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# Jonathan Austin Now That's Entertainment

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN, originally printed in 2015

**J**ONATHAN AUSTIN is dressed like a priest, minus the Roman collar—black shirt, black pants, black shoes and black pork pie hat. Slight build, muscular, quick-talking as a street hawker, with an endless supply of one-liners no matter the occasion. Quips spill from his mouth as he begins to perform. He has a feathery touch that lofts bean bag balls into the air. One, two, three, four, and then five, and finally six. Impossible it seems as the balls follow one another in a blurry orbit in what is known among jugglers as a proper cascade. And it is a cascade, a circular and fluid waterfall of colored spheres.

We're in the living room of my home in Bellevue, one block away from Jonathan's boyhood home where he learned to juggle when he was just shy of becoming a teenager. "The nickname Jonathan the Juggler was given to me when I was living over in Northside," he says. "We lived at 1421 Claremont Avenue."

His first paid gig came on August 8, 1984 at a vacation bible school in Lakeside. He did five shows for the princely sum of fifteen dollars and thought he had arrived. "As soon as I did that show I just started doing shows all the time, as many as I could for whoever would hire me, money or no money," Jonathan remembers.

At age fifteen, Kings Dominion hired Jonathan. "They hired jugglers for street entertainment so

you'd entertain the lines," Jonathan says.

That same year, he wandered into One Eye Jacques in Carytown and met a man by the name of Woody Landers, who would serve as a mentor and more to Jonathan. "I saw him doing magic and it was one of those defining moments in life where it picked me up and threw me down," he says. "So I just started hanging out there all the time, buying stuff."

In those glorious days before Amazon, magicians could not order online. They had to actually go into a shop and engage with another human being. "It was actually much better to get it in person and know what you're getting," Jonathan says. "Woody was a pro and he was just real good at manipulation and card tricks and coin tricks. He would be perpetually performing and cracking jokes and one-liners and that kind of funny stuff."

When I ask if Woody influenced his shtick, Jonathan nods enthusiastically and says, "Oh yes, very much so, even to this day. He taught me to always try to get the party going."

The very first magic trick he ever learned was actually one of those novelty tricks you can buy at a magic shop. "It was a little finger guillotine," Jonathan says. "You open the box, read the instructions and two minutes and sixteen seconds later you can do the trick."

That's what lured him into the art of legerdemain. There was satis-



Jonathan the Juggler by Bill Nelson.

faction in possessing the ability to seemingly change the laws of physics. Contradicting reality, altering matter. All illusion, but so convincing people would believe it in spite of their rational minds. "It's still what gets me thirty-one years later, mystifying people," Jonathan says. "It doesn't get old. The same is true with juggling."

When I ask him what his two favorite magic tricks are he shows

me.

"Will you light up a cigarette for me?"

Which is what I do.

"Okay, now can I borrow your jacket?" he asks and I nod as he picks up a Harris tweed jacket draped over a chair back.

"One assumes you wear this on a regular basis?"

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AJ Soucy, MD

**#POPLIFERVA**

“When it gets cooler, sure.”

“What is it made of?”

“Wool,” I say.

And then he turns the shoulders of the jacket into a sort of funnel that disappears into his partially clenched fist and with his other hand he raises the lit cigarette and points toward that funnel of wool. At that moment I know where he’s going with this.

“Is this your smoking jacket?” says Jonathan with a staccato laugh. “Or maybe I should ask if it’s a blazer.” With each word the cigarette gets closer to the jacket. “Remember three things when you put this thing back on: Stop, drop and roll,” he says. “You’re watching every angle now, right?”

And at that moment he stabs the lit cigarette into the jacket and quickly clenches his fist.

“Hocus pocus, chicken bones choke us,” he says. “Watch everything now. Yoko Ono, Sonny Bono. You’re watching everything.”

“Yes I am.”

Then he releases his grip on the jacket and the cigarette is gone and there’s no damage to the wool. I am standing less than two feet from him, and have watched his every move.

“And would you believe the cigarette has now vanished right before your eyes, ears, nose.”

“Wait a minute, how the hell did you do that? That was amazing.”

“You liked it?” says Jonathan. “I’m glad you did. And for my next trick . . . the invisible deck.”

Jonathan holds up nothing in his hand, though he appears to be gripping a deck of playing cards.

“I have an invisible pack of cards,” he says, and then, in a stage aside, adds, “I sell these too. We do pass the savings on to you. I’m going to take the deck out of the box, you can watch every move.” And he

pulls nothing out of nothing and then invites me to pick a card out of the invisible deck which he has fanned out. I do as instructed and hold an invisible card. I initially think of the three of clubs but then at the last nanosecond I change it to the Jack of diamonds.

“Now, once again, it can be any card you please,” Jonathan says. “Fifty-two choices. Now I’m going to turn them over. You put it down wherever you want, I won’t look. Okay, now, I’m going to hand you the cards.”

I take the invisible deck from him and slip them into the invisible box and tamp the invisible lid flap shut.

“Now when I count to three just throw them here and I’ll catch them,” he says. And when he says three I toss them over to him, this invisible deck, but when that deck reaches his hand, it materializes.

“Now, as you can see the cards are here,” Jonathan says. “Nothing planned, nothing rehearsed. That is the truth. If I’m lying, I’m dying. Not here to waste somebody’s time, especially a man of your caliber. Now for the first time so everybody can hear. Which card was it?”

“Jack of diamonds,” I say.

“Now you could have picked any card you wanted?”

I nod.

“Nothing planned,” he says. “No power of suggestion or anything like that?”

I shake my head.

