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have a life of their own, though they're often overlooked. Unlike their parallel arteries—streets, avenues, boulevards—that showcase the architectural splendor of the front elevation of houses, their figurative faces, alleys expose the backsides of these properties, many of which are sublime, others messy and unkempt, and a few that border on the downright ugly. Richmond has more than 3,200 alleys, spanning over 200 miles. And these less traveled byways are different from one area of the city to the other, but they all possess a certain mystery and magic, and, in some cases, a kind of downtrodden charm. *(continued on page 10)*

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COVER oil painting by Richard Bland

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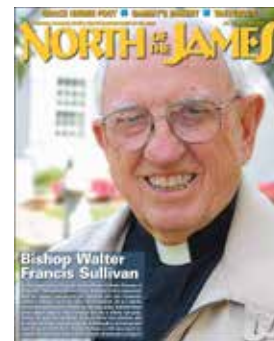
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Bishop Walter Sullivan

A Man of Peace

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

Walter Francis Sullivan served as the eleventh bishop of the Diocese of Richmond from 1974 to 2003. He passed away on December 11, 2012 at the age of 84. This story was written in 2006, three years after Bishop Sullivan's retirement.



MEET WITH BISHOP WALTER Sullivan just before Holy Week at his residence, a stone's throw from St. Paul Catholic Church, and throughout the interview we can hear bells tolling. His three schnauzers are out in the back yard where there is a statue of Saint Francis of Assisi. Bishop Sullivan's car, parked in the rear of the house, bears plates that read "PAX JUS", which certainly reflects his stance on war. "Peace and justice," he says. "The Latin for justice was just too long for the license plates."

When I ask Bishop Sullivan if he had a road to Damascus moment that ushered him into the priesthood, he smiles and shakes his head. "I was going to say facetiously that I was the only boy growing up with three sisters—Patricia, Kathleen and Betty—and I just wanted to get away," he says. "But that's not it. I just liked what priests did. I don't think it was any divine intervention. The Lord didn't appear to me."

Not long after ordination, Father Sullivan was assigned to St. Mary's Star of the Sea in Fort Monroe. "I now look upon it as a great blessing being at Fort Monroe because I grew up with a real appreciation of the military," he says. "And at various times people would say I'm anti-military, but that's the furthest thing from the truth."

In 1960 he was assigned to the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Richmond. Ten years later he was ordained auxiliary bishop, and enjoyed a close friendship with Bishop John J. Russell, the residing bishop at the time.

This was at the height of the Vietnam War, and Bishop Sullivan was taking a position on the war that was anything but popular among hawkish Catholics.

"I got into the peace movement," says Bishop Sullivan. "I joined Pax Christi, the Catholic Peace Movement, but, I am not a pacifist and I get very irritated when people say I am a pacifist."

Sometime in the early 1970s, Bishop Sullivan was invited to speak to the Knights of Columbus in Northern Virginia. There were some 400 men

in the audience and Bishop Sullivan said something that you would expect all Christians to embrace—"Christ is a peacemaker,"—but the Knights were up in arms the moment he uttered those words.

"They went wild because I talked about peace," he remembers. "Peace was a very dirty word in those days. As they got madder I got hyper so I talked about conscientious objection to the war."

As the Knights filed out of the banquet hall after the talk, Bishop Sullivan understood that every last one of them loathed him. Except for one. He was a clean-cut Marine sergeant, who waited near the door. "Oh, sweet Jesus," thought Bishop Sullivan as he neared the man. "What's this guy going to say?"

And the Marine said: "I want to thank you because my son goes to Canada tomorrow and I had to decide whether to disown my son. And you saved him for me."

Says Bishop Sullivan after this recollection: "That was it, there was no turning back. That's how I really got started in the peace movement."

He mentions the casualties of the Vietnam War—more than 50,000—then says, "But did you know 58,000 Americans who fought in Vietnam are in prison today. I've always supported these poor guys and their battered lives. Their lives were ruined by that war."

