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continued on page 10

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TABLE of CONTENTS

4 DIVERSIONS **Getting Baked This Christmas**

Steam on the windows. The scent of warm sugar. A Christmas Story on the TV. When I bake for the holidays, I am all in.

6 SEASONAL **Christmas on MacArthur Returned**

After a two-year hiatus, due to the pandemic, Christmas on MacArthur returned on Saturday, December 10. A full family-fun day featuring kid-friendly activities, bagpipers, street vendors selling handmade arts and crafts, and a visit with St. Nick.

8 BUSINESS PROFILE **RVA Naturals: Where Toys Will Be Toys**

There's a place you can do your holiday shopping for the kids on your list and actually bring a bit of the magic back into Christmas for them. What's more you'll be doing Mother Earth a big favor. No plastics here, no black mirrors made of rare earth metals the mining of which wreaks havoc on the environment, no synthetic fabrics, no computer screens.

10 COVER **Saint Nicholas: On the Essence of the Human Soul**

Santa Claus, Pere Noel, Father Christmas, Sante Klaas, Befana, Kriss Kringle, Pelznickel, Old Babouschka, Christkindl. He's known by a hundred names in a hundred different countries. But he is Saint Nicholas, a fourth century bishop of Asia Minor, and he still lives on the North Pole and continues an annual tradition of giving and hope that has gone on for more than 1,600 years. He is an engaging man, insightful, and above all else believes in keeping the flame of hope burning.

15 MONUMENT REMOVAL **A.P. Hill**

The last Confederate monument standing in Richmond, other than those on the state capitol grounds, finally came down on December 12.

16 HIDDEN HISTORIES **The American Way... Sedition**

The Confederate flag's prominence in the Capitol insurrection of January 6th comes as no surprise to those who know its history. A charge of sedition or seditious conspiracy is relatively rare in the modern era, of course, but that's not for lack of trying.

18 BOOK REVIEW **Racism in America**

Andre Henry is a Black activist, artist, and writer. In his book, "All the White Friends I Couldn't Keep," Henry shares how his close white friends and family do not truly understand how racism undergirds the foundation of our country. The heartbreaking ways his white friends dismiss racism eventually leads him, with grief and reluctance, to drop them from his life.

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DIVERSIONS

Getting Baked This Christmas

by FAYERUZ REGAN

STEAM ON THE WINDOWS. The scent of warm sugar. A Christmas Story on the TV. When I bake for the holidays, I am all in.

This season has always been a dichotomy of cheerful and stressful. Christmas music seems mocking when played in a store where the checkout line is fifteen customers deep. Everyone knows that smiling toddlers on Santa's lap often involves tears and bribery.

As parents of a young child, we are keenly aware of how fleeting "Christmas magic" is. There's pressure to have everything perfect, so that their childhood memories will be trapped in amber. That was my experience, and only now do I realize how my parents hustled. Add to this the time crunch of social obligations, and the pressure only builds.

I'm not saying society wants us to be stressed out. But it does feel expected of us. I refuse to succumb to it. Just like I refused when planning my wedding. The word "Bridezilla" was bandied about, women would try to commiserate on how hard it was, but I shut out the noise. I was planning the biggest party of my life, and I enjoyed every minute of it.

I try to do the same for Christmas. I refuse to slip in holiday baking after work, or between weekend obligations. I clear my schedule, slow down, and go full Hallmark. The halls are decked, Vince Guaraldi is on the stereo, and I am awash in a cloud of flour and dunes of sugar.

I suggest that if you are going to bake for the holidays, go all in. Dress comfortably. Wear an apron, but also something that will inevitably get dusted with flour. Lick the spoon, sample everything, don't count the calories. Get stuck in front of the TV for a little while to see Ralphie almost shoot his eye out. Time doesn't matter today.

And by all means, make the crowd-pleasing Aristocrat Popcorn Balls. It requires zero baking, cooks in minutes, and is deliciously addictive.

Aristocrat Popcorn Balls

Ingredients:



13 cups of salted, popcorn (pop one huge pot, and snack on anything left over)

1/4 cup salted butter

Additional butter to coat a 9"x13" pan

1/2 cup chocolate chips

3/4 cup of smooth peanut butter

Instructions:

Butter the 9"x13" pan and set aside

Melt 1/4 cup butter in a large pot

Add 10 oz marshmallows to the butter, and keep stirring

Once it's melted, stir in peanut butter

Once the peanut butter is melted, pour all the popcorn into the pot.

Stir vigorously – it's a workout because the mixture becomes very thick!

Very quickly, stir in chocolate chips and remove from heat before fully melted. If they melt, it's not the end of the world – it just makes the snack more visually interesting.

Press contents of the pot into the buttered tray

Press flat with a spatula and allow to cool, then cut into squares.

Optional: While they're cooling off, you can mold them into balls. This is more visually appealing but involves a bit of muscle work.

These will keep in an airtight container for 4-5 days before becoming a

bit hard and stale. But I'm pretty sure they won't last that long.

