EARLY BIRD BISCUIT CO • KAMBOURIAN JEWELERS

VOLUME 25 NO 8 AUGUST 2019

NORTH OF THE JAMES®

TOM Chambers

came of age on a farm in the heart of Pennsylvania's Amish country. He spent his boyhood running feral through the woods that ringed the open farmland, and exploring the creek that wended through the property and emptied into the nearby Susquehanna River. Tom connected with nature, with the animals both domestic and wild, but wanderlust would pull him off that farm and he would explore the world at large, ultimately becoming a modern master of the fine art of photomontage. His work transfixes with its juxtaposed images that beg the viewer to consider other realities that, though not impossible, are highly improbable. And to consider our ties to nature and the seamless fabric woven of all life and rocks and air and water. A fabric we have torn asunder for the greed of money. "How could someone put their pocketbook ahead of their children's future?" Tom asks. And there is no answer. *continued on page 12*

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NORTH of the JAMES®

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PO Box 9225
Richmond, VA 23227
(804) 218-5265
www.northofthejames.com

editor/publisher
CHARLES G. MCGUIGAN
art director
DOUG DOBEY *at Dobey Design*
contributing writers
DALE M BRUMFIELD
BRIAN BURNS
MARY ELFNER
ALANE CAMERON FORD
ORION HUGHES
JACK R JOHNSON
ANDREW CHURCHER
ANNE JONES
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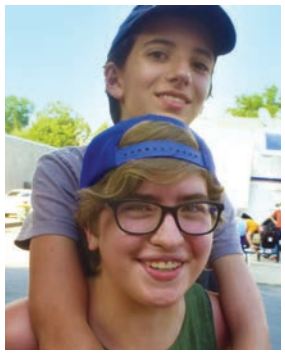
JUDD PROCTOR
FRAN WITHROW
contributing photographers
REBECCA D'ANGELO
account executive
AREINA-GAIL HENSLEY
summer intern
ISABELLA WADE
editorial: charlesmcguigan@gmail.com
advertising: areinaghensley@gmail.com

National Night Out
On MacArthur Avenue



Top: *The Fords of Nottoway with a treat from one of the many MacArthur merchants.* ***Above left and right:*** *Willa James with a hitchiker, Jonathan Austin playing with fire, and Catherine McGuigan and Vickie Hall of Stir Crazy Cafe.*

EVEN AN HOUR before National Night Out had officially begun, there were already a hundred people gathered on MacArthur Avenue. The event on August 6 lasted from 6 till 8 pm, and throughout the night some 700 people made their way up and down the 4000 block of MacArthur. Sponsored by the Bellevue Merchants Association, National Night Out has become the second most popular event held along the business strip in the neighborhood's heart. It was an evening of family-fun activities—including the ever-popular misting tent (perfect for a sweltering late summer evening)—and a time for members of the local constabulary and other first responders to meet with the citizenry they are sworn to serve and to protect. Of course, native Northsider Jonathan Austin was there to amaze and astound with magic, manual dexterity, death-defying feats atop a unicycle, and a schtick that could make a dead man groan.

Virtually every Bellevue merchant offered a variety of food and beverages. Jimmy and Daniella Tsamouras, co-owners Demi's, served up a massive quantity of paella, which has become a tradition at the annual event. That along with the root beer floats compliments of Bob and Rob Kocher of Once Upon A Vine. To accompany the frosty beverages, Classic Touch Cleaning handed out bags of popcorn. And watermelon was available from Little Green Grocer. Next door to Rich's Stitches, where you could get a chilled bottle of water, Stir Crazy passed out oatmeal raisin cookies and iced tea. Down the street, at the mill on MacArthur, they dished out the finest Key Lime Pie this side of Key West. And over at Zorba's Pizza, Santos and company provided garlic knots, while Bellevue resident Larry Brown scooped out bowls of ice cream. At Dot's Back Inn, they served chicken wings, and across the street, next to one of the misting tents and a constant stream of music, Robert Shore and his team from Decatur's Garage served up snow cones, the perfect antidote to the August heat and humidity. NJ

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Local Business News

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

Early Bird Biscuit Recognized Again and Again and Again

EARLY BIRD BISCUIT CO, with two locations now, one in the Fan and the other in Bellevue, seems to be consistently recognized as Richmond's premier purveyor of home-made biscuits. "Recently, we were blessed enough to be recognized by Richmond Magazine, which is a local publication," says Early Bird owner Tim Laxton. "And this wasn't a peer award. This was folks who took time out of their day to actually vote for us. In the breakfast category they voted us the best biscuit or breakfast sandwich in Richmond."