He tells me again that he opposes violence, but is by no means a pacifist. "I'm not sure there are moral wars at all," he says. "But I have always believed that those in authority, namely government, have an obligation to protect the innocent."

We talk about the current war. "I think the war in Iraq is a disaster," says Bishop Sullivan. "We thought we were going to go in and in ten minutes win it all and get control of the oil. And there's no question it was about oil. Even some of my very conservative friends have said, 'Let's be real it's all about oil.'"

As I mull over his words, the bells from St. Paul's begin tolling. "This new war has been tragic," Bishop Sullivan says. "I read an interesting book called 'The

Sorrows of Empires' and the author said there are four things that will result from this war. The U.S. will always be at war, we will never hear the complete truth, civil rights will be curtailed, and we're going to go bankrupt."

Not long ago, Bishop Sullivan started visiting one of the flesh and blood casualties of this war. He's a young man who lost an arm, part of a leg, and much of his face. The government veils these men and women in secrecy as they are returned to their homeland. "What I found out is that they put him in a coma," he says. "They do that with those who are wounded. When they're flown in from Germany at two in the morning they ship them into Walter Reed Army Hospital so nobody sees them."

The clandestine manner in which the wounded come back to the United States bothers the Bishop. "In the Vietnam War what created so much havoc were the body bags," he says. "You don't see them in this war. You don't hear the truth about why we're there in the first place. What are we hiding? Why do we have to lie? I think people have a right to conscientious objection and I don't think there's any such thing as a just war."

He considers World War II. "I will say Hitler was a different case," he says. "But we created Hitler. He was our man before we realized how awful he was. And we made Sadaam Hussein in the war against Iran. We gave him chemical weapons."

From almost the time he became bishop in 1974, he has championed underdogs. "I firmly believe in order to make the Gospels real you have to touch the lives of people where they are," says Bishop Sullivan. "People living in abject poverty. People deprived of the necessities of life. People think of me as being very liberal, but I was never a big flaming liberal. I was just following the Gospels."

According to Bishop Sullivan, one of the biggest issues facing the country today is immigration. "Well we created that monster," he says. "People fled oppression from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Central America areas where we supported

the worst of dictators because it was to our interest. Everything is to our interest. We live in a greedy society. There are the haves and the have-nots."

Not long ago he was giving a talk at the University of Richmond. During the question and answer portion of the talk, one student said: "The poor are undeserving."

To which Bishop Sullivan said, "Well, what makes you deserving? You just happened to be born rich."

When asked about Church doctrine concerning celibacy, Bishop Sullivan says, "From Scripture we know that Peter was married. I would hope that a change will come. And one of the reasons that it may come is that we have a shortage of priests."

As far as having female priests, the Bishop has no problem with the idea. "It's not going to be in my lifetime," he says. "I'd be in favor of it if it happened tomorrow."

On the LGBTQ community, Bishop Sullivan says simply, "Sexuality is a fact of life. I've always contended that people are gay or lesbian or trans ab initio, from the beginning."

The bells of St. Paul's toll again.

When I mention pedophilia, Bishop Sullivan shakes his head. "I remember going around the diocese meeting with all the priests and I said very simply, 'If you do this I'll see you in jail,'" he says. "It is an evil action because you're ruining someone and I wouldn't tolerate it."

We retreat to the deck in his back yard and he tells me when the weather warms this is where he spends most of his free time. He looks fondly down on his three schnauzers.

He regards the statue of St. Francis and his three children are gathered around it as if this concrete representation were about to preach. He tells me his middle name is Francis. The bells at St. Paul's begin tolling again, their bronze throats resonant. "He was a man of peace," says this living man of peace of the concrete statue below him. **NJ**

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DIVERSIONS

RVA Fashion Week Strutting Style

by FAYERUZ REGAN

ISANK INTO THE BOOTH across from the tarot card reader. Though it was dark, I could tell she was stunning. Her cheekbones could cut glass. “So...do I ask a question, or do you just read the cards?” I asked. She smiled and responded, “I don’t read tarot. We are just here to be fabulous.”

