf also teaches cursive writing, which sadly has fallen by the wayside in many school districts. “Starting in second grade, we’re teaching with an Italic print, and then we move into the cursive writing, and by the middle school years the children are able to create their own handwriting,” Letitia adds. “Cursive writing is another example of really balancing the hands, heart and head of the child.”

From a very early age, children at Waldorf begin learning about words, and even their component parts. “We bring the letters of the alphabet to them in an imaginative way,” says Letitia. “So they’re learning to not only use their imagination, but also to create the different sounds of the letter before they really even learn the letter itself. We’re not just teaching them the rote alphabet. We usually use a three-day rhythm, so the first day the teacher might tell a story about a snake, and the next day on the board would be a drawing of a snake in the shape of an ‘S,’ and then the next day the children would work with different verses with ‘S,’ and they learn much more about the letter ‘S’ than just writing it. We know that children really see the world as a place full of wonder, and so, if we really want to deepen that sense of wonder, we can bring it into every subject. That’s our hope. When we’re introducing the letters, we don’t have them memorize the alphabet. They really actually learn the full nature of each letter, and experience it within their whole bodies. They’re moving the letter, they’re drawing the letter, and they’re speaking the letter. It’s much more than memorizing. Nurturing the imagination is something you’ll see is prevalent throughout the school.”

The students ultimately become avid readers. “In fourth grade we read ‘Shiloh,’ we read ‘Old Yeller,’ and we read this book called ‘Blood on the River,’” says Letitia. “They had a book to read every month.”

Foreign languages are introduced



into the curriculum from the earliest years. Students begin with Russian and Spanish, and then in fifth grade they learn Greek. From sixth through eighth grades they study that mother of all European languages, Latin. “It’s a classical education,” Roberto will tell me later. “It forms your thinking.”

When we leave the confines of the conference room and head down the hallway, I can hear one group of very young children reciting, in sing-song fashion, a story about a girl named Sasha who is eating girl by the side of a road. They sing it in flawless Russian. From another classroom, there is the sound of half-dozen recorders being played in perfect harmony.

The halls are literally alive with the sound of music.

“Starting in third grade, every student is assigned a stringed instrument, so they’re either going to play the cello or the violin,” says Letitia. “By sixth grade, they choose an instrument. It usually is the same instrument they have been playing, but they move in to working with the orchestra, and they have a private teacher that supports that work. We really try and integrate the music, and art into all of our subjects.” Some kids opt to play woodwinds or brass; it’s finally up to them.

“We don’t want to just focus on the intellect only,” Letitia says. “We want the children to walk away very well-rounded, and ready to walk out into the world. At a very young age, the children are exposed to language that children are just not exposed to these days. I mean very, very complicated words that they’re now using every day in their speech.”

As Letitia leaves us, Roberto Trostli joins us.

Part of the success of the Waldorf program is the way classes are structured. For the first two hours of school, students study a core subject. “They study

one subject intensively for a month at a time,” says Roberto. “And the reason it’s two hours long is because it allows you to explore that subject through every modality. So right now, we’re doing North American geography in fifth grade. When we finish that, we’ll move on to history, and then to science. It’s immersion learning where the children have a deep experience.”

The rest of the day consists of four periods, each one being forty minutes long. “They do the subjects that should be done on a rhythmical level,” Roberto says. “English, foreign language, music, handwork, woodwork, movement, art—things that you wouldn’t want to just do once or twice a year, things that you actually need to do on an ongoing basis. They’re doing things all day long that really speak to their will and to their heart.”

“My class right now has biking, and then they have painting,” he continues. “After lunch they have music, and then they have Russian. In geography we, of course, are learning all the terminology and all the states and provinces in North America—the things you would learn anywhere. Today, we studied about the beaver because the beaver was the foremost animal that really had a huge impact on trade and settlement in this country. We will be painting a map of North America. They do projects, so it’s not like we try to cover everything, but we try to cover the representative things that will allow them to understand other things we study. That way, the academics aren’t so tiring and depleting. It’s one of the reasons they can do Greek at two o’clock in the afternoon.”

Even as some school districts have shortened the length of recess, or erased it altogether, the Waldorf School provides students with ample time for play, even in inclement weather. “We try to go out in all kinds of weather,” says Roberto. “There’s a

saying, ‘There’s no bad weather, only bad clothing.’ They go outside twice a day for half an hour each time because they really need to explore the physical side of life, and also the social part, so that time outside is time really well spent. Children need to play.”

The Waldorf School, unlike every other school I’ve ever visited, has no principal. “But we all have principles,” says Roberto. “What Rudolph Steiner said, is we replace the function of a headmaster or principal by being fully responsible ourselves. So instead of wondering what the administration thinks of my teaching, I wonder what my students think of my teaching, and what I think, and my students’ parents, and my colleagues. So, in a way, it’s a much harder level of accountability because, if you’re devoted to being the best you can be, there’s a tremendous motivation to be better, and not because you’re going to get a raise or you’re going to get disciplined.”