Early Bird biscuits have also been singled out nationally. Two years back, Garden & Gun magazine listed Early Bird as one of the top ten biscuit destinations in the South "worth the drive."

"And our ham biscuit was recognized by the Food Network," says Tim. "We use Edwards Ham out of Surry, Virginia. None of that other stuff. No imitations." Early Bird's also been featured on the Cooking Channel's Cheap Eats.

We're sitting at an enamel-topped table in his shop on Bellevue Avenue. They've just locked the door after a busy morning, and Tim still sports his baker's shirt. He's been very pleased with the North Side location.

Early Bird Biscuit owner Tim Laxton at his Bellevue Avenue location.

"We're really loving the new faces over here on Bellevue Avenue," he says. "It seems there are a lot of younger folks coming to the neighborhood, and I'm liking the new energy we're finding over here. It's a nice diverse mix of people. It shows our price points are where they need to be. I mean where can you go and get a cup of coffee and a biscuit for under five bucks? And they're made with the best ingredients and made with a lot of care."

Earlier this summer, Early Bird teamed up with Canon & Draw Brewing Company in the Fan for a popup series. "It's been a fun run to add a few things outside of what we're doing with the bakery, kind of get out of the bakery and get outdoors and meet some new people and collaborate with some of the beers they're making," Tim tells me.

Tim, who was bred-and-buttered on Virginia's Eastern Shore, has a strong sense of community, and a desire to always give back. To that end, this past spring, Early Bird Biscuit's Fan location hosted a "gospel brunch" to benefit Feed the Streets RVA. "Feed the Streets is a local organization that is very focused on the community and helping out folks that are down on their luck," Tim tells me. "We had a gospel choir come in and there was some real energy in the building that day."

All the proceeds from that entire Sunday went directly to Feed the Streets. "We wrote them a check for about $1,500 that day," Tim says.

On hand that day this past May was a film crew. "They shot an episode for American Road Trip that will be broadcast on Netflix in the fall," says Tim. "It just keeps happening, it's so cool." And then with his customary humility, Tim downplays himself. "It's not me, man," he says, "It's my team. I couldn't do it without them."

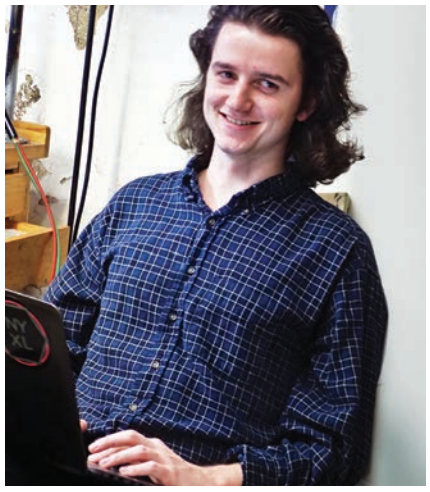
He has instructed his entire staff of 12 employees to always show appreciation. "I instill in all of the people that work for the bakery that you have to make sure that you thank the customer, and you have to also realize that they're the people that pay your salary," Tim says.

And every employee is paid well. "Not a single person that works for either of the bakeries makes less than $12.50 an hour," says Tim. "I'm not getting rich by doing that, but I think it does impact the level of service that the customers get. It keeps people from going to the fast food place."

Tim Laxton leans back in his chair. He raises his arms in a stretch. "Five years later after our inception, I think it's pretty cool that we're still being recognized and we're still relevant," he says.

Early Bird Biscuit Co
Tuesday-Friday, 7am-1pm;
Saturday, 7am-12pm
1221 Bellevue Avenue
(804) 553-3866
119 North Robinson Street
(804) 335-4570

Kambourian Jewelers Prepares to Move West



Left: *Nathan Kambourian at his jeweler's bench.*

Right: *Joey Kambourian in the Carytown showroom.*

RICHMOND'S PREMIER JEWELERS will be leaving Carytown and opening a new shop this September on Grove Avenue near Libbie, the West End shopping district home to many locally-owned businesses. Additionally, Kambourian Jewelers will also have a presence on the second floor of the Branch House, what may well be the most stunning structure on all of Monument Avenue, and home to Richmond's American Institute of Architects.

Currently, all merchandise at the Cary Street location is up to fifty percent off. "But that's only until the move date," says co-owner Joey Kambourian.

He and his brother, Nathan Kambourian, are taking over the family business as their mother, Melissa Kambourian, and their uncle, Haig Kambourian, slip into a soft retirement. Both Haig and Melissa will remain active in the business. Haig will be running the office at the Branch House.

For the Kambourians, the creation of fine jewelry is an intergenerational affair stretching back to the 19th century.