Turns out that tarot booth was just an elaborately lit photo opportunity, and the psychic was a model for RVA Fashion Week. I may not have had my fortune read, but the pictures did not disappoint. This was a few years ago, and the theme that week was Welcome to the Funhouse. The opening night party at Vagabond was decked out with homemade booths, glowing under blacklights. There were giant tissue paper flowers and carnival games. Clowns were decked out with outlandish eyelashes, platform boots and full glam.

The event has just entered its 15th year, and it’s bigger than ever. It’s still surprising that so many Richmonders have yet to hear of it.

It all began in 2008, when a group of students from VCU’s esteemed Arts Fashion and Merchandising Department cooked up the idea to launch a fashion week in Richmond. They wanted to celebrate the unique style and culture of the city they loved. Richmond may only be the 56th largest city in the U.S., but culturally, we may as well be in the top ten.

RVA Fashion Week takes place twice a year. In the fall the focus is streetwear, and in the spring they trot out their luxury collections. For an entire week, the city is alight with pop-ups and parties. Last fall, there was an exclusive shopping event for sneakerheads, who snatched up collectible kicks. There were speaking panels, spa brunches – a little something for everyone.

It all culminates on Sunday night, at the much-anticipated fashion show. There’s a runway lined with eclectically dressed patrons, a step-and-repeat



A non-tarot reader at RVA Fashion Week.

wall and flashing bulbs, just as there would be in any large city. But unlike larger cities, the staff is nearly 100% volunteer based. That is how strong the will of creative expression is in Richmond.

Though there isn’t one word that can encapsulate fashion in Richmond, it is by varying degrees bold and vibrant. Designers are unafraid to make waves, refusing to play it down to appeal to a wide market. It’s also reassuring to see such a healthy representation from the Black community, who make up the majority of players in this scene, from volunteers and musicians to designers and caterers.

The overall impact of RVA Fashion Week cannot be measured. It’s an economic shot in the arm for local restaurants and boutiques, party venues, jewelers and more. It catapults recent graduates and struggling artists into the spotlight. And other cities are taking notice.

In fact, D.C.-based artist Ryan Azia moved to Richmond and has since become the creative director for RVA Fashion Week. “It was here in Richmond that I was first able to share and cultivate myself as a designer and a brand at RVA Fashion Week,” she says. “A few years later, I moved to Rich-

mond. I had an opportunity to work with RVA Fashion Week, so I took it.”

Ryan also has his own fashion line, dubbed The Aziancy. While each collection varies, it has an urban streetwear feel; think a lot of black, metal chain accents and cynical quips on hoodies and tees.

“We are starting to be recognized outside of Richmond and gaining respect. That is thanks to the models, fashion stylists, hair and makeup stylists, photographers, and designers venturing forth,” Ryan says.

Many models and stylists have struck out for New York, but often stop in Richmond during fashion week. I sat beside a former model at a recent show who said she misses the sense of community.

Ryan agrees. “The most gratifying part of the event is the people and the community coming together and supporting each other. Most of RVA Fashion Week is volunteer based, so to see the amount of people giving up their time to help produce a show for the community is an amazing thing.”

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Supremes Gone Wild

by JACK R. JOHNSON

WHEN CONSIDERING Supreme Court scandals, Clarence Thomas' hanging with conservative billionaire Harlan Crow and getting a free rental for his mom and luxurious vacations is bad, certainly. According to Pro Publica, if Thomas had chartered the plane and the 162-foot yacht himself, the total cost of just one of the trips could have exceeded \$500,000. Additionally, Clarence Thomas said he didn't understand that he needed to declare these gifts, which—for a Supreme Court justice—doesn't pass the smell test. All this is bad, but historically not the worst. Not by a long shot.