There are several full-time administrators—Valerie Hogan, along with a finance officer, and a front office manager. “They handle, you could say, the logistics of the school,” Roberto says. “Then we have a leadership team which is composed of three people who act on behalf of the different realms in the school. I function as the community relations coordinator. In addition to being a class teacher, I’m also serving an administrative role. Then we have a governance group of teachers called the Faculty College, which meets weekly to program staffing vision. Steiner felt that nobody should be involved in making educational decisions who’s not a teacher. Teachers will always put the children’s experience and best interest first, whereas administration can easily lose sight of it.”

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding, and as Roberto exits, Valerie leads the way from one classroom to the next. After visiting the Russian class (these were the kids singing earlier) taught by Irene Baranov, the entire class says, “Dasvidaniya.”

The second grade teacher, Noelle McKown, holds a length of colored chalk in her hand, and draws a fox who reaches for a cluster of grapes he will never attain. She works meticulously at each purple grape in the cluster, slowly bringing this classic Aesop fable to life, which gave birth to “sour grapes” an idiom that has persisted through the ages. “They will be sculpting foxes and grapes,” says Noelle, who has a background in both art and education.

When she asks the students what characteristics foxes have, hands shoot up.

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One kid says, “A black nose.” Another says, “Pointy ears. Then one girl says this: “They have adorable little nails.”

When we’re back in the hall, Valerie says, “There are different themes for each grade, so second grade they’re learning a lot of fables. First grade they learn a lot of fairy tales.”

In the third grade classroom, boys and girls alike are crocheting, and they’re amazingly adept at it. “They know how to knit, they know how to crochet, they can even use the loom,” the teacher tells me. One boy explains, in great detail, the difference between knitting and crocheting, between hooks and knitting needles. By the time the kids are in fifth grade, they will move into a woodworking class.

“What impressed me about Waldorf students before I began my training was how easily they talk with adults,” Valerie tells me when we’re out in the hallway again.

It’s true, too. These kids are comfortable speaking with adults, are not in the least bit shy or reserved. They already exude a confidence that is born of security, not arrogance. And their vocabulary astonishes me.

At Waldorf, Valerie says, they celebrate the seasons, and what is unfolding in the natural world as Earth spins with defined purpose around the Sun as it has done since time immemorial.

At the beginning of each school year, the kids observe Michaelmas, which commemorates Saint Michael slaying the dragon. “It’s about having the courage to stand up for what’s right,” Valerie says.

As the days shorten toward the Winter Solstice, the kids walk along a spiral of candles in a darkened room. “It’s about bringing your internal light into that dark time of the year,” says Valerie. “We have to shine our internal light, even in dark times.”

Then, as the days lengthen in February, the school gives a nod to Candlemas, and then the final celebration comes with May Faire. “It’s about spring and the planting season and new life,” Valerie says.

And just as Waldorf celebrates the seasons and the universe in all its majesty, the school also celebrates the beauty and wonder and absolute complexity of each and every member of its student body. **N9**



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Start Creating Memories Now With Hardscape in Your Yard

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

VICTOR AYALA, ONE of Richmond's premier masons specializing in hardscape, tells me a story about one of his clients. He had just completed work on a fire pit in her back yard, and he asked her, as he is wont to do upon the completion of a project, if she was satisfied with the work he and his team had done. She nodded, but seemed troubled. And her eyes filled with tears.

"I wish I hadn't taken so long to do this because now my youngest son has moved out," she told him. "We thought so many times of building something like this for the family to enjoy, and now it's too late."

Then she said this: "How many memories have I lost? How many afternoons?"

Victor pauses for a moment. He owns My Outdoor Project, and has a wife and young daughter. "Don't waste the time," he says. "It's not about the money, it's about the special moments with the family you can create. If you've got the money sitting in the bank, use it. Memories are going to stay with you forever; money, no. If you've got the money, use it to create good memories with the ones you love."

Most people who consider an outdoor project have a pretty good idea what they want, whether it's a retaining wall, a patio, paved pathways, raised beds, an outdoor kitchen, or a fire pit.

"First, I listen to the ideas of the customer, and after that, I start asking questions like, 'How many people are going to enjoy the patio?'" says Victor. "Some people want to do big patios, and there's just going to be three or four people using the patio, or the other way around. Some people want to do a ten-by-ten patio, and they want to entertain large parties. So, I make recommendations."

In many city neighborhoods, rainwater drainage is a significant problem. "You always want to push the water away from the house," says Victor. Which can mean a simple grading of the earth surrounding the house. And before laying in a patio, it's a



good idea to install a proper drainage system, which is really nothing more than a series of PVC pipes laid beneath the patio.

"In Bellevue there's a big issue with the alleys because they are so flat, and the water comes back into the yard," Victor explains. "So we have to raise up the patio and run drainage pipes under the patio. We install a simple drain on the patio."