I'm also a fan of Italian wedding cookies, peppermint bark, pumpkin chocolate chip cookies, and coconut bars. When I'm on a roll and the oven is warm, I bake until I start running out of things. You can't stop the momentum, so you start substituting ingredients with coconut flakes or Fruity Pebbles.

Then, once all the treats have cooled to room temperature on my dining table, I line tins with wax paper and fill them with cheer. Something worth noting is that certain spices are strong enough to spread across the entire tin, dominating the flavor of every other treat in the package. Anything mint-flavored, pumpkin-spice flavored, or treats containing anise seed (like biscotti) will penetrate everything else, so keep them individually wrapped or in a separate package. No one wants to bite into a minty pumpkin spice cookie.

If you think you've made too much, think again. We see people in our daily lives and never know what they are privately going through. A thoughtful tin of homemade goods will brighten their day. Teachers, assistants, your favorite barista – anyone who makes your day a little sweeter would be touched to have some sweetness in return. Happy holidays. **RF**

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SEASONAL OFFERINGS

Christmas on MacArthur Returned December 10

AFTER A TWO-YEAR hiatus, due to the pandemic, Christmas on MacArthur returned from 10 am till 2 pm on Saturday, December 10. As always this annual Northside holiday celebration benefited Toys-for-Tots. This year they collected more than one thousand toys that the U.S. Marines picked up the day of the event.

A full family-fun day featuring kid-friendly activities, bagpipers, street vendors selling hand-made arts and crafts, and a visit with St. Nick, this year's event attracted hundreds of people of all ages. Some of Richmond's finest female vocalists—Laura Ann Singh, Elana Lisa and Evy Watts—accompanied by guitarists Jerad Romero and Dave Schieferstein, performed holiday favorites.

Though there was no parade this year, MacArthur Avenue from Nottoway to Bellevue was closed to traffic so visitors could walk safely to shop at all the vendors. Bands played at both ends of the street, with other performers taking the stage on the parklet in front of Stir Crazy Cafe. A number of children's activities, including ornament making, were held throughout the day. As in years past, the Richmond Police Department, Richmond Fire Firefighters, ACCA Shriners, and the Clan MacLeod Pipes & Drums of North America were all on hand. 🎅





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RVA Naturals Where Toys Will Be Toys

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

THERE'S A PLACE YOU now the building that can do your holiday shopping for the kids on your list and actually bring a bit of the magic back into Christmas for them. What's more you'll be doing Mother Earth a big favor. No plastics here, no black mirrors made of rare earth metals the mining of which wreaks havoc on the environment, no synthetic fabrics, no computer screens. Plus this shop supports independently owned businesses that are all fair trade, thereby building local economies. Most importantly of all though, the toys sold here nurture the imagination, and kids actually play with them instead of staring vacantly at a screen.

Tricia Kambourian, owner and sole proprietor of RVA Naturals, greets me at the door to her shop in the Gayton Crossing Shopping Center. I follow her back to the counter, and she begins telling me a bit about the history of her toy store.

"This shop has only been open since July," she says. "But I've been online for almost ten years. It started off real slow and it grew over time."

The seed of it all was planted when Tricia and her spouse, Haig, decided to homeschool their children. "I like the freedom of it," she tells me. "I liked that the kids could wake up when they needed to. They were able to have a kind of organic day. We would spend all day outside instead of in a classroom. We did a lot of for-



est schools."

That was about the time Tricia learned about the Richmond Waldorf School. "Waldorf had all these wooden toys, and they were also just playing with sticks and dirt and acorn tops. And I thought, this is perfect. And that kind of turned me on to all the natural toys," she says. "That just became a rabbit hole that I delved into. I said to myself, 'Why can't we find these toys everywhere?'"


She already knew about the big toy companies used by Waldorf families, places like Ostheimer's and Grimm's, but Tricia wanted to work with smaller companies. "I found them on Facebook and Etsy," she says. "A lot of very small businesses that I've been able to contact and provide here as well to sell. A lot of them are very small businesses from Europe and the U.S."

Each of those businesses has several things in common. "All of them use only natural materials, and those materials are sustainable," says Tricia. "They are fair trade, and the products they make are all handmade."

She takes me on a quick tour of the shop that begins not far from the checkout counter where there's a display of long, rainbow-colored strands

Throughout the shop there are scores and scores of items to select from—bunny rabbits stuffed with Kapok (a natural alternative to cotton); a massive wooden castle that has a sculptural beauty to it; wondrous mobiles that feature a pig, an elephant, a flying cat, a horse, a dog and a hummingbird, all carved from hardwood; even dress up costumes, screen-printed and sewn by a woman in Georgia, where kids can use their imaginations and become a superhero, a dragon, a pirate, a butterfly, at least for a day.

There's a lot more to it though. RVA Naturals also sells handmade baby clothes, children's books, natural soaps and candles, and all natural craft supplies—everything from wool felt to modeling beeswax.

As she surveys her store, Tricia Kambourian says, "These toys will last forever; they might get knicks and dings, but they're going to last." And then she says, "It brings you back to a simpler life, a simpler childhood, and you don't really need all the bells and whistles, and the gimmicks and the gadgets." 