As scandals go, you might say our highest court was borne in the stench of the didie. Justice John Rutledge, one of our first Supreme Court justices, was ejected from his position after he gave a ranting speech suggesting he would prefer that George Washington die instead of signing the Jay Treaty with England. The Senate ousted him in December 1795, which Rutledge responded to by attempting suicide. John Adams wrote that they had to revoke his post because of his "accelerated and increased Disorder of the Mind." In fairness, Rutledge's wife had just died, and Adams noted this probably affected the judge's discernment.

Justice James Clark McReynolds who served on the court from 1914 to 1941 had no such excuse. After he died in 1946, not a single other living current or former justice attended his funeral. A vocal anti-Semite, McReynolds also hated African Americans, Germans, and women. According to Robert Longley from A&M University, whenever Jewish Justice Louis Brandeis spoke, McReynolds would leave the room. Of Jews, he once declared, "For 4,000 years the Lord tried to make something out of Hebrews, then gave it up as impossible and turned them out to prey on mankind in general—like

fleas on the dog." He would often refer to African Americans as "ignorant," possessing "but a small capacity for radical improvement." And in the rare event a woman attorney appeared to argue a case before the court, McReynolds would exclaim, "I see the female is here again," before grandly gathering his robe and leaving the bench.

Then there's Justice Hugo Black, a Ku Klux Klan Leader who later disavowed the white robes. On October 1, 1937, less than two months after taking his seat on the court, Justice Black was forced to give a nationwide radio address to explain his history. "I did join the Klan. I later resigned," he said, but, as late as 1965, Black was complaining that "unfortunately there are some who think that Negroes should have special privileges under the law." Those "special privileges"? Voting.

The closest we have to the Thomas scandal is probably Justice Abe Fortas. Appointed to the Supreme Court by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, Fortas had already faced serious allegations of improperly helping LBJ's political career while serving on the highest court in the land. His former law partner Paul Porter set up a gig for Fortas to teach summer school at American University. That probably wouldn't have been especially controversial, except Fortas's salary wasn't paid by American University. Rather former Arnold & Porter clients, many of whom had cases potentially heading to the Supreme Court, paid the summer school salary to Fortas.

Fortas remained on the Supreme Court for another year until another financial scandal sunk his career. In January 1969, Life magazine discovered that a financier named Louis Wolfson, who was indicted for securities fraud, had entered an agreement to pay Fortas \$20,000 a year for life for "consultation" on his securities fraud case. Justice Fortas returned the money but his reputation was ruined. Though he always



denied taking Wolfson's money, Abe Fortas became the first and so far only Supreme Court justice to resign under threat of impeachment on May 15, 1969.

Yet, the worst scandal in SCOTUS history is the one that really isn't considered a scandal at all, the establishment of so-called corporate personhood.

We can thank U.S. Senator Roscoe Conkling and Supreme Court Justice Stephen J. Field for this non-scandal scandal. Conkling helped draft the 14th Amendment and he argued to the Supreme Court in *San Mateo County v. Southern Pacific Rail Road* that the 14th Amendment is not limited to natural persons. In 1882, he produced a journal that seemed to show that the Joint Congressional Committee that drafted the amendment vacillated between using "citizen" and "person" and the drafters chose person specifically to cover corporations. But according to historian Howard Jay Graham, "[t]his part of Conkling's argument was a deliberate, brazen forgery."

In a recent podcasts, Historian Heather Cox Richardson points out "That [Conkling's interpretation] was ridiculous. That was absolutely not on the table [for congress]. But because Conkling put it forward, Justice Field started to rely on it, and he doesn't say so explicitly until later on in that decade. But the two of them working together established the idea that due process established in the 14th Amendment was not just designed to cover the rights of indi-

viduals in the states that were suffering under the legal restrictions put on Black Americans after the Civil War, but that in fact it was designed to protect corporations."