“Now I’m going to take them out of the box, slowly, dramatically,” says Jonathan. “You said the Jack of diamonds. If you look, every card is face up. Now if you look even closer, smack dab in the middle of the deck you can see one card that is face down. Nothing planned, nothing rehearsed. You could have picked any card you had wanted but you said the Jack of diamonds.”

He stops for a second and then

says, “Have you ever had one of those days when nothing goes right?” pauses, then flips the card over. “Fortunately, this is not one of them.”

And there it is—the Jack of diamonds.

“So that trick and the cigarette trick are my all-time favorites,” says Jonathan. “I learned them within the first five years after I started doing magic.”

When Jonathan first started juggling in earnest he was a student at New Community School on Hermitage Road. “I had dyslexia and went there from eighth through twelfth grade,” he says. “New Community was fantastic and I graduated in 1989.” While in school there, Jonathan took up the unicycle, another element he would incorporate into his act. He even rode his unicycle to school.

After high school graduation, Jonathan had what he calls an early mid-life crisis. He left his job at Kings Dominion and spent the summer juggling at Busch Gardens. In the fall he went up to New York and spent a year at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. “I did some shows in Central Park and definitely kept my chops up with the juggling,” he says. The following May he got a job at Disney World, where would work for the next three years. “I’d work about four or five months each year, May through September,” he says. “It was a great feeling to be on board with the number one tourist attraction of the world, if you will. I was the street juggler in the Magic Kingdom and it was fantastic. You’d do a twenty-minute bit and then have an hour break. It keeps you on your toes.”

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## DIVERSIONS

# A Few of My Favorite Things

by FAYERUZ REGAN

**T**HANKSGIVING HAS had many iterations for me. In elementary school, my classmates and I, armed with construction paper, would choose between a making a pilgrim hat or an American Indian headdress. I always chose the latter because, hello? The feathers, the color – is it even a fair choice?

I spent my 20s and 30s in Los Angeles, where it was all about Friendsgiving. No one in LA is from LA, and a flight home isn't worth it one month out from Christmas. So it was a gathering of chosen families, where everyone felt included. It was always an ambitious potluck with plenty of weed and California wine.

Nowadays, Thanksgiving is a trip to Bucks County, outside of Philadelphia. It's often snowy in November. It's all covered bridges, stone houses, and 75 cent martinis at The Pipersville Inn – a tavern once frequented by George Washington.

But over the past few years, Thanksgiving has evolved into more than comforting traditions. I focus on the things I'm grateful for. It was a little harder this year. Every time I shop for groceries, I'm almost as nervous as I get when I weigh my salad at Whole Foods. Inflation, and other gripes that indicate we may be descending into a dystopian society, make it harder to look on the bright side.

That being said, I know I have so much to be thankful for. One thing I like to do every November is list the things I am grateful for in Richmond, for North of the James. Without further ado...

### THREE SHEETS TO THE WIND

The soft rock hits of the 70s and 80s transport us to a simpler time, when suits were pastel and whispers were careless. Three Sheets to the Wind have positively nailed it, if not made it more joyous. Their reputation has them playing gigs around the country, but sometimes we are treated to a hometown show. [www.threesheetsyachtrack.com](http://www.threesheetsyachtrack.com)

### GARDEN GLOW AT MAYMONT

For those who haven't been to this annual autumn event, know that words cannot describe how ethereal and other-worldly Garden Glow is. Trees, rock walls and water features are lit up at night in every color of the rainbow, and little corners offer eclectic light art and moving installations. This dreamy event even caters to those who have difficulty taking longer walks, offering golf cart shuttle service.

<https://maymont.org/calendar/garden-glow-2023/>

### LESLIE HERMAN

Last year I raved about Hotel Greene but Leslie Herman deserves his own mention. This artist is integral to their branding, from the famous postcards placed around their lobby (which I consider collector's pieces) to the website. The style is even more Wes Anderson than Wes Anderson. And if you visit his website, you'll see he has a unique style, but expansive influences. [www.leslieherman.com](http://www.leslieherman.com)

### THE FOOD!

Here's a special shout out for: the Krispy Kreme bread pudding at Lunch. Supper!, the brussels sprouts at Lillie Pearl, the banh mi at Pho So 1, the carne asada tacos at Big Chile, the gargantuan apple fritters at Country Style Donuts, the homemade corned beef hash at Millie's Diner, and the smash burger at Black Lodge.

### PORCHELLA

This COVID-era event, where local musicians played on front porches for crowds, started when those in quarantine pined for live music. The tradition has happily carried over to our post-COVID world, and has grown to attract people all over the Richmond Metro area. The lucky ones have ties in Bellevue, where porch keys are hidden. They have access to bathrooms (rather



Fayeruz and her family take in the sights at Garden Glow.

than a port a-potty), a fridge for their beer, and if the host is especially gracious, a nice spread of snacks. <https://bellevueporchella.com/about/>

### PARNEY'S PANTS

They say no one remembers what a man wore to the wedding. Todd "Parney" Parnell (former VP and Chief Operating Officer of The Richmond Flying Squirrels) actively fights against the bland nature of men's clothing. His signature collection of wild, technicolor pants is impressive, and quite joyful.