RVA Naturals

Wednesday & Thursday 9-5; Friday and Saturday 12-8; Appointments on Tuesdays

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SAINT NICHOLAS

ON THE ESSENCE OF THE HUMAN SOUL

THIS ALL HAPPENED YEARS AGO, SHORTLY BEFORE

Christmas. I had tried to interview one of the so-called real Santas, but to no avail. Fawning PR flacks hovered around him, making an interview impossible. One person had told me that Santa didn't become Santa until after Thanksgiving. I thought about some of his helpers, the men who carry out his work locally, men like Joe Stankus, people who really embody what Saint Nicholas was all about. But I wanted to meet the real St. Nick. I needed the interview (something I'd promised my daughter), but time was running out, deadline was creeping up on me. I knew the Polar Express made only one trip north each year, but that was on Christmas Eve, much too late for my purposes.

Fortunately, an old friend of mine named Blaze Orange told me he still had military connections from a time in his life when he had served in the Air Force, a time I had always assumed was imaginary. I had reasons to doubt Blaze's veracity, too. There was the 38-foot Sportfisherman we were going to do some Gulf Stream fishing in that turned out to be a 12-foot punt, a pathetic vessel that would have capsized in a bubbling creek. And then there was the RV he promised to let me use for a cross country trip. What he let me borrow was an old Dodge van, two-toned in harvest gold and mustard yellow. Also: It had no transmission.

But this time Blaze came through. On our way down to Langley Field, he told me a bit about the aircraft that would take me to Thule in northwest Greenland.

On Board A C-130

"It's got a big, old bulbous body and the wings are on top of the fuselage," Blaze said. He took a pull from his flask that contained what he called "his potion". He wiped his lips with the camouflage cuff of his shirt. "It's a military cargo plane," he continued. "A C-One-Thirty. A four-engine turbo prop. Rugged, reliable, it can go just about anywhere. Hell, it can fly into the eye of a hurricane. And the tips of those props, when they get rotating, are doing better than the speed of sound. It's a noisy plane, but it'll get you up to the Polar Zone and back with no problem."

When the C-130 got underway the air pulsed and quivered. It was the sound of a hundred mile an hour wind whistling through the Indy 500 just as the race started. The pilot's name was Thresher and he told me that we were on the Polar Route, headed due north.

"We're dropping off supplies in Pakistan, but we can let you down at Thule," said Thresher. "We got us a naval air station there. We'll refuel, and you can get up with a boy on the base by the name of Mallory. He's got himself one of those deHavilland Twin Otters that'll land you right on the ice sheet."

I drifted off to sleep with the whir and whistle of the C-130 lulling me, and when I woke and looked out the porthole I could see the last vestiges of greenery, a ring of spruce forest that gave way to a vast tundra. As we crossed Baffin Bay, I could see small rocky islands locked in ice. And then we were over Greenland, and not a speck of green anywhere. Everything was white and gray.

The Twin Otter

Chris Mallory had enlisted with the Navy thirty years before, had since retired, and now ran his private Twin Otter on Polar excursions. Mainly, people just wanted to cross the ice cap, see the North Pole.

"I don't get many people who actually want to be dropped off there," he told me. His mustache was frozen above his lip as we made our way out to the hangar.

"You're going to go see the big guy, aren't you?" he asked, and I nodded. "Well, good luck. Not too many people get to see him. But I'll take you on up, and drop you at the Pole."

We climbed into the cockpit, and he cranked it up. "How long you plan on staying up there?" he asked.

"What time will we get there?"

"About noon," he said.

"I'll be ready at noon tomorrow."

"I'll be there waiting."

Down Under The Ice

After leaving the plane, I checked the thermometer clipped to the zipper pull of my parka: It read 37 degrees below zero. Overhead, the moon was bright, nearly full, and there were stars I had never before seen. All around me was ice, and not a sound. There was no wind. It was almost as if I had stepped off the top of the world and tripped into outer space.

Two small people, dressed in heavy furs, approached me out of the darkness. They crept along the ice like wolves, and I could not make out their legs. I followed them toward an outcropping, a sheet of ice that

formed a sort of hill. In the face of that hill was an opening. We entered a cave, and then started descending stairs that were carved from the ice, and the deeper we went the warmer the temperature became. As we approached the bottom, I could see light. We walked into a giant cavern carved out of the ice. I had no idea how deep we were, but we had trudged down those steps for a good half-hour.

The ice of the rounded walls and ceiling were a crystal blue, and there seemed to be a sun behind this wall of ice, a yellow, warming sun, yet the ice was not melting.

Deirdre And Elena

My two escorts had shed their furs. They were elves, smallish people. One was called Elena, her skin the color of cream-lightened coffee, with dark eyes and black hair; the other was named Deirdre and her skin was pale and her hair ashen blonde and her eyes silvery gray. Deirdre hummed to herself the entire time. Her mind was elsewhere. Elena, on the other hand, was talkative and engaging.

"You're here to see the Man, aren't you?" said Elena.