A powerful speaker, Field influenced other members of the court to accept this interpretation, many of whom had railroad ties. The court never specifically ruled on the concept. Only an informal headnote to the Supreme Court case, *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Rail Road*, suggests their thinking. "The court does not wish to hear argument on the question whether the provision in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids a State to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, applies to these corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does."

Later cases uncritically cited the headnote as if it had been part of the case. From the railroad through *Citizens United* to the Hobby Lobby decision in which corporate monoliths can now exercise 'free speech' and 'religious choice' despite having none of the vulnerabilities of a human, much less a 'soul.'

Field remained on the Supreme Court until Dec. 1, 1897 and died two years later, likely senile. By then the power of corporations had come to rule the United States. Technically, Field died with only \$65,000 in assets, but his forgery inspired interpretation of the 14th Amendment caused far more damage than any personal scandals might have. **NR**

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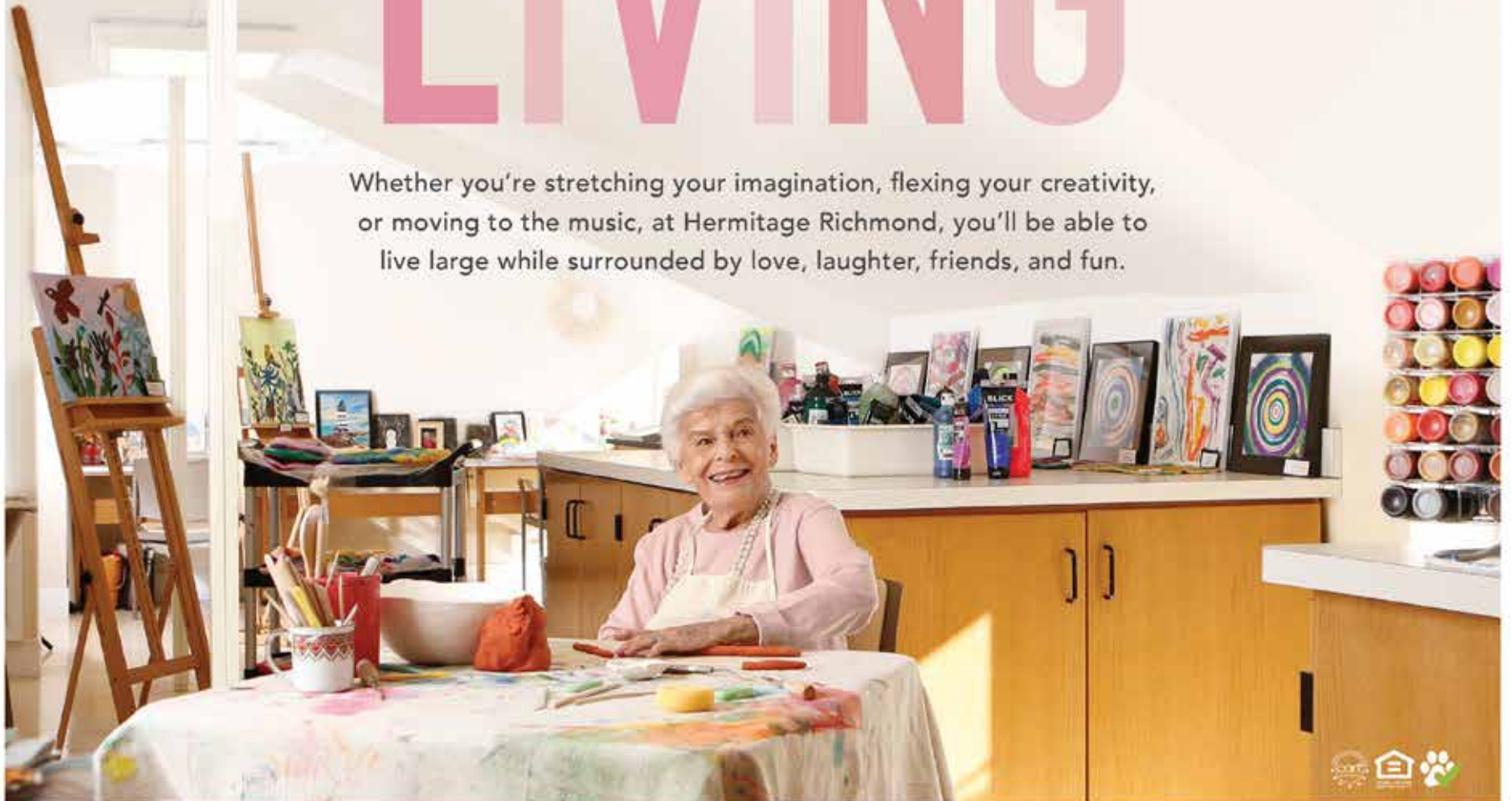
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ALLEYS ROADS LESS TRAVELED, PART 1