### TRUCKLE CHEESEMONGER

This quaint cheese shop in The Devil's Triangle is unmatched. The owner isn't just passionate about cheese, she has impeccable taste and can introduce you to undiscovered cheeses around the world. When it's cold out, they host Raclette Sundays from 12-5p. People can stop in and sample raclette, a gooey cheese from Switzerland that's heated before being served, because it has the ultimate, showiest cheese pull. <https://www.trucklerva.com/>

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone! 🍷

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**BRIEFS**

**Christmas on MacArthur Returns  
December 9 10 AM- 2 PM**

**C**HRISTMAS ON MACARTHUR is back from 9 am till 2 pm on Saturday, December 9. This annual holiday celebration benefits Toys-for-Tots, so please drop off new unwrapped toys to collection boxes that will soon be available at locally owned Northside businesses. Or bring a toy the day of the event.

A full family-fun day featuring kid-friendly activities, street vendors selling handmade arts and crafts, and a visit with St. Nick who will listen to all your Christmas wishes.

This Northside tradition is made possible by the Bellevue Merchants Association, the Bellevue Civic Association and NORTH of the JAMES, which has been a proud sponsor of this event since its inception.



Bob and Vera Kocher pulled Santa's sleigh at last year's event.

**NO CASINO, NO!**

Richmonders gave a resounding "No" to the second, and hopefully final, attempt to build a casino in Richmond. The measure was soundly defeated with well over 60 percent of Richmond voters giving the thumbs down sign to this proposal.

As many may recall an airplane dragging a banner that simply read VOTE NO CASINO . . . AGAIN! flew repeatedly around Richmond for more than four hours on the final day of the Richmond Folk Festival. This entire campaign was spearheaded by community activist Farid Alan Schintzius.

The banner will eventually end up at The Valentine in downtown Rich-



No casino again.

mond. According to Alan, William Martin, director of The Valentine, had this to say: "It's our role to document and preserve these important moments in Richmond's history and we're excited to add this to our collection."

**RICHMOND WALDORF SCHOOL  
HOSTING 3RD ANNUAL HOLIDAY  
FAIRE**

On Saturday, December 2 from 2pm till 6pm Richmond Waldorf School host it's 3rd Annual Holiday Faire on its campus at 1301 Robin Hood Road. Family friendly and open to the public, this event celebrates the festive season with live music, several local vendors with giftable shopping at all price levels, food and drinks, plus Waldorf crafts, puppetry, and unique activities for kids. Entry to the event is free.

Learn more at [Richmondwaldorf.com/Holiday-Faire](http://Richmondwaldorf.com/Holiday-Faire)



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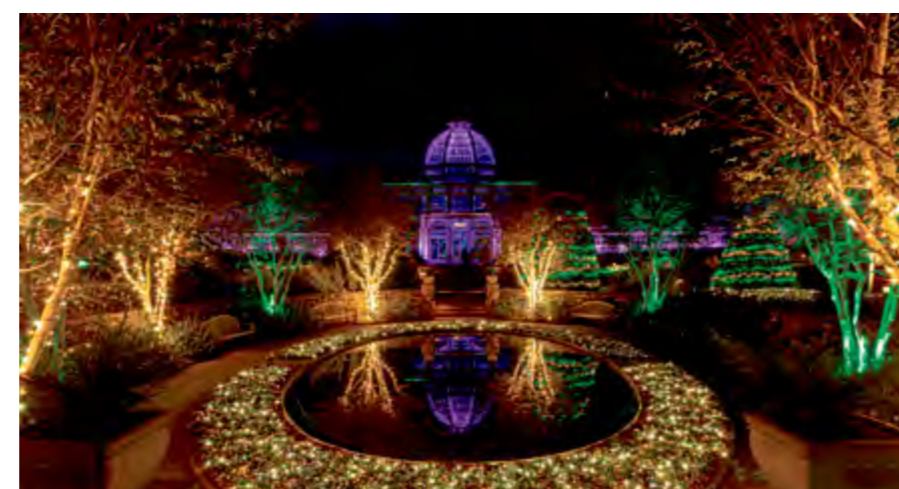
Now in its 47th year, the Concert Ballet's Nutcracker is Virginia's longest running version of this holiday

classic. Acclaimed for colorful scenery and costuming, The Concert Ballet will present shows in November and December at a wide range of venues across the Richmond metro area. Tickets start at \$20. For more information call (804) 798-0945, or visit <http://concertballet.com/season/events-calender-tickets/>

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GardenFest of lights photo by Tom Hennessy.

is represented in a new light form. Other new light forms include a bluebird, mushrooms, and lily pads floating in the pools in front of the Conservatory.

For more information please visit [lewisginter.org/visit/events/dominion-gardenfest-of-lights/](http://lewisginter.org/visit/events/dominion-gardenfest-of-lights/)

**ADVENT HOLIDAY MARKET  
AT SAINT PAUL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Crafted by local artisans, many handmade items will be available at the Adven Holiday Market at Saint Paul's Catholic Church at 909 Rennie Avenue on the Northside. Select from cards, ornaments, jewelry, pottery, paintings, sculptures and much more. Sale runs from 12pm till 1pm on December 10.

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# DAWOUD BEY ELEGY

## ALL ART, IN THE VERY GERM OF ITS SEED, IS POLITICAL.

Which is not to say Democrat or Republican, Progressive or Independent. For art springs from the politics of humanity, a deep well that quenches the thirst for ultimate truths, and propels us forward in a sort of aesthetic evolution that actually alters the mind and the soul and the heart. With Guernica, Pablo Picasso compelled us to confront the real terrors of war. Mary Cassatt insisted we acknowledge a noxious patriarchy that had ruled the West for millennia. And Dawoud Bey reminds us of the eternal horrors of the enslavement of Africans, and the persistence of racism in our culture.