"It's a proud family name," Joey says. "We had two jewelers over in Armenia, and five over here.

Seven generations."

Joey's brother, Nathan, does all the jewelry making and repairs. "I do the stone sourcing and that sort of thing," says Joey. "And we both do design work."

Nathan mentions jewelry the Kambourians designed and crafted with a "Lord of the Rings" theme. Joey nods. "That was a collaboration between me, Nathan and Dee (Haig)," he says. "Nathan made the sapphire ring and I did the diamond ring with Dee's help."

Like much of the work at Kambourian's, these Tolkein-inspired pieces were a custom order. "It's so much fun when people have that wild of an idea," Joey says.

At their new location on Grove, the Kambourians will continue most of their services there on-site. "Appraisals will always be one of the services we offer there," says Joey. "We'll have standard hours of operation. We probably will have kind of open office where you can just come by and talk with us about design work and browse the showroom, but we're hoping to move toward a more appointment-based schedule for custom-design work."

All the other business will be conducted out of the Kambourian office in the Branch House. "Dee (Haig) will have appointment-only gold buying at the Branch House," Joey says. "We won't be doing any buying at the Grove Avenue location."

"We'll still do the repair work," says Joey. "Nathan will still be doing all of our repairs, but his bench for repair work will be at the Branch House."

"And we'll always be available to create any piece of jewelry you can think of," Nathan adds.

Kambourian Jewelers
3141 West Cary Street, Richmond, VA 23221 (current location)
5706 Grove Avenue second floor, Richmond, VA 23226 (new location after mid-September)
Tues-Fri, 10-6; Sat, Noon-5
(804) 254-4653

Stir Crazy Cafe Extends Its Hours

STIR CRAZY CAFÉ FAIRLY BUSTLES from the moment the door opens in the morning until the lock snaps shut in the evening. This past spring, owners Tre and Vickie Hall really beefed up the menu at what has become one of the North Side's favorite spots. Part of it's the ambience (which is like your own living/dining room), part of it's the baristas and other staff, but it's also the extraordinary food and beverages they serve up, and the customers, who are almost familial in their interactions.

So that people can get a little more of Stir Crazy, hours have been extended to seven in the evening on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. "Hopefully it will catch on," says Tre Hall. "The menu stays the same including breakfast all day. And if this works out we'll go to seven, seven days a week." NJ

Stir Crazy Café
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Tom Chambers

THE ART OF MAGIC REALISM

TOM CHAMBERS HAS A MIND THAT COLLECTS IMAGES, each one stored away, stamped on a series of neurons, and when that circuit of neurons is excited by a synaptic flash, the image comes back to him in sharpened focus. But it is not a single image that compels him to create art. Instead it's a jumble of them that align themselves and create a somehow cohesive whole. When his brain utterly relaxes, or when he treads on that threshold to sleep and pauses for a moment too long, those images merge to form ideas that run through his head. And if he is lucky enough, he will capture those images that will one day become a photomontage. He will pick up a Post-It and draw out a three-by-three thumbnail, and later pin it to the wall of his studio. That, though, is only the beginning.

"That little sketch gives me a direction that I don't forget," Tom Chambers tells me. "Instead of taking pictures, I build pictures."

Some of the earliest images Tom collected came from the family farm he grew up on in Lancaster County. Pennsylvania. By agricultural standards, it was a fairly small farm—about ninety acres or so. They grew wheat, soy bean, corn and tobacco. Raised steer and pigs. Tom's grandfather, Wilson Chambers, had purchased it during the Great Depression, and throughout the summer and into the fall, Tom and his four brothers would often roam through the woods surrounding it, overturning rocks, climbing trees, sucking in the natural world which freely allowed them to delight in her charms.

That farmhouse in rural Pennsylvania pulsed with creativity. Both his grandfather and grandmother were visual artists; he an illustrator, she a painter. It was his grandmother who taught Tom to paint and to draw. She was patient with him and nurtured his creative streak. Tom's grandfather was part of the Brandywine School. After all, the Chambers' place was less than an hour away from Chadds Ford Township, home to legendary illustrator N.C. Wyeth. So there was that influence early on, and though his grandfather was drawn to the work of the elder Wyeth, Tom preferred the paintings of Andrew, whose landscapes and interiors, as barren as they might seem, radiated pure emotion that could sear the eyes.

When he wasn't out exploring the woodlands, Tom would travel with his father to that impounded eight-mile stretch of the Susquehanna River called Lake Clarke, which was a Depression-era initiative that produced hydroelectric power. On that lake, the Chambers would canoe or sail for hours on end. "My dad was a boat builder, that was one of his hobbies," says Tom. "And we had a lot of canoes."