"Yes, I am."

"Well follow me," she said. "He's half-expecting you."

I followed her from one cave to another. She walked quickly, and was barefoot. I had already removed my parka and layer after layer of sweaters. It was warm down here, and all the furnishings were of wicker. There were lush, tropical plants, and no shortage of elves, though almost every one of them I saw was a female, and none of them was working.

"I thought y'all'd be busy with Christmas coming?"

Elena stopped, and turned around, looking at me quizzically. "Busy

with what?" she said.

"You know, making toys."

"No, that's a myth. Nick's bag is all he needs. He reaches in, and what he needs comes out. It's a sort of fishes and loaves thing. He can carry every present for every child in the world in one sack. Don't ask me how it works. It just does."

New Age Time/Space

Deirdre had sidled up on us. "Here, and all around Saint Nicholas the laws of physics are suspended," she said. "All the fields are unified and there is no time. Saint Nicho..."

"He doesn't like that name," said Elena. "Take it down a notch. His name's Nick, and none of us really understands how any of this happens."

"You don't have the proper respect for him," said Deirdre. "He's a holy man and we should be honored just to be..."

"Give it a rest DeeDee."

"My name's Deirdre."

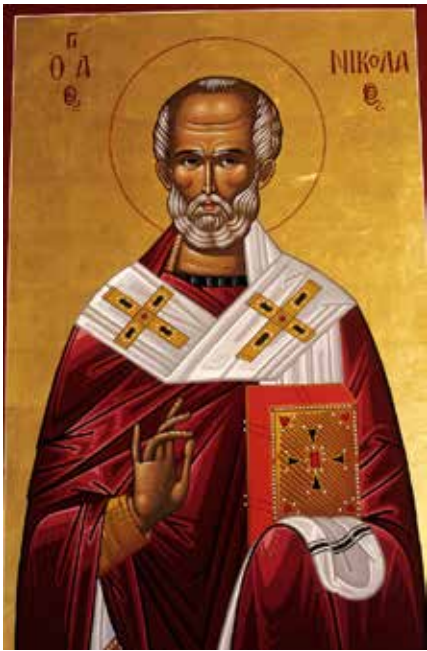
"All right D. And stop humming that New Age crap. It's about to drive me crazy."

As Deirdre left our company, Elena took me on a slight detour. We entered a chamber that was lined with beverages of every description. She went to shelves where each bottle wore a red miter, and pulled down a fifth of Jamaican rum and a couple of tumblers. "Nick drinks rum, and he drinks it neat," said Elena.

Aurora Borealis Halo

We proceeded down a narrow hall to a large rounded room, a sort of study, the curved walls of which were lined with books. The man who sat in a leather chair was tall, large, but by no means fat. In fact, he was lean, and though his hair and beard were both white and curly

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN



you, sweet woman,” he said. “How about pouring us all a round?”

Elena uncapped the bottle and poured three tumblers half full of rum and passed them around. He sipped the drink, relishing the taste. “I’ve always loved rum,” he said. “It reminds me of warm climes and turquoise waters and brown-skinned women. I can taste the Caribbean in it.”

I sat down in a chair next to him and moved up close to him, my eyes squinting against the rainbow aura suspended above his head. “I can’t turn it off,” he said.

“It’s okay,” I said, “But listen, what should I call you? How should I refer to you in the article? Santa Claus?”

He frowned and shook his head. “No, no, I don’t like that name at all, never have,” he said. “That’s what that hack cartoonist Thomas Nast came up with. It’s of Austrian or German origin, but it’s not me. I’m Nicholas, Saint Nicholas. But that sounds too formal and pompous. Tell you the truth I like the name Nick best. Just call me Nick.”

He sipped again from his rum.

Born In Lycia

“You have a million questions, don’t you?” he asked, and his golden eyes

flickered with limbic sparks.

“At least a thousand.”

“Well, I’ve got the answers. Shoot.”

“Let’s start from the beginning.”

“Where I was born, you mean?”

“Yes. Where were you born?”

“I was born in the village of Patara in Lycia,” he said, looking at me. “Those names mean nothing to you, do they?”

I shook my head.

“The country of Lycia and the village of Patara have been gone for centuries,” he said. “They were in the region that’s now called Turkey. But when I was a young man, Patara was a bustling village and the warm winds blew off the Mediterranean and men sold fish in the market and women wove on outdoor looms. It was a wondrous place.”

He got a faraway look in his eyes, and removed the pipe from his mouth. His nostrils widened, releasing blue smoke. The tobacco was a blend, and he told me whenever he smelled the blue Latakia and the Macedonian, he thought of his now defunct homeland.

Calming Waters, Stirring Winds

“At an early age I left home for the sea,” he said. “All the islands. Samos and Chios and Thodes and Karpathos. I loved the water, the clear blue water. There is no water like the water of the Aegean. It makes your eyes bluer, if they are blue; greener, if they are green; and more golden than a Midas touch, if they are gold.”