When he was a little boy, David Smikle was planning to visit the home of one of his classmates for a playdate. His father was going to take his son over to the boy's house, but then the mother of David's friend told them not to come to the front door, that they would have to enter through the back door in the rear of the house, hidden from street view. That was one of the first times that David Smikle, who would become world-renowned artist Dawoud Bey, understood firsthand that racial prejudice was woven inextricably into the American tapestry.



DAWOUD BEY 1

*Untitled (Trail and Trees) from the series Stony the Road, 2023, Dawoud Bey (American, born 1953), gelatin silver print. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Alfred duPont, by exchange. Image © Dawoud Bey*

graphic series and two film installations, and the images will leave you mesmerized and amazed, and saddened beyond belief in your deep heart's core. Dawoud's use of stark landscapes, sans color, evokes the spirit of a place out of time. Each carefully framed image rings with eternal truths that are beyond denial and not restricted by any calendar.

Richmonders will at once recognize every image in "Stony the Road." These twelve photographs were commissioned by the VMFA, and shot by Dawoud along The

eliminate one material aspect of the present world that we live in: color. And I also make my photographs from an eye level vantage point, which also suggests that landscape might have been viewed as if through the eyes of the enslaved African Americans who inhabited or occupied that land. The work is about bringing that horrific history into the present moment, creating a palpable sense of that past in our own time through the work."

It should come as no surprise that this exhibit was organized by Valerie Cassel Oliver, the museum's curator of modern and contemporary art, who has helped re-imagine the function of a public art gallery. She has been responsible for some of the most powerful installations in recent memory, including the two showstoppers that followed in rapid succession—"The Dirty South: Contemporary, and the Sonic Impulse" and "Isaac Julien: The Lessons of the Hour, Frederick Douglass."

"Elegy" unites three photographic series ("Stony the Road," "In This Here Place," and "Night Coming Tenderly, Black") and two short films ("Evergreen" and "350,00") that celebrate Dawoud's quantum jump from portraiture and street photography to landscapes that invite the viewer to experience the living horrors of our history.

Trail of Enslaved Africans, sometimes called The Richmond Slave Trail. Anyone who has spent time in that place on Richmond's Southside knows the shudder you feel while walking along those worn paths. Dawoud captures the essence of that spirit through his extraordinary understanding of how a place and its storied past reverberates down the long corridors of time.

When I asked the artist how he achieved this effect, he responded: "By using black and white film and large scale black and white prints, I

One series of photographs, titled "In This Here Place," was created in 2019 by Dawoud who trained his sensitive lens on the grounds and ancient slave cabins surrounding Louisiana's Evergreen plantation down along the Mississippi. In those black and white images Dawoud is able to bring to life the inescapable nightmare of human beings shackled and abused for life. As with all the landscape photographs in "Elegy" this grouping of photographs does more than invite viewers to experience the inhumanity of chattel slavery: It commands them to do so.

The last photo series in this exhibition was actually the first series of landscape photographs Dawoud Bey ever did. Called Night Coming Tenderly, Black, these photographs were taken in northeastern Ohio and give a sense of what the final stages on the Underground Railroad must have been like for the men and women who struggled against all odds to gain their freedom. Although this was Dawoud's

first landscape series, it was not the first time his art addressed historic moments.

"The Birmingham Project, which is not included in the VMFA exhibition, was the first in the history-based series of works I have been doing," Dawoud said. "It was provoked by the memory of seeing a picture of the surviving sister of one of the four girls who were killed in the dynamiting blast at 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963. The picture, which I first saw in a book when I was 11-years old, came rushing back to me one morning, and I decided I needed to go to Birmingham and make some work about that history which still haunted me." And then, he added: "I plan to continue this history-based work that I am doing, though having just completed 'Stony the Road; and '350,000' here in Richmond I'm not exactly sure for the next film that I want to do, and it will continue to examine the Black American historical land-



DAWOUD BEY 2

*Untitled (Curve in the Trail) from the series Stony the Road, 2023, Dawoud Bey (American, born 1953), gelatin silver print. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Alfred duPont, by exchange. Image © Dawoud Bey*

scape, but from a much more personal vantage point."

When I asked what sensations he had while photographing along The Trail of Enslaved Africans, Dawoud responded, "As I was

photographing and filming there I was imagining what this foreign terrain might have felt like to those enslaved Africans experiencing for the first time, not knowing exactly where they were going and where this unknown trail ended, what

When I recently asked this Queens, New York native about those early experiences, he wrote: "Racism was alive and well in Queens as it was everywhere else at that historical moment." He would remember a teacher "who couldn't believe that I had done the homework that I did, since a little Black boy could not have been capable of this, with the language I was using, without copying it from somewhere. A little Black boy who had the Encyclopedia Britannica and the Encyclopedia of American Poetry, among many other books, in his home was something that they simply could not fathom. I was sent to the Guidance Counselor's office for all kinds of imagined infractions, solely because I was one of a handful of Black children bused into largely white schools after busing was mandated."

"Dawoud Bey: Elegy," which runs through February 25, 2024 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, is unlike anything you have ever seen before. It is made up of three photo-

by **CHARLES MCGUIGAN**



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DAWOUDE BEY 3  
*Untitled (James River Through the Opening) from the series Stony the Road, 2023, Dawoud Bey (American, born 1953), gelatin silver print. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Alfred duPont, by exchange. Image © Dawoud Bey*

was around each bend of the trail. So I tried to make the work from the vantage point of an unknown terrain, fraught with fear, looming horror, and anticipation.”

Dawoud also learned as much he possibly could about Richmond’s notorious slave trade from the folks who have made a careful study of it, including Ana Edwards, education programs manager at the Ameri-

can Civil War Museum.