When Tom came of age, as the war in Indochina raged, he enlisted in the Navy for a four-year stint. That was in 1966, and they sent him off for a full year of schooling at Great Lakes. He learned boat engine mechanics there, and then was sent to Short School in San Diego for Swift Boats. Then it was off to Vietnam, specifically, Qui Nho'n, a coastal city on Dam Thi Nai. Late one night, the base where Tom was stationed was attacked by the Viet Cong. Tom escaped with a flesh wound that earned him a Purple Heart, and he hoped a return stateside. "But they just stitched it up and sent me back to the base," he says.

Edge of a Dream *by Tom Chambers*

Later, Tom returned to Norfolk and was stationed on a World War II destroyer in the Mediterranean, then back again to Asia, this time aboard a guided missile cruiser in the Pacific off the coast of Viet Nam. "We refueled helicopters and did helicopter operations," says Tom. "I was in charge of the fuel."

After his stint was up, having seen what he saw of the bright shining lie, Tom returned to the family farm. He would work half a year in Lancaster as a

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN

PHOTOS COURTESY of TOM CHAMBERS

mechanic, and then come spring would hit the road, obsessed now with travel. "I'd hitchhiked all over Canada a couple of times," he says. "I took a van all over the states, hitchhiked through the states."

He did that for about four years, and then by the mid-seventies he and his four brothers did what a lot of young people were doing at the time, rejecting a culture that embraced money above all else. "We decided to go back to the land like all the hippies," says Tom. "And we ran the farm for five years, just the brothers and various girlfriends." They weren't particularly good farmers, but an uncle who lived nearby showed them how to do it right. They quickly learned that tobacco and pigs were more trouble than they were worth. "Pigs are horrible," he says. "And tobacco was a mistake. I think once you figured it out you were getting thirty to forty cents an hour on tobacco. But by the end of five years our crops were probably up to speed as far as output. "

By the time the five brothers called it quits, Tom was growing increasingly restless. He needed the kind of change that only comes with travel, so he headed down to the Virgin Islands. He settled into life in Charlotte Amelie on Saint Thomas, found a job in a boatyard as a maintenance mechanic working on charter sailboats. Tom didn't have a car so depended on his thumb for local travel. A young woman picked him up on a couple of occasions, and Tom was drawn to her. "She lived near me so I kind of knew when she was going to be driving by each morning, so I'd run out and stick out

my thumb," he says with a smile. He gestures toward the ceiling of this fairly new and spacious addition to the classic American Four Square in Bellevue he and his wife have called home for more than three decades. "Turns out that young woman who picked me up in Saint Thomas is upstairs right now," he says. "That's how I met my wife, that's how I met Sally."

Sally was a teacher and the pair fell in love and within the year moved to Gainesville, Florida where she returned to school at University of Florida, studying to become a middle school counsellor. While she attended school, Tom worked in greenhouses, employing his experience as a farmer. After Sally graduated, the couple moved to Sarasota where Tom enrolled in the Ringling College of Art and Design, which ranks as one of the nation's premier art schools for animation.

Tom studied graphic design and worked on the school magazine. After graduation, he went to work for a regional art magazine, but he and Sally had no intention of settling in Florida. For one thing, the traffic, even back then, was abominable. And the place seemed entirely rootless.

"So we put up two big maps of the US on the wall," Tom says. "I circled all my areas of choice in blue, and Sally circled hers in red. Where they overlapped was Richmond." After moving to Richmond, Sally went to work as middle school counsellor at Collegiate, a position she held for the next 33 years until her retirement just this past year. And Tom landed a job with Riddick Advertising, which at the time was designing and pasting up a local magazine. "They needed someone to work on Richmond magazine which was called Richmond Surroundings at that time," says Tom. "So I worked at Riddick for five years on Richmond Surroundings, which changed to Richmond magazine while I was still there."

They had given him free rein with the design of the publication. "I could call the shots as far as the design went," he says. "So I took it from something that looked like a newsletter and turned it into a magazine. I had fun studying other city magazines and playing with design, and playing with typography and changed it." On about the time when Tom left Riddick, the entire print industry was taking baby steps into the digital age. "That's when computers started happening," Tom recalls.

While he was still at Riddick, Tom began using a revolutionary, image-editing program that would change his life, and the direction of his art forever.

Spring's Landfall *by Tom Chambers*

"Riddick got one of the first copies of Photoshop," says Tom. "We didn't really know what to use it for, but we had fun copying eyeballs into the middle of someone's forehead. You know, doing dumb stuff like that."