Nick had worked on board several sailing vessels, carrying olive oil in clay urns from Greece to the islands and back to Lycia. On his journeys, he got to know a lot about the ancient Greek and Roman myths that were quickly dying out in the wake of Christianity. And on one of these journeys a strange thing happened.

“I was on the third watch and a squall came up on us,” he told me. “There were suddenly twenty-foot seas so we lowered our sails. For some reason I felt compelled to call out, and I did, yelling, ‘Seas calm.’ And the seas calmed. I didn’t tell any of my shipmates about it. I held it close to my heart: It was a secret.”

“On another occasion, well below Crete, the wind, all traces of it, died. For four days we drifted, using oars, as we were able, but making no real progress. Our rations were down, and we dipped the dregs of our water urns. The water we drank was green and crawling. That night, alone on the prow, I called out to

and braided in dreadlocks, his face, a deep mahogany, was youthful. He wore a white cotton shirt without any buttons, and white cotton pants without any pockets, and around his head was a pulsing light of many colors, not unlike a small version of the Aurora Borealis. He wore headphones, and his head was gently rocking back and forth. He held a book in his hand that was creased at the spine.

He looked up and directed his golden eyes first at me and then at Elena. He eyed the bottle of rum. “Bless

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the full moon, 'Winds rise', and the winds arose, so we set the sails, and headed homeward."

At the time, Nick did not know where this power came from, and told no one he possessed it. Back in Lycia, he began praying and left his work on the water. By degrees he became a priest and later a bishop. He sensed when people, particularly children, were in need, and would help them whenever he could. It brought him great joy.

"I always felt more alive when I was helping people, particularly the little ones," said Nick. "But any one, really. Any sort of creature, human or otherwise."

Sign Of The Pawnbroker

He told me the story of three girls whose father and mother were impoverished. These three maidens were destined to lives of prostitution. Nick couldn't bear the thought, so he threw three solid gold balls into their open bedroom windows. With handsome dowries in hand, the three girls escaped their fate of prostitution.

"You know what those three gold balls became," said Elena.

"No," I told her.

"They became the emblem for pawnbrokers. That's where the three gold balls came from."

"I don't understand that. How could that be twisted into an advertising logo?"

"It's called marketing," Elena said.

"But," said Nick. "Pawnbrokers do provide a certain service to the financially destitute."

"At a price," said Elena.

"Still," Nick said. "There is some good in pawnbroking."

The Pickled Boys Story

Elena was getting impatient. "Everybody knows the three golden balls story," she said. "Tell him the other one."

"Which one?"

"The pickled boys story."



"But that's so gruesome."

"I'm sure our guest would like to hear it," said Elena. She looked over at me, and smiled.

"I would," I said.

"Okay, here goes," said Nick. "There was an innkeeper in southern Lycia, in a coastal town. He was a murderous rogue, and killed three boys, cut them up and preserved them in three barrels of vinegar. Pickled them. A Sweeney Todd of his era. Even back then there were demented killers; nothing's changed. When I found out about it, I went to the inn and paid the innkeeper handsomely for the three barrels, and then poured off the vinegar, put the different body parts together, and prayed to God. The three boys were restored. They came back to life. When I heard them breathe, I passed out."

Lizzie Borden Got An Ax

"Tell him about all the Firsts," said Elena. "I know he'd like to hear about them."

"All right," Nick said. "Let's see. I gave Jonas Salk his first microscope, and Stephen Hawkins his first telescope. I gave Jackson Pollack his first set of oil paints, though I'm still not sure if I did the right thing there. Time will tell. I gave Bach his first harpsichord, Beethoven his first piano."

"Tell him some of the ones that didn't work out that well," said Elena.

"Well, I did give Einstein his first abacus, but he flunked math anyway," Nick said. "Later, I gave him his first pocket watch, and he became obsessed with time. The rest is history."

"No, not those. Tell him about some of the others, the ones you really screwed up. Tell him what you gave Lizzie Borden."

"What do you mean?"

"The ax, how you gave her the ax. Tell him about that one."

"It was a tomahawk, and it was made of rubber."

"But, it was still pretty much an ax."

"Okay," said Nick, with a groan. "It was an ax."

Failures And Successes

"Tell him some of the others," Elena said. "I love these; they're great."

"All right, all right. Let's see, I gave Curt Cobain his first guitar, Rush Limbaugh his first microphone, and Chief Justice Roger Taney his first gavel. I also gave Dick Cheney his first board game—which was RISK—but how was I supposed to



know he'd go global on us. One of my biggest regrets was giving a toy rocket to Elon Musk. But at the time I had no idea he was an Alien."

"There are a lot more . . . failures," Elena needed.

"You're right," said Nick. "And a lot of successes."

Chimneys And Toilets

Deirdre reappeared, as noiselessly as before. She knelt next to Nick and looked into his face, adoringly, which seemed to make him fidget.

"He'll want to know about the chimney," said Deirdre.

"You do come down the chimney?" I asked.

"Oh sure," said Nick. "When there is a chimney. Otherwise I jimmy a door or window, pick a lock. There's no house I can't get into. But if there's a chimney, that's my way in."