“I did indeed did spend time with Ana Edwards, whose father happens to be a close friend of mine, the sculptor Mel Edwards,” Dawoud wrote. “Both through Ana and through my own research and Valerie Cassel Oliver along with Omilade Janine Bell of the Elegba Folklore Society in Richmond, I was able to immerse myself in the history in an immediate and physical sense. It’s important to me to have a knowing sense of the place where I intend to make my work before beginning. It helps to steep me mentally and psychically in the experience of the place as well to remind me exactly where I am. It also gives the work a level of integrity that I feel is important, that can only come from spending time in a place and connecting and forming community with others who are also deeply invested in uncovering this history.”

Asked if the shooting for “Stony the Road” was significantly dif-

ferent from his work on “In This Here Place” and “Night Coming Tenderly, Black,” Dawoud wrote, “The challenge was fundamentally the same, to visually re-imagine the landscape of place and history through the medium and materials that I use to make my work. The most significant difference in photographing on the trail was that the approximately three-mile undisturbed length of the trail that still exists was the most abbreviated landscape of any that I had previously photographed on, which created the challenge of how to reinvent the description of that abbreviated space from photograph to photograph.”

And then I asked him what it is has been like to grow up Black in America.

“I guess you could say that as a Black person in America I have PhD in Structural Racism, having experienced its effects directly through most of my life, from childhood to adulthood. Racism

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DAWOUD BEY 4

Untitled (James River) from the series Stony the Road, 2023, Dawoud Bey (American, born 1953), gelatin silver print. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Alfred duPont, by exchange. Image © Dawoud Bey

fundamentally shapes the social landscape that Black people inhabit," according to Dawoud. "The reason it does begins with the institution of slavery, which Richmond played a very significant role in. The reverberations of Black degra-

dation and human contempt that began in slavery continues very much to this day. The writer and cultural theorist Christina Sharpe, who contributed to my exhibition catalogue 'Elegy' has written about the institution of slavery and all

the social traumas and injustices that continue to unfold from it as a 'wake' that continues to ripple out into our society, impacting countless aspects of sociopolitical life in America. Slavery is inherently a part of America's DNA, and racism is and will continue to be its enduring legacy."

Finally, and more than somewhat naively, I asked, "Can art redeem us and make us better as a people, and help eliminate racial prejudice?"

To which, Dawoud Bey responded: "Art can make us more reflective as a people, more alert to those things that we might not otherwise consider. I do believe that art has the capacity to reshape the world, one person at a time. I think it would be simplistic to think it can eliminate racism, but it can certainly make one more alert to things you might otherwise be ignoring. The human challenge is what we each choose to do with that. It's the artist's role to raise the questions or the history, to be the provocateur. I think James

Baldwin states it best when he said, "The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place."

This is the perfect juncture in Virginia's history for every student in the Commonwealth to visit this exhibit and understand the unblemished truth about the enslavement of Africans. There was no upside to it as some governors have suggested. And other elected leaders, who have tried to rewrite history texts that essentially echo the false narrative of "the lost cause," are simply spoon-feeding lies, swaddled in dung, to the young. "Elegy" by Dawoud Bey "illuminates the darkness" and "blazes roads through that vast forest." **NS**

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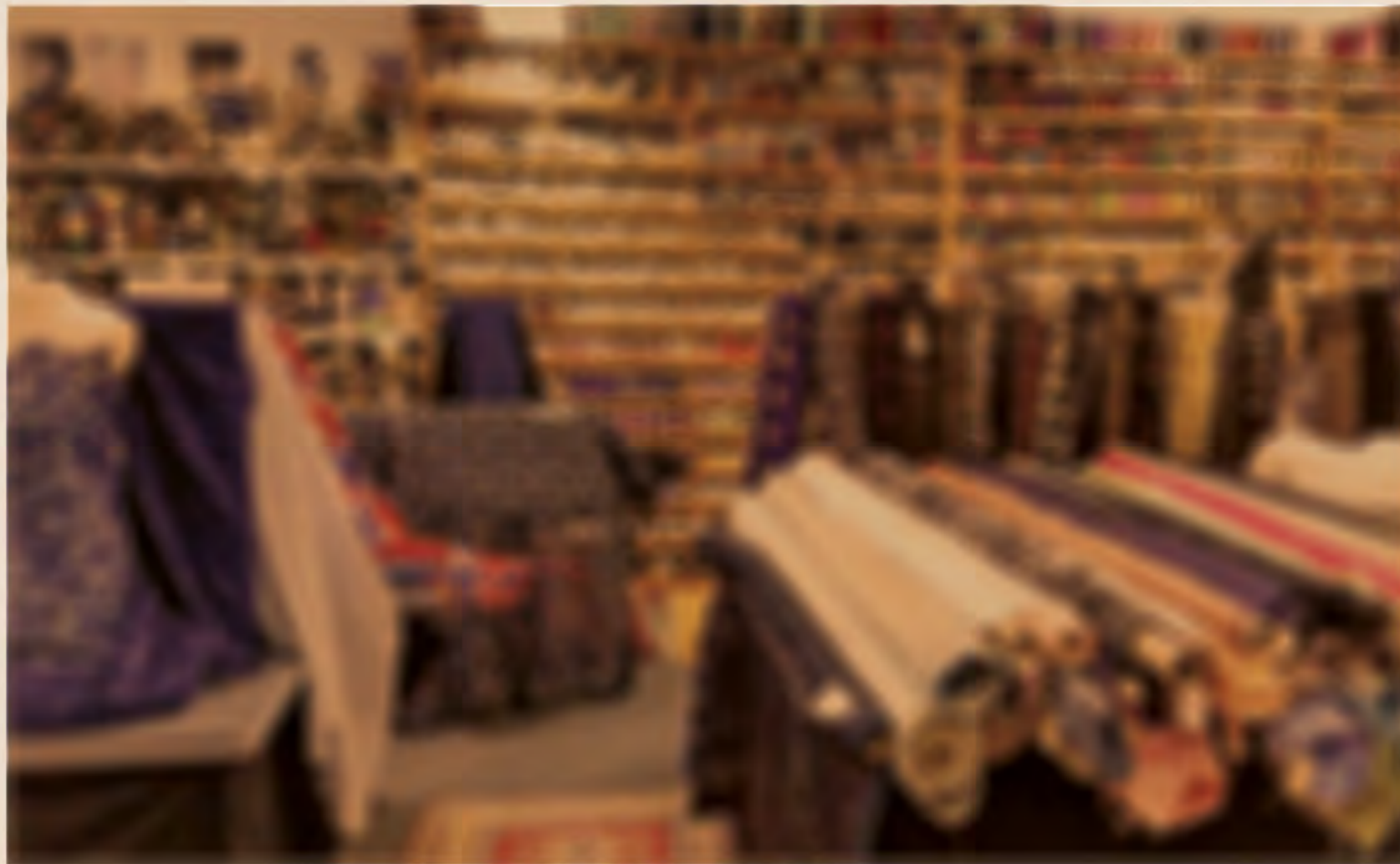
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# Never Again