Tom immersed himself in computers and Photoshop, and began learning how to manipulate these tools. He went to work for Proctor-Silex (which would later become Hamilton Beach/Proctor-Silex) in Glen Allen, where he designed boxes for everything from coffee makers to toasters. "I was an in-house graphic designer and I did packaging," he says.

In the evenings, after staring at a computer screen for eight hours, Tom would come home and work some more at the computer, refining his skills in Photoshop, but he wasn't working on corporate packaging. "I found that Photoshop was a great creative outlet," he says.

One of his other creative outlets was the art of photography, and because he and Sally loved travelling, Tom had amassed an impressive collection of photos. "I was using vacation shots and putting elements into those vacation shots," he says.

Bit by bit, Photoshop was becoming more sophisticated, and to stay ahead of the curve, Tom learned every new permutation of the program. "By then Photo Shop was using layers so I could cut from a different photo, place it into the background, move it around, reposition it, adjust the color so that everything looked seamless," says Tom. "I could make these images a little edgy like maybe this shouldn't be happening. After I worked at it for awhile, I decided to try to make things look possible, like they could possibly happen, but they were improbable, probably wouldn't happen."

Tom opens a large coffee table book of his work called "Hearts and Bones" which features the first nine series he has created. He points to one image called Feeding Time from the Entropic Kingdom series. "Like this one, it's very improbable that a sheep would be eating from a burning hay stack, but it could happen," he says. "The type of art I do is photo montage. I take different pictures, including backgrounds and other elements, and I combine them into one image."

There's something akin to surrealism in his work, but Tom's art has a much more lyrical quality and narrative style. When I suggest magic realism, Tom nods.

"I didn't realize that at first, until maybe after I was halfway through the first series and somebody pointed out that this is magic realism," he says. "And I said, 'What?' And I looked it up. That person was right. I think if someone was describing the genre I work in it would have to be magic realism."

From his series Illumination, Tom shows me a piece that depicts a seated woman holding a full-grown man, who is lifeless, in her lap. It is a Stabat Mater, and luminous orbs, like halos, are suspended behind the heads of both subjects. It is titled Pieta after the Renaissance master's iconic sculpture, and Tom explains that he had trouble with the two figures. "I had to do two different shots, because the Mary figure and the Jesus figure didn't really fit together," he says. "That's husband and wife factually, and he was so much bigger than her, she couldn't really hold him on her lap so I had to reduce him in size to make it look like he was on her lap."

Turns out the old master had a similar problem. "I recently read a book about Michelangelo," Tom says. "When he actually did the Pieta he reduced the size of Jesus compared to Mary to make it look good. I thought that was pretty cool. Even though I am doing it digitally, I still have the same problems he had to work through."

On the facing page is an image of a woman dressed in a white, lace-rimmed gown. Her hands, palms forward, shield her eyes. And the palms are pierced through and bleeding, a living stigmata. In front of her grows a small sapling, its leave a rich green in stark contrast to the landscape behind her which is dark and ominous. She is flanked by a lamb on one side, and a goat on the other. Like The Pieta, this imagery is undeniably religious. But it is not the religious context that moves Tom to create these pieces.

"People may think I have a lot of religious iconography in my work, but that doesn't mean I'm religious," he says. "I embrace the magical aspect of the religion."

Tom considers the trips he and Sally have made to Mexico over the years. "Religious icons in that type of art really inspired this type of work," he says. "In Mexico we would see how people embrace that magic. Even though they're the poorest people on earth, they will give whatever they have to their church."

Many of the subjects in the images that Tom creates are young women and girls. They are seen in vast landscapes and often with animals of one kind or other—horses, wolves, a griz-

zly bear, sheep, deer, birds of every sort, to name a few. Their relationships with the natural world are not in any way confrontational; they are at home with the wild, and seem to share an empathy and a deep concern for the environment, much like the animals who are being threatened out of existence, along with the entire human race. And the girls, like the animals, seem to understand this, but they are more than just familiars. They seem integrally linked by spirit.

"A couple of my series are about the environment and how animals cope with the changing environment," Tom says. "There's one series called Animal Visions that has to do with the environment being out of whack. There's one of a girl with the wolves. People and animals relating to each other, and not necessarily on a violent basis. I'm showing animals and humans on the same level."

Tom's most recent series will have its Richmond premiere at Glave Kocen Gallery this December. Called Tales of Heroines, each image in the series tells a story about a different young woman. If you, as a man, are fortunate enough to have a daughter you will understand what Tom is getting at in this series. Having been one of five boys growing up, Tom didn't have the benefit of watching a girl become a young woman. But he and Sally had a girl who is now a woman. "All the portraits in this series are of young women, full-length, standing and facing the camera directly," he says. "Each image has an arched top. In these works I was trying to describe the strength and resiliency I saw in young women, what I saw as my daughter was growing up. I really didn't understand it until I had my daughter."