HAVING GROWN UP IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA'S

sprawling suburbia, alleys were something new to me. I had experienced them to some degree in Philadelphia where my grandparents lived, but my explorations there were merely cursory. So when I first arrived in Richmond to attend VCU I became immediately enamored of these extraordinary byways that traversed every neighborhood in the city. I came to know them as well as I did all the streets in the city, and would more often than not map my routes along them when I traveled by foot or by bike.

That first year I lived in a dorm at 806 West Franklin Street, a Victorian era building that had once served as a YMCA, and beneath many layers of paint I could trace grout lines on the wall next to my bed and imagined that the room had once been a large shower stall. I had one window in that room, but it was massive, almost floor to ceiling, and the ceilings were twelve feet high. Many nights, sleepless and melancholic and morose as any other freshman, I would open the window, climb out on the ledge and slide down to a wooden fire escape that two floors below opened onto the alley between Franklin and Grace Streets. My spirits would lift instantly as I began exploring the alleys of the Fan, and by the end of the year, late at night or very early in the morning, I would wander the alleys as far afield as Church Hill, and witness wonder after wonder that so many had never seen before.

For a brief period I lived on Church Hill in a slave's quarters at the corner of 29th and Franklin Streets, overlooking Sugar Bottom. From the alley, which was right outside the gate of my courtyard, I could travel late at night on foot to a nearby shot house in the English basement of a three-story house near the Confederate Soldier and Sailors Monument (removed) on Libby Terrace. They served Friday and Saturdays from midnight till six in the morning. Some nights, after a few drinks, I would wander through the maze of alleys until the sun rose.

It was on one of those sojourns that I stumbled upon St. John's Mews, that block-long alley between 23rd



Illustration by Rob Ullman

and 24th Streets. It was a full-moon night in the early autumn, and the leaves had just begun to change and there was a faint chill in the air.

As soon as I entered the alley from 24th Street, my breathing stopped for a full minute, and my eyes roved along the extraordinary brickwork

and the fanciful cast and wrought iron. Years later I would sit on a cast iron bench there with a woman I loved most deeply.

Many nights I would wander the city alone, and could make my way from Church Hill all the way over to the Fan down different alleys without ever walking along a street, except for a few blocks in downtown Richmond.

Mainly though, I lived in the Fan, and there I lived extensively. Not long ago I did a count of the places I inhabited. Over the course of almost 20 years I had 35 different addresses in the Fan and Museum Districts from apartments to efficiencies to single rooms in Suitcase Alley, that odd strip along the 1600 and 1800 blocks of West Grace Street. When I left a rental space—sometimes only after a month—I traveled light. I took only my books, my albums, my stereo, my file cabinets, artwork, box springs and mattress, and my clothing. Everything else I left behind—desks, chests of drawers, tables, chairs. Because within a week or two of scavenging I could easily refurnish an apartment. It was as simple as that.

Alley shopping became a favorite pastime, and from the detritus behind the grand homes of the Fan I would discover remarkable finds from signed oil paintings to first edition books. And there were also completely serviceable items like gas and charcoal grills. All free.