by FRANCES TEMME



**M**Y EARLIEST MEMORY of childhood TV is vividly etched in my brain. No “Bonanza,” “Leave It to Beaver,” or “Father Knows Best” for me. On Sunday evenings, at six, we, as a family, would watch the CBS show, “The Twentieth Century.” The opening salvo of an enormous rock, Prudential Insurance Company’s logo (I didn’t know until years later that the logo paid homage to the tenacity and strength of the Rock of Gibraltar); Walter Cronkite’s deep baritone; and an orchestral march excited and drew me in. The producers knew what they were doing.

tory at Cronkite’s knee, but I also first grew aware of what a dreadful place the world could be. The most telling and wretched image of that show for me were the frames of a chute, like so many steep sliding boards of my childhood playgrounds, only human bones rattled down that chute, the bones of victims of the Holocaust. I was horrified, did not know what to make of it. Other images appeared on the screen: grotesquely emaciated bodies, living skeletons really; piles of bodies clothed in those pajama-like striped uniforms; roomfuls of eyeglasses and prosthetics and shoes. I asked my parents lots of questions and they answered—I went to bed unsettled and afraid.

The following summer I faced per-

sonally the physical reality of that awful history. As a child, I spent my summers with my maternal grandparents in Philadelphia in a neighborhood of Poles, Italians, Irish, and Jews. I made daily trips around the corner to the Jewish bakery and the Jewish green grocery, and two storefront synagogues were situated on the block behind my grandparents’ house. I watched toothless old men in their yarmulkes sitting in front of their synagogues on folding chairs, smoking and talking. It was very mysterious. And very exciting. I felt as if I had been transported from my suburban world of splitlevels and cul-de-sacs to a foreign country—the people were more interesting, more varied, more exotic. Produce hucksters still sold their wares from the back of a

horse-drawn cart so the stink of the horse manure mixed with the scents from Lipton’s Bakery. It was nothing like home.

Every summer, my grandmother sewed me a stunning wardrobe of clothes, all based on the featured items in the August edition of “Seventeen.” I was spoiled without recognizing it. My grandmother, an accomplished seamstress, shopped for patterns and fabrics at Moshe’s Fabrics. Moshe spoke a heavily accented English which enchanted me. He and his wife were lovely—gentle, kind, welcoming—and they knew everything about the fabrics they sold. I learned so much from them: how to drape a fabric to feel its hand, how to crush a fabric to see how it would re-

spond to wrinkling, how to calculate the amount of fabric needed based on pattern, stripe, or plaid.

One hot and humid Philadelphia day, Moshe had rolled up his sleeves and was unwinding a bolt of fabric for our inspection when I noticed a line of numbers tattooed onto his inner forearm. My great uncles all had tattoos so I was used to seeing ink on flesh, although those I was familiar with were hearts or women’s names or battleships from World War II; I had never seen a row of numbers. I asked their meaning and Moshe explained they were his from his time in a concentration camp in Poland. My mind exploded—the images from the show I had watched on TV and the immediacy of that tattoo bowled me over. I cried on the walk home. My grandfather took me to the local library and I read what a ten-year old could read about the Holocaust, but the book that really defined that gruesome period for me was “The Diary of Anne Frank.”

Anne Frank made the Holocaust alive and real for me in the same way that Moshe’s tattoo had clarified that grim history. Approximately Anne’s age, I could understand her crush on Peter and her fascination with her body and the complexity of adolescence; what I could not fathom was the extraordinary fear that pervaded her life. My world was small and safe—Anne had literally been captured in a critical moment in the world’s history. We are profoundly privileged to be able to share her witness to the unimaginable.

Decades later, I was able to visit Auschwitz and see those sights firsthand. I stood in the gas chamber; I wandered through the barracks that featured rooms of shoes, every kind of footwear imaginable, from the softest leather of infant booties to steel-toed work boots to elegant high heels; rooms of artificial legs and arms and back braces; an entire room of eyeglasses. I was particularly overwhelmed by that last encounter because I’ve been near-sighted for most of my life so I know how disorienting

it is to be without glasses. I pondered all the ways that the Nazis strove to rid Jews of their humanity—by assigning tattooed numbers instead of names, by taking away prosthetics that made movement possible, by stealing the spectacle that allowed people to see clearly. Every inkling of horror that I first felt watching bones collide down that chute, peering at Moshe’s tattoo, listening to Anne’s fear—all those horrors materialized and were confirmed as I made my way through the labyrinthine maze of Auschwitz.