We look out into his back yard, which has the benefit of a canopy of trees. "I'll shoot the kids back here in the shade," Tom says, referring to the subjects he uses for his images. "I have to be careful about direction of light. If the background has light coming at a certain direction, the figure or the elements that I place into the background have to have the light coming from the same direction. I'll shoot on cloudy days or in the shadows. When I photograph my backgrounds it's on cloudy days, too, so everything matches up."

As the image comes together, Tom begins adjusting the color and the contrast. And then he begins fine-tuning it even further to soften hard edges so the figures blends into the background.

"So I'll put it altogether in Photoshop, and I'll typically have thirty or forty layers of stuff," says Tom. "Every little thing, even if it's a bird in the sky, gets

an individual layer. And then in Photo Shop you can do adjustment layers."

As the image finally emerges as Tom initially envisioned it, he has to make the most difficult decision of all. "The hardest part is knowing when you're done," he says. "With Photoshop it's hard to stay out of the cornball range. If you try to do too much, or make it look too weird, it looks cornballish. I never want that."

Tom Chambers' work is now represented by art galleries here and abroad, including Chase Young Gallery in Boston, Gilman Contemporary in Sun Valley, Snap! In Orlando, and AFK Gallery in Lisbon, Portugal. And then there's Photo-to-Eye in Santa Fe. "Photo-eye is one of the best galleries in the country," says Tom. "It was a big deal getting picked up by them, and once I was on their website it was real high exposure, a lot of people were seeing my work."

As I thumb through the book later in the afternoon, long after the interview is over, I am overwhelmed by the images. Some are edgy, others slightly melancholic. But what gets me about all of them is that each one in its distinctive way suggests that the center is failing away, that there is something terribly out of kilter, that there is innocence lost, that there may be, just beyond that stark horizon, a nameless dread; yet despite it all, or perhaps because of it all, there is a joy in that singular moment of being captured in that image, and a celebration of the strange complexity of the globe we must all share.

And as I look at these images that hint at what is not right, I think of my children and all of the animals we have known through the years, and our beloved Earth, and I can hear some of the last words Tom spoke to me in what seemed like disbelief.

"It's almost too late right now to stop what's happening," he said. "It should have happened ten years ago. We can still do things to slow it down, and who knows . . ."

Tom stopped in the middle of that sentence as if he had struck a column of concrete. Reality gripped him. "Unfortunately people are too much about their wallet," he said. "I don't know what's going to happen. I imagine we're going to wind up destroying ourselves and at that point the world will rebound because we won't be here."

But then there was a magic, and not the sleight-of-hand variety. Tom remembered the trips he and his wife had taken to Iceland. "You'd be driving along, and random steam would be shooting out of the ground, anywhere, everywhere," Tom Chambers told me. "Iceland is one country that really has it down as far as ecological advancements. They are fully self-sufficient. It's all hydroelectric, or they're harnessing geothermal power."

"Maybe," he said. "We can learn." NJ

BOOK REVIEW

The League of Wives
Challenging the U.S. Government

by **FRAN WITHROW**

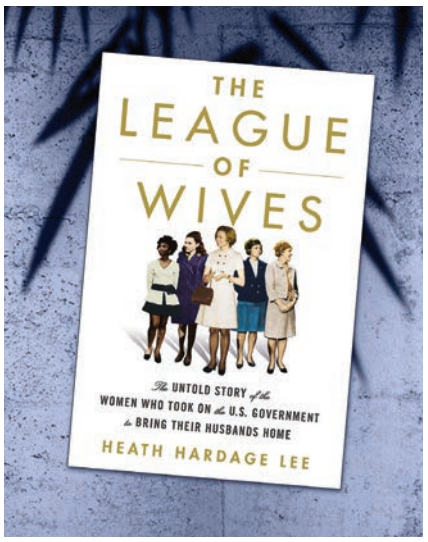
BY 1970, THE VIETNAM War had been raging for 15 years. The United States had been actively involved for six of those years, trying to keep South Vietnam from falling into the hands of Communist North Vietnam. President Lyndon Johnson ordered the first air strikes in 1964, and the war dragged on until 1973, when the United States finally threw in the towel and pulled out.

From 1964 on, U.S. pilots who had been shot down were held as prisoners of war in Southeast Asia. Tortured, neglected, and denied access to medical care, their plight was horrendous. But they had unexpected allies: their wives back home, who fought relentlessly for their release. "The League of Wives" is the story of how these women defied governmental protocol to bring their husbands home.