The collected water can be diverted to the alley and the city rainwater sewers, or to garden beds. If warranted, drainage precautions should always be taken. "You can do a nice patio, but if you don't deal with the issue of the water, your patio's going to start sinking," says Victor. "We try to do the best for our customers."

Before a patio, pathway, or front walk-



way is installed, a solid base must be created. This can be done in one of two ways. The first method requires a four-inch layer of crushed gravel, which is then tamped tightly down. This provides proper drainage. Next comes a one-inch layer of sand. Once the pavers are set, Victor and his team fill the gaps with polymeric sand, which is sand laced with a glue that activates with water. This prevents weeds from growing out of the cracks.

When bricks are used for a pathway or a front walkway, a four-inch layer of concrete is poured in the area that has been excavated. After the concrete sets up or a full day, Victor lays the bricks with wet mortar, buttering all the sides, and then pointing the seams.

The projects Victor undertakes can be as simple as the installation of a fire pit, or as complex as a pair of brick columns and accompanying serpentine walls. He can also erect wooden fences, provide landscaping, and yard maintenance. "No job is too big," he says. "No job is too small."

Materials used in hardscaping include bricks, bluestone, flagstones, concrete pavers, and almost anything else you can imagine. "We use cobblestones, sometimes we use timbers for the edging," says Victor. "Whatever the materials, whatever the budget is, we work with people."

Victor recommends that people visit a place like Pete Rose Landscaping out in Glen Allen. There, they can eye for themselves the various mediums, and



they can see what the finished product will look like.

"Pete Rose has big displays you can look at," Victor says. "An outdoor kitchen with a built-in grill, or an outdoor chimney, or a fire pit. It really helps to see it, and the products that are used."

We end up back at the making of memories.

"If you create that moment when your children are young, they never forget," says Victor. "And when they grow up they want to remember that moment. They will say, 'Remember when we had that fire in the back of the house, let's go back to my dad's house and make it happen again.'"

And lack of money should never be an obstacle.

"If you don't have the money, go to Home Depot and get a mobile fire pit," Victor Ayala says. "You can even just dig a hole and burn the wood there. If you don't have the money to build a patio, to build a fire pit, that doesn't have to stop you to create a special moment." **NB**

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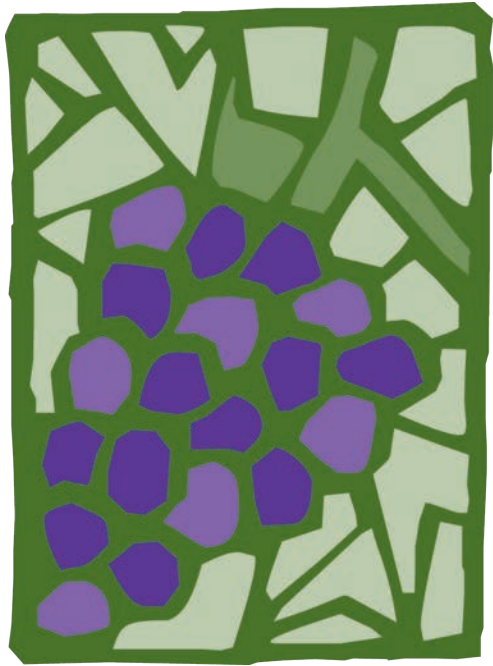
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BRIEFS



JEZEBEL'S OF CARYTOWN PARTNERS WITH WINE FOR CURES

Jezebel's of Carytown, which had operated for a decade as Jezebel's Boutique in Ashland, provided all the clothes for all eight cancer survivor models in this year's Wine for Cures fashion show held last month at the Southern Women's Show. This is the second year Jezebel's has partnered with Wine for Cures.

Wine For Cures raises awareness, provides funds for cancer research, and offers medial scholarships to those qualified students entering the oncology professions as nurses, doctors and researchers. They employ the cultural, entertainment and health values of wine to lead their fun-filled events.



PARSONS FIELD AND OPEN MIC NIGHTS AT STIR CRAZY

Parsons Field performs at Stir Crazy 6-8pm April 18th. Featuring Julia Dooley, Leslie Williams, Brian Nalls, Eric Bowers, and Greg Collins, this Richmond-based ensemble, specializes in vocally-driven, Americana, roots, and indie music.

And Stir Crazy is now home to Open Mic Night 6-8pm on the first Thursday of the month. Stir Crazy Café, 4015 MacArthur Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227. (804) 864-0264



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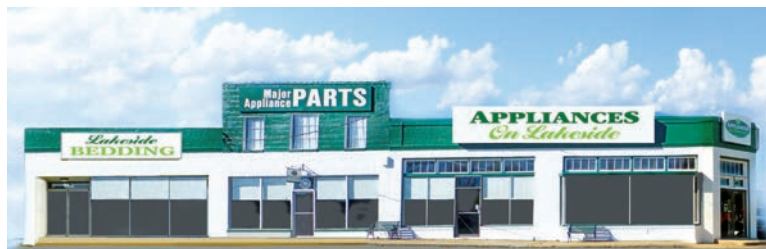


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