"It just seems like such a dirty way of getting into a house, I mean with the soot and all," I said.

"It's not nearly as dirty a way of getting into a house as some other immortals use," said Elena.

"Don't go there," Deirdre said. "Show some sense of decorum."

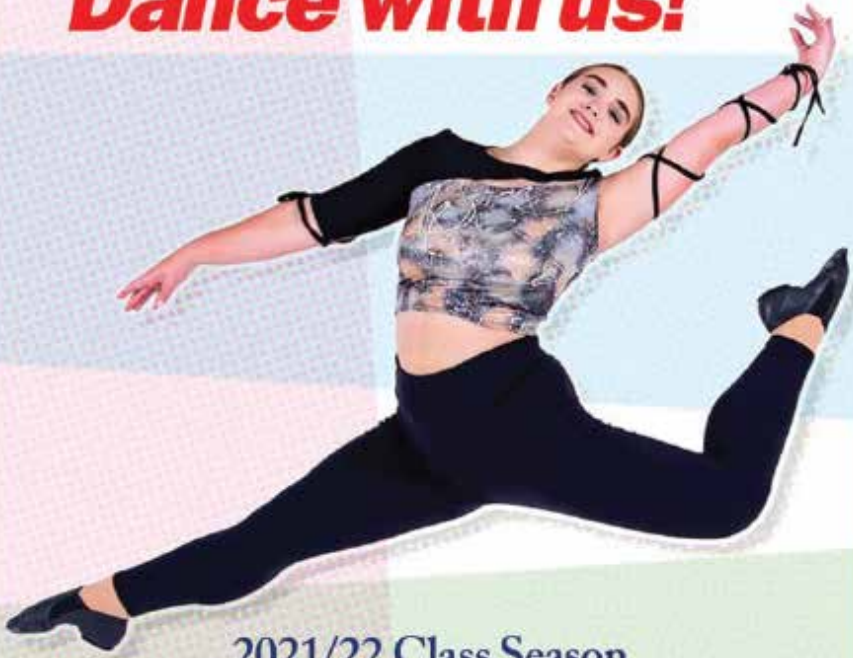
"What do you mean, Elena?" I asked.

"Little known fact," said Nick. "The Easter Bunny comes into the house through the toilet."

"Talk about messy," said Elena, and then turned to me. "Can you imagine?"

Deirdre got up and glided out of the room, and Santa turned to me and said, "Sometimes Deirdre's a little too ethereal for her own good. She takes herself too seriously," he added, then raised his voice and turned

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to Elena and said, “But you ought to go easy on her. She means well, she’s just been listening to the wrong kind of music for far too long.”

The Laplanders’ Reindeers

Elena changed the subject. “By the way,” she said, turning to me. “How many reindeer does it take to change a light bulb?”

I shrugged.

“None,” said Elena. “If the reindeer happens to be Rudolph. His bulb never needs changing.”

“What about the reindeer,” I asked. “How’d they figure into it?”

“Well,” said Nick. “That all started when we moved north. I don’t like the cold, never have. I was born way down south near the Equator, and in all these centuries I still haven’t acclimated to the North Pole. For hundreds of years Jamaica was our home.”

“Those were the days,” said Elena, longingly. “That’s when you started drinking the rum.”

“But,” said Nick looking at Elena as his eyebrows arched with impatience. “But, then Columbus came and that screwed things up for us. We had to move, always north. Up into Canada and then into the Arctic Circle. That’s when the Laplanders introduced us to the magic reindeer, and that’s when I started hauling that sleigh and wearing fur collars and knee-high boots. You know, I still travel incognito down to the Caribbean, and some of the less populated Keys. On my off time.”

Elena replenished the drinks, and then Nick told me he’d have to be going soon to prepare for the Christmas run. He was a kind man and a gracious host, but I still had hundreds of questions I wanted to ask. With his hectic schedule, Nick would have time for just one more question. I strained, trying to think of just the right question.

Hope: Essence Of The Soul

“You’re hoping for some sort of wrap up quote, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” I said. “That’s exactly what I’m looking for.”

“Try this. By my reckoning, I’m well over sixteen hundred years old, older than any man alive. I’ve outlived Methuselah by hundreds of years. I’ve seen the world change a lot in my time. I’ve seen great ideas that helped people, and other ideas that destroyed entire cultures. I have seen love and innocence, and hate and corruption. I have watched the human race mature, and then massacre itself. The human spirit is a strange thing. It defies reason. It’s hypocritical, yet it is miraculous.”

“I used to think that faith was at the core of all good men. But people will believe in almost anything, and they’ll kill other people out of that faith. And love? Granted, it’s a wonderful thing, but all too often people love the wrong things, or they love people for the wrong reasons. Both faith and love are corruptible.”

“But hope is another story. It is the essence of the human soul. You can live without faith, and you can live without love. At least for some period of time. But I’ll tell you what you can’t live without, not even for a moment. You can’t live without hope. You can always hope for faith, you can always hope for love. You can hope for justice. And in these days of perpetual doom and gloom while we watch in terror as greedy corporations destroy the Earth and exterminate tens of thousands of species each year, in these grimmest of times when evil men try to overturn democracies, we need hope more now than ever. For you can hope for anything, which can sometimes lead to action.”