The world said, “Never Again,” but that may not be holding firm. Watching the horrors of October 7 should awaken us all to the real meaning of never again. Too much of the coverage of that awful day has been clouded by extremists on both the right and the left. We must never confuse the suffering of the Palestinian people and the need for two states to camouflage Hamas’ relentless desire to rid the world of Israel and, more broadly, the Jewish people. Few people in the 1930s could either imagine the horrors of Hitler’s regime or believe that it could be implemented. Even when American citizens knew, we chose to turn our backs to protect ourselves—and, oh, lest we forget, many Americans embraced Hitler’s ideology. In 1939, The Daily Princetonian polled its students to determine “the greatest living person.” Ninety-three votes were given to Hitler, twenty-seven to Einstein, and fifteen to Neville Chamberlain. The Fuhrer won.

We need to do a better job of teaching history—books that make students uncomfortable shouldn’t be banned. Some political movements are evil—we should be allowed to say that. Moral equivalency is a fallacy. Teaching children to read widely, to analyze, to feel, to be open to others is necessary to keep our democracy functioning and to maintain a world order that says, “Never Again” and means it. Those images from my childhood haunt me to this very day. And I am grateful for them. 🙏



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# Bat Boxes In Bryan Park

by KATHY BUTLER SPRINGSTON

**BATS SCOUTING** for warm nighttime shelters and dark daytime hideaways should detect with their sharp echolocation the three bat boxes Scout Sam Whipple recently placed in Joseph Bryan Park.

A member of Scout Troop 770, Sam, 15, is the son of Keith and Cabel Whipple of Henrico County and a freshman at Douglas Freeman High School.

In the rain, on Saturday, October 14, Sam, along with his dad, and brother, Finn, set in place the three black boxes he had attached to tall heavy poles, just north of Lower Youngs Pond, near Bryan Park Avenue.

"I've always had an interest in the environmental side of things," said Sam. In school he is taking advanced placement environmental science.

When he reached Life rank in scouting in 2022, his dad asked if he had an idea for his Eagle project. Sam remembered reading about bats in a book about endangered animals. Perhaps helping the small nocturnal mammals would be worth pursuing, he told his dad.

They visited Pocahontas State Park in Chesterfield County, where a ranger talked to them about the bat colony there.

"Dad and I came across Bryan Park," with its ponds, "and it looked like a great place" to pitch the idea for putting up a few boxes. Bats need a body of water to attract aquatic insects and other flying critters they eat. Protein-rich moths like the area, too.

Friends of Bryan Park President Rick Sinsabaugh, member Sue Ridd and former Times-Dispatch environment writer Rex Springston (my husband) met at the park to brainstorm with Sam. Rex put the scout in touch with Chris Hobson, then a state-employed bat expert, now retired. He lives in Quinton in New Kent County.

"Mr. Hobson and I emailed several times and we met in person," said

Sam. "He gave me pointers on what to do, what type of box to make. He was a great help and taught me everything I needed to know."

They talked about how white-nose syndrome has really taken a toll on the numbers of so many bats, especially the species Sam hopes to attract, the little brown bat. White-nose fungus, introduced from Europe, creates a white fuzz on bats' muzzles, ears and wings. The sickness causes the bats to stop hibernating in winter when there are no insects to eat, so they starve to death.

Sam is fascinated by the work of Chris Hobson and his colleagues "who have been trying to bring back bat populations and recording what's happening."

The evening bat is the species folks around Richmond usually notice coming out as night is falling, Chris said. The smaller little browns are rare because white nose reduced their population by 95% to 98% in Virginia over a decade or so, he said. "But small isolated colonies of little browns made it through for whatever reason." Females have one pup a year. It will take decades to see a growth trend.

Sam and Chris are hopeful some little browns are out there to find these new homes in the park, even if evening bats and other species are roommates, or live in a box next door. Diversity is good. Little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*) weigh about eight grams and stretch their wings out about eight or so inches.

The coolest thing about bats to Sam is that with limited sight they must use echolocation to locate insects and navigate around objects by emitting high frequency pulses and listening for the echo. "It's like a sixth sense," he said. Their tiny eyes are adapted for pitch-dark places.

"Bats are a keystone species in our ecosystem. They help limit the pest population and actually prevent people from using pesticides which are harmful to the environment," Sam said, as if giving a classroom lecture.



Little brown bat.

"Because bats eat a lot of small insects, many larger animals – carnivores like hawks and owls – will feed on bats. But since they have become so endangered this has really impacted our food web and how many animals get their energy," he said.

After pushing the third pole into its PVC pipe stand that was sunk two feet in concrete weeks earlier, Sam looked up and said, "I'm just hoping these houses help give bats good homes to reproduce and shelter from predators."

Sam found house plans for what Chris Hobson calls "modified rocket boxes" on the internet.

Each is double-chambered– like a box within a box – so the bats can move from the cozy outer chamber that gets sunlight to the inner compartment which is cooler as their temperature needs change, he explained.

Sam said two vents provide airflow and entry, and holes between the chambers allow the bats to go from one chamber to the other. Bats can also enter crevices at the bottom. All the walls of these quarters have been roughed up so the bats can climb and dig their claws in to hang upside down.