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN

PHOTOS BY CHARLES BRANDON RAPP MCGUIGAN

When I waited tables at Matt's British Pub, which was just around the corner from the Tobacco Company down on 12th Street, toward the end of each night shift, my fellow servers and I, as we broke down the waiter's station on the second floor, would often pause at the one window there and stare down into the alley below which was strewn with dumpsters and trash cans, many of which spilled their guts of garbage onto the cobblestone alley that ran behind the restaurants on Shockoe Slip. We would watch well after midnight, and gradually the rats would come out, just several at first, but thirty minutes later there were hundreds of them and they moved across the alley like a relentless incoming tide that devoured everything in its path. Within the hour the alley had been scrubbed clean of refuse, and the rats simply vanished.

There is much more to tell about the alleys of Richmond, and how the alleys of the Fan differ from those of my home village for the past 25

years—Bellevue. And the pocket parks, and the botanical gardens that neighborhood folks created on raised beds over concrete and gravel, and brick and cobblestone.

But now I turn it over to several people who have given their detailed impressions on our system of alleys.

DAVID BENDER

The first one comes from David Bender, who many of you know as chief cook and bottlewasher, and sole proprietor of Sheppard Street Tavern. This Bellevue resident also hosts Alley Chairs of Richmond on social media.

"This all started a couple of years ago, shortly after the first Bellevue Porchella. One of my neighbors made a NextDoor post about an abandoned office chair in their front yard. I offered to retrieve it, and recognized it as one I had been passing in the alley for the past couple of weeks. Anyway, I tossed it in the back of my truck, and drove

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Scuffletown Park off of Strawberry Street.

over to a friend's house around the corner, where I left it in their front yard, as payback for them messing with my Ring doorbell camera. Soon after this, whenever I came across a chair that someone was throwing out, I'd haul it off to my friend's front yard. After a while, this started becoming too much work, so I would just snap a pic on my handy dandy iPhone 11, and text it over.

"Eventually, instead of texting my friends, I started posting these pictures of random alley chairs on Facebook with the heading Bellevue Alley Chairs. As I work in the Museum District, and spend a good bit of time in the Fan, as well, it was only a matter of time before I would

stumble across chairs in these neighborhoods, too. Therefore, Bellevue Alley Chairs morphed into Alley Chairs of Richmond. People actually started "liking" my posts! Who knew? After a few suggestions that I should publish a coffee table book, I did kind of the internet version of that: I started an Instagram page.

"Not all of the chairs are actually in the alley, as I consider abandoned sidewalk chairs fair game. Also, some of the alley chairs are not abandoned, either. Apparently there are more folks like me who enjoy quality alley time, and find respite sitting amongst the weeds and detritus. I've come across chairs that I would most definitely

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Fan alley.

have taken home, if only I had the space. I've had other chairs that ended up being reclaimed, and now live a happy, post-alley life in someone else's yard. My mechanic regularly sends me pics of random alley chairs, as does one of my bar regulars. Several of these have ended up on my Facebook page, and are now also featured on alleychair-sofrichmond.

"Our alleys are great. They are walkable, fairly well-lit, safe, and

ever so interesting. I urge all of you out there to occasionally get out of the streets, get off the sidewalks, and take a leisurely stroll through the alleys that run behind your house instead. And if you happen to come across a discarded chair, snap a pic and send it my way."

LIZ SCARPINO

Liz Scarpino, another Bellevue resident, wrote eloquently about the alleys, and this is just a smattering

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of what she had to say.

"I've been walking the alleyways of Richmond for about 40 years now, ever since leaving the alley-less 'burbs to attend VCU. From day one, the city's back alleys drew me in, as if into a novel or movie, an album cover or painting, to the cobblestoned cusp of adulthood



One man's creation off an alley in the upper Fan.

and independence. They delivered me to enticing places of creativity and discovery — places like artists' studios and galleries, band practice spaces, secret shot houses and after hours clubs. They led me everywhere from garage sales to house parties, both of which inevitably spilled out onto the gritty rear cloisters, often culminating around a makeshift fire or some other urban mischief.