He paused for a moment, brought the tumbler to his lips, tipped it back and drained it. Then he said this: “Hope in this world is personified by one thing, and one thing only—children. And that’s why I do what I do every Christmas. I answer the wishes of the hopeful.”

When Nick finished speaking, he rose from his chair and the small rainbow halo that had floated above his head throughout the interview began to expand. As it grew larger, this ring of color began dropping slowly, encircling Nick, and as it did, he began to disappear. First his head, then his torso, next his legs, and finally his feet. And then there was nothing left of him at all. **[N]**

A.P. HILL

Last Confederate Comes Down


by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

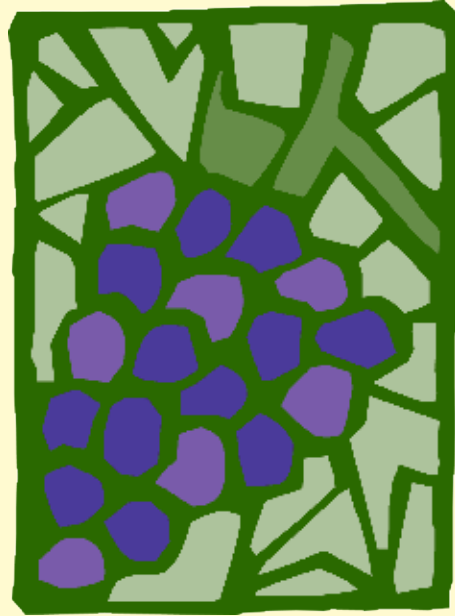
ONE HUNDRED and thirty years ago, at the direction of Major Lewis Ginter, a nine and a half foot bronze statue of Confederate

General A.P. Hill was erected atop a twenty-four and a half foot pedestal of finished granite blocks in the dead center of the intersection of Hermitage Road and Laburnum Avenue. Like hundreds of other monuments to Confederate leaders, the A.P. Hill monument was a nod to the evils of the Jim Crow era, a dark period in our history when white southerners decided African-Americans should remain dehumanized, and essentially enslaved. These white men resented their terrific defeat at the hands of the Union, and scorned a peaceable Reconstruction. Instead of accepting the equality of all human beings, they reaffirmed their commitment to the lunatic notion of white supremacy and embraced what was called the Lost Cause.

Just a few days ago, on December 12, A.P. Hill was finally removed from his perch, and laid out on the flatbed of a truck, strapped down, and taken to the Black History and Cultural Center of Virginia. Aside from several statues that reside behind the gated walls of the Virginia state capitol, A.P. was the last Confederate monument standing in Richmond.

The day after the statue came down, crews removed the remnants of the pedestal and unearthed the remains of A.P. Hill which were laid out in a hearse and driven to a cemetery in Culpeper, where his bones will be buried, not too far from the place where he was born.

As one woman told me that cold bitter morning when the state came down, "It's about time. It should never have been put there in the first place. I am relieved it is gone." 



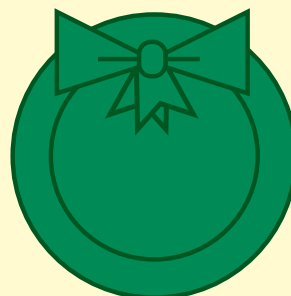
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HIDDEN HISTORIES

The American Way. . . Sedition

by JACK R. JOHNSON

THE CONFEDERATE flag's prominence in the Capitol riots of January 6th comes as no surprise to those who know its history: Since its debut during the Civil War, the Confederate battle flag has been flown regularly by white insurrectionists and reactionaries. Inevitably, it is associated with crimes like insurrection and sedition which was the charge leveled against eye-patched Stewart Rhodes, founder of the Oath Keepers in connection with the U.S. Capitol attack; bringing that history full circle.

A charge of sedition or seditious conspiracy is relatively rare in the modern era, of course, but that's not for lack of trying.

Way back at the founding of our country, America was awash with charges of sedition. It was a time of intense partisan conflict, before the norms of peaceful transfer of power were established, and there was a much weaker understanding of First Amendment rights.

In 1798, the Adams administration passed The Alien and Sedition Acts, that made it a crime for American citizens to "print, utter, or publish... any false, scandalous, and malicious writing" about the government; it also tightened the requirements for citizenship in the new country. Since the Democratic-Republican party was typically favored by new citizens, the laws were designed to suppress their turnout. The only journalists prosecuted under the Sedition Act were editors of Democratic-Republican newspapers. Luckily, the law did not stand. Adams and the Federalists were defeated in the 1800 election, and Thomas Jefferson and the victorious Democratic-Republicans allowed the law to expire in 1802.

But "sedition" remained a potent concept. In a perverse twist, it was increasingly used against abolitionists, forcing them to return runaway

slaves, and to block efforts by African-Americans to challenge slavery and white supremacy. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was meant to force free states to return runaway slaves. One of the few prosecuted incidents of seditious treason under this law was the so-called Christiana Resistance.