About 24 hours went into planning the project. Then, Sam and five helpers met twice on weekends for the construction. Assisting him were scouts Charlie Bridge and Hatcher Cox, and friends Evan Diers, Benjamin Parent and Drew Levasseur.

They used exterior grade wood for each roof, topping it with metal to protect it from rain, snow and ice. On the wooden sides, they applied a good primer and black paint to absorb sunlight. The bat expert had suggested where the boxes should go so they get six to eight hours of sun.

Each 18-foot metal pole runs through the center of the inner chamber of each four-foot house. With the bottom of the pole secured two feet in the ground, each house sits 12 feet off the ground. Positioned away from branches, the boxes are out of reach of owls and hawks. Chris was pleased with the height because bats also need to swoop from up high to take off.

The scientist was impressed recently to see a picture of Sam and his boxes. He thought the metal poles are an "interesting design twist" and choice instead of wooden four-by-fours that can warp. Also, predators like large birds and raccoons would have a hard time clinging to the slippery metal. Baffles can be added to deter hungry rat snakes that can climb poles, Chris said.

Near the boxes looms a big dead tree bats use by the water off Bryan Park Avenue. Sam said Chris told him "when that one falls or is taken down – probably soon – it would leave the bats without a home. So these boxes will actually help because they are near" the bats' usual roosting spot.

Chris had quite a park bat story to tell Sam.

"When I met Sam, I told him one of my most vivid memories of Bryan Park was being at my mother's annual sorority picnic in one of the shelters," said Chris. "It was late in the afternoon and all of a sudden all these bats started flying out of the chimney into our shelter."

He said everybody was freaked out and men swung baseball bats and tennis rackets, killing as many bats as they could.

So, Sam's boxes "may be a way to flip that on its head." They'll show these animals are welcome and doing a service. "Granted, most people don't want bats in their potato salad... but we should understand bats are here for a reason and support them," he added.

"Sam is a very nice, intelligent young man," said Chris. "He was very open to listening to ideas and obviously soaked up a lot of information in the short time we had together. I'm proud of him. I just pointed him in the right direction and he took off. He did a lot of research on his own."

Now that winter is close, the park's bats will use familiar hibernation sites and are unlikely to find Sam's houses right away. But he hopes some bats discover them by spring or summer. Moms could use them to deliver their pups in May or June.

Chris Hobson told Sam that establishing a substantial colony can take a couple of years. Each box could hold 100 or so little brown bats.


To become an Eagle Scout, Sam still has a review to write and must meet with scout officials.

Sam will come by the park every few months to monitor how many bats are hanging around. And he'll see if repairs are needed.

Would Sam give a program on his project whenever the park's nature center reopens? "That would be amazing," he said. "I'd be honored."

How does it feel to do something that helps the cycle of life?

"It makes me happy," Sam Whipple said.

"We all do small things that help," he added. "But I think for the average human what we do in our entire life will really hurt the environment no matter how we act. It's just how our economy and our lives are built. So, it makes me feel better that I'm doing this one small thing to help a little bit." 

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**BOOK REVIEW**

# Paved With Good Intentions

by **FRAN WITHROW**

**WE SURE DO ADORE** our roads, unless we are inconvenienced by them. Traffic jams, construction blockages, and poorly maintained expressways will have us tapping our feet in frustration and peeking at our phones. The world is criss-crossed with roads and more are being built all the time. But there is a downside to our love affair with roads, and it is a doozy.

Ben Goldfarb explores the far-reaching effects of roads in his fascinating book, "Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet." Roads are a convenience, but Goldfarb shows how they are also detrimental to every sentient being on the planet.

You can easily guess that one problem is roadkill, which is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1910, people decried the death of animals who didn't have enough time to get out of the way of these quick, new predators. We're all familiar with those sad little carcasses by the side of the road as we speed by. And roadkill numbers are more massive than we see. Many animals crawl away to die, or are too small to be noticed by a passing motorist.

Roads block and alter rivers, which affect fish. Roads interrupt migration routes. Animals need to roam to survive, but highways can cut them off so severely they become trapped. Some species are so averse to these "moving fences" they starve and die, unable to access life-saving food just a few hundred feet away.

Amphibians, snakes, and turtles are less hesitant to cross roads, but are more likely to get squished since they are slower to run the gauntlet. And what about insects? Goldfarb says we are in an insect apocalypse, and I believe it. As a child, I remember our windshields spattered with insects af-

ter a trip. When was the last time you wiped a moth or butterfly off your car?

And it's not just the fact that animals and cars crash into each other. Traffic noise affects all manner of wildlife. Stress levels rise in both people and animals who live near high-traffic areas. People of color, whose communities are often forcibly divided by highways, are disproportionately affected by the noise and exhaust fumes emitted by vehicles.

All this is discouraging, but Goldfarb also talks to researchers, scientists, concerned civilians, and others who are struggling to help. Engineers are creating special underpasses and bridges so wildlife can safely cross highways. Volunteers meet to carry frogs and turtles across roads, wildlife rehabilitators take in those orphaned by cars, researchers gather data that helps in constructing safer highway crossings.

Some countries hold engineers accountable for road collisions, which cause millions of dollars in damage to cars and people as well as to wildlife. Thus it is the road designers rather than the driver who is responsible. A novel idea!

Our dependence on roads isn't going away anytime soon. What other ways can we help alleviate the suffering associated with roads? Well, as Goldfarb said he drove down a road in Brazil, "On a planet preoccupied with speed, it felt good to go slow." **NB**

"Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet"

By *Ben Goldfarb*

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