In the 1960s, military wives were expected to be obedient, respectful, and stand behind their men. Books like "The Navy Wife" laid out specific rules for how these women should act. It is no surprise then that when the wives learned their husbands had been taken captive, they initially obeyed government orders to "keep quiet." Even when POW Jerry Denton brilliantly blinked T-O-R-T-U-R-E in Morse Code during a television interview, government officials decided that keeping this information private was the best way to help the captured servicemen.

At first the wives followed this protocol. But years passed, with prisoners being refused basic necessities laid out by the Geneva Convention. Fed up, the women decided to take action. Slowly they transformed themselves from demure, quiet helpmates to strong, determined advocates. They met with U.S. leaders, wrote letters, and even traveled to Paris to meet with North Vietnamese delegates. They organized by creating the National League of Families for Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, and their decision to defy the government and publicize their husbands' treatment made a difference.

In 1973, the surviving men came home.



Author Heath Hardage Lee personalizes this story, sharing the hardships faced by women like Jane Denton, Sybil Stockdale, and Andrea Rand. Lee describes not just the struggles these women faced in trying to help their husbands, but also the crushing reality they dealt with in managing their home lives as single parents. Many worked full-time, and some were in financial straits because they could not complete monetary transactions without their missing husbands' approval.

While these accounts are fascinating, Lee does not delve into opposing views surrounding this war. One protester asked the wives about all the Vietnamese civilian casualties: the devastation wrought by Agent Orange and the 1972 napalm attack which caused such horrific suffering to civilians. Were the POW-MIAs more important than the war-torn Southeast Asians? This question is not answered, perhaps because Lee felt it beyond the scope of this book. Despite that, this is an intriguing account about a little known aspect of the Vietnam War.

From now until September 2, there is an exhibit at the Virginia Museum of History about the League of Wives if you would like to learn more. NJ

The League of Wives: The Untold Story of the Women Who Took on the U.S. Government to Bring Their Husbands Home
By Heath Hardage Lee, $28.99, St. Martin's Press, 336 pages

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION by DOUG DOBEY

Call Me by Eric Eaton.

Eric Eaton and Bob Scott At Eric Schindler

"In A Manner of Speaking" new works by Eric Eaton and Bob Scott coming to Eric Schindler Gallery September 13 through October 12. Opening reception 7-9pm September 13.

Eric Schindler Gallery
2305 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23223. (804) 644-5005

Columbus Day by Scott Clark.

SCOTT CLARK PAINTINGS AT STIR CRAZY CAFÉ

Through September, Stir Crazy Café is featuring the paintings of Scott Clark, who is a visual artist as well as a drummer and a composer and artist. Scott Clark has been performing in the Richmond area for almost two decades. Before his current exhibition at Stir Crazy, he had a show at Black Iris Gallery that coincided with the release of his last musical work called ToNow. The paintings, and the music, were inspired by the Standing Rock protest on the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota.

Stir Crazy Café
4015 MacArthur Ave, Richmond, VA 23227. (804) 864-0264

HIDDEN HISTORIES

Freed Slaves Created Memorial Day

by JACK R. JOHNSON

IN HIS BOOK RACE AND Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory, Professor David W. Blight declared that our first official recognition of Memorial Day began not with Union Soldiers, or Confederate soldiers for that matter. But rather with liberated slaves who wished to honor the Union Dead. According to the Charleston Post and Courier, on a Monday morning, May, 1865, nearly 10,000 former slaves marched onto the grounds of the old Washington Race Course, where wealthy Charleston planters and socialites had gathered in old times. During the final year of the war, the track had been turned into a prison camp. Hundreds of Union soldiers died there and were buried in mass graves.

For two weeks in April, former slaves had worked to re-inter the Union soldiers in proper individual graves.

On May 1, 1865, they sought to give them a proper funeral. The procession began at 9 a.m. as 2,800 black school children marched by their graves, softly singing "John Brown's Body."

According to the Post and Courier, Former slave children strew flowers on the graves as they walked past. After "John Brown's Body," they sang "The Star Spangled Banner," "America" and "Rally Round the Flag." By the end, the graves looked like a massive mound of rose petals.