Shortly after the act was passed, Edward Gorsuch, a Maryland farmer went in search of four slaves he suspected had robbed him and escaped to Christiana in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Christiana had become a refuge for fugitive slaves and freed men. Gorsuch obtained warrants of arrest under the Fugitive Slave Act, and tried to collect his runaways from the settlement.

He met armed resistance from a small band of Blacks, who were just as determined not to let one of their own be taken back into slavery. A freed Black man named William Parker led the resistance, assisted by a white Quaker, Elijah Lewis; and his friend, Castner Hanway.

Edward Gorsuch appeared at first to be relenting, but then he abruptly changed his mind and, according to William Parker's account in the Atlantic Monthly, said, "I've not had my breakfast. My property I'll have, or eat my breakfast in hell."

In the ensuing melee, Edward Gorsuch was killed and his son, Dickinson Gorsuch, seriously wounded.

In the aftermath, 37 African Americans and one white man were arrested and charged with seditious treason under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law. The Quaker farmer Castner Hanway was acquitted by the jury after 15 minutes of deliberation. The prosecutor then withdrew the other charges, as it was apparent that the charge of treason could hardly be satisfied. The defense pointed out the absurdity of trying a group of poorly armed Quaker farmers for somehow levying war against the United States. The acquittal proved pivotal in the

lead up to the Civil War.

Ironically, the charge of sedition would also be used against Southerners who gave speeches questioning the authority of the federal government, and later, when 11 Southern slave-holding states decided to secede and take up arms against the United States.

To many historians, the storming of the Capitol on Wednesday, January 6, 2021 recalled a very specific history: the many white supremacist attacks on Black voting rights and legitimately elected governments during Reconstruction. The Colfax massacre of 1872, the so called New Orleans riot a few years earlier, and 1898 coup d'état in Wilmington, North Carolina were part of a continuing effort to overthrow legitimately elected biracial governments.

According to the New York Times, "There were numerous such episodes of violent white supremacist 'redemption' across the South, many of which have only begun to be recounted honestly. And that historical echo was underlined by the spectacle of men with Confederate flags parading through the halls of the Capitol — a sight, many noted, that would have been unthinkable during the actual Civil War."

"When people say this doesn't happen in America, they reveal their idealism, but also their ignorance," said Gregory P. Downs, a historian at the University of California, Davis, who studies Reconstruction. "It has happened before. And it can happen again."

Indeed, it has happened again. Two more seditious conspiracy trials — one involving more Oath Keepers and the other a group of Proud Boys — are set to start in the coming weeks. The outcome of those trials may be an echo of where we have been, as much as where we are going. **NR**



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BOOK REVIEW

Racism in America A Heavy Boulder

by **FRAN WITHROW**

ANDRE HENRY IS A Black activist, artist, and writer. In his book, “All the White Friends I Couldn’t Keep,” Henry shares how his close white friends and family do not truly understand how racism undergirds the foundation of our country. The heartbreaking ways his white friends dismiss racism eventually leads him, with grief and reluctance, to drop them from his life.

Henry explains that racism is so systemic in our society that whites do not even notice it. It also changes as society changes, which makes discrimination more difficult for white people to see. And even those whites who consider themselves anti-racist can actually get in the way of Blacks’ work toward true equality.

It is disturbing to read how Henry’s white family, friends, colleagues, and fellow students at Fuller Theological Seminary either dismiss Henry’s concerns, make light of them, or expect him not to discuss racism because they consider it impolite.

As he leaves his white friends, Henry becomes more intentional in combating racism. The deaths of George Floyd, Philandro Castile, and other murdered Blacks grieve Henry so much he decides to lug around a boulder in a wagon. This boulder is a literal symbol of how Blacks live under the heavy burden of racism all the time.

The struggle to end racism faces many challenges, and overcoming it will not be easy. From the election of an overt racist to our highest office, to police brutality, to unjust application of criminal laws, and to the often misguided attempts by white people to address the issue, this problem will need to be tackled on many levels. Henry says Black people need to find a way to unite together in the fight, since from unity comes

strength. They will need to find ways to use peaceful disruptions (like the Black bus protests) to create change. They should not bother engaging with hard core racists, but they can work to galvanize white people who are sympathetic but not active in the movement.

Henry warns that his book is not an easy read. And it isn’t. Henry is totally honest about the heartache he experiences when the white people he loved betray him. That sense of deep loss, coupled with the senseless deaths of Black people, compel him to call for a non-violent revolution, as only through revolution will things change.

“All the White Friends I Couldn’t Keep” is a sober look at what needs to happen in our society to give Blacks true equality. Henry’s deft description of his life and the loss of his white friends should be a wake-up call to white people. Black readers will no doubt identify with much in this intelligent look about the heaviness of racism. White readers will learn more about the ways we fail the Black community and how we must contend with this. Though our country was built on racism, Henry remains hopeful that change can come, and that some day Blacks can put down the heavy boulder of discrimination and truly be free. **NR**

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