Soon, their voices would give way to the sermons of preachers, then prayer and — later — picnics. It was May 1, 1865 — they called it Decoration Day, but on that day, former Charleston slaves started a tradition that would come to be known as Memorial Day. The first official declaration of Memorial Day came decades later in 1971, as a federal holiday by Congress. NJ

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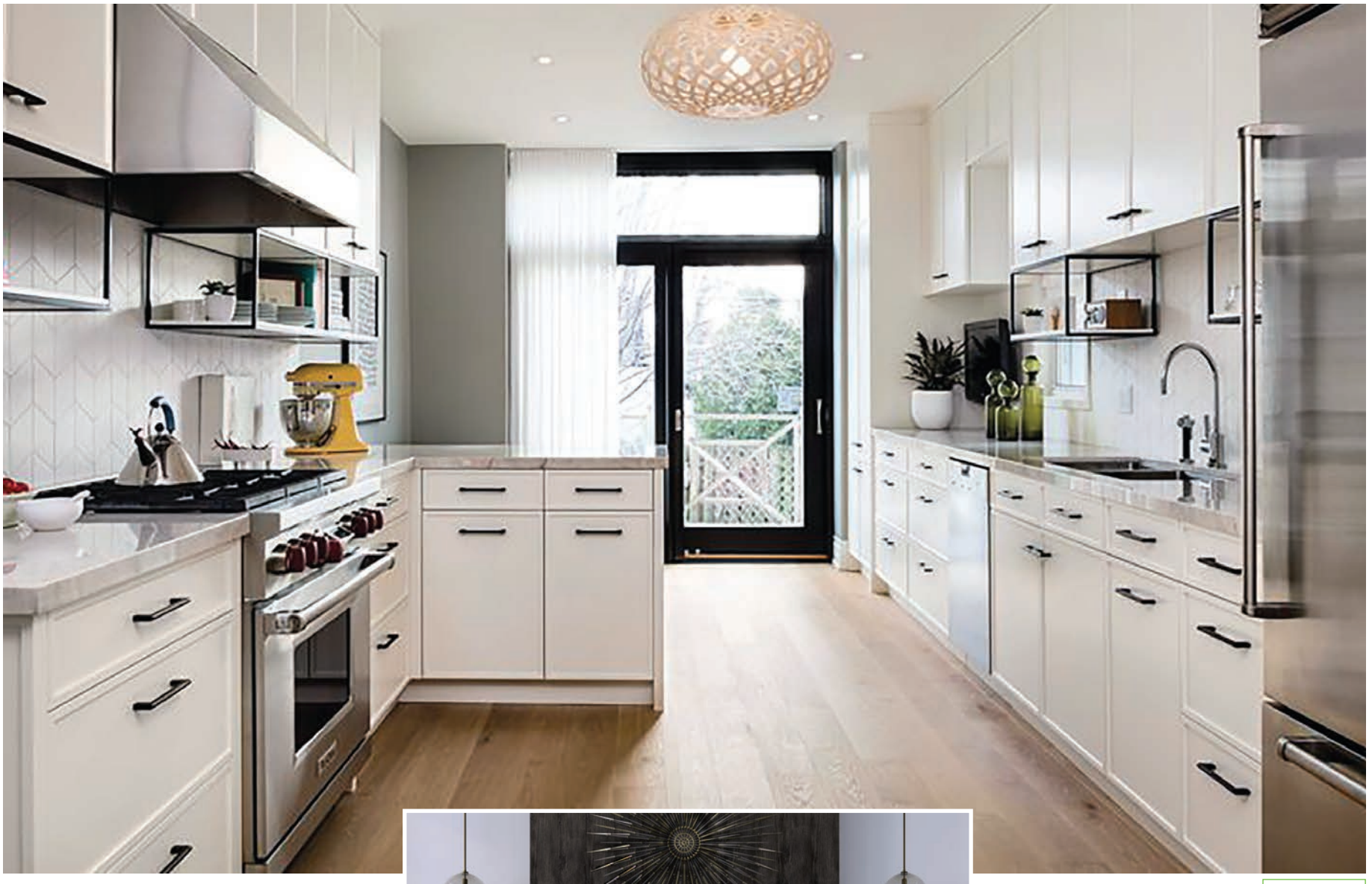

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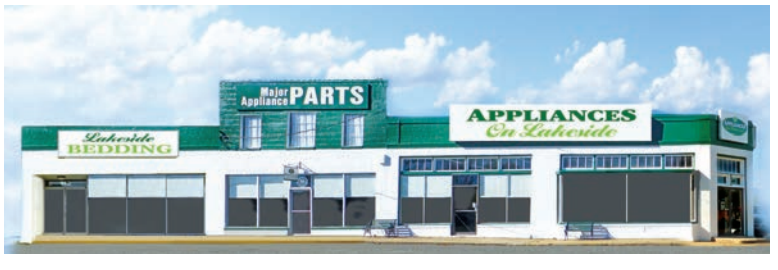

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