"Over the years, I've had ample opportunity to mull over certain sociological trends about our material culture, and what generations of Richmonders value. Walking certainly facilitates observing and thinking, and walking my dog in the alleyways, no matter the weather or temperature or location, was always so therapeutic and revealing. There seems to be a sort of natural cycle to alley life — something akin to biological or liturgical seasons, even with some of the same basic ethics and 'ground rules' as it were. First commandment: don't take anything if you have even the slightest question of it being thrown out. If there's any grey area

to that effect, leave it or wait and see if it's still there after a few days. Or ask. Second, leave children's items for the kids. Kids are alley shoppers too, and we olds need to encourage sharing among the next gen! Third, if you must dig to extract an item from a pile, remove the cool thing you want, then leave the pile in as

good or better order than it was when you came upon it. Do unto others....

"On these warm Spring weekends, those piles will be full of cuttings and prunings and old hose reels and all things yardwork and garden-related. After The Pollening, the artifacts of Marie Kondo clearouts will appear: knick-knacks, utensils, craft supplies, old tools and grills, half-dead plants, outgrown toys, perfectly wearable clothing, and always ironing boards, boxes of books, and old windows. (Pro tip: Christmas wrap, artificial trees and holiday décor will be available year-round, as folks don't seem to believe that it happens every year.) Back in the day, I found working class neighborhoods to be particularly bountiful — perhaps because there are more renters, or because the houses are smaller and cannot contain and store so much 'stuff'.

"And while these days I need not one more thing, I still relish a cool alley find, if only for someone else, and because it has not been barfed up and shipped in absurdly excessive cardboard/styrofoam packag-

ing by some amazon 'fulfillment' center. (If ever there was a more dystopian euphemism, I'd like to hear it.) The optimum scenario: your kid has just signed the lease on her first real apartment, and she needs the basics. You serendipitously stumble upon a retro lamp, with no grey area about it:

it has a note taped to it — 'Works great! Bulb does too! Please take me home!' No venmo, internet, or credit card needed — just a good old-fashioned pay-it-forward hyperlocal act of generosity. Win-win. And so you scoop it up, utter a thank you in case the giver can hear, and think to yourself, '...so shines a good deed in a weary world.'"

Next month we will feature Part 2 of this story. We'll hear more from Liz, and something from artist Rob Ullman, the man who created the illustration at the opening of this story. And we will also hear from the Maestro of Alleys—Richard Bland, an artist who lives in a former carriage repository on an alley in the Fan. And Richard knows more about Richmond's histories—great and small—than anyone else I have ever known. **NJ**

If you have an anecdote or two about alleyways you'd like to share, or a photo of a favorite alley haunt, please send them to charlesmcgugin@gmail.com and we will try to include them in the next issue of NORTH of the JAMES, either in print or on our website.

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Northside Grille Music to the Ears

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

AFTER A TWELVE-year run, Shenanigans on MacArthur Avenue closed its doors for good and all on the last day of 2011, and just like that Bellevue lost its live music venue.

But now, thanks to Brett Cassis, live music has finally returned to the Northside, and in a very big way. Every Thursday through Sunday (times vary) there's live music of every conceivable genre either inside Northside Grille or out on the Patio.

Brett has a long history with Richmond's restaurants and live music. From deejaying and booking bands at Bird In Hand, Famous Franks and Rock Bottom, to being the co-founder of The route one South music conference, Brett has multiple connections with bands both local and national. Route one South included a three-day festival with 300 bands over three nights in thirty venues throughout the city. Brett also took his skills to the Flood Zone, and then began working at Main Stage Productions. Throughout that period he also tended bar and waited tables.

Two years ago, Brett joined the staff at Northside Grille as a server and a bartender. "We were coming out of the pandemic and so I did random shows on the Patio," he says. "During the winter we moved inside and started doing shows, and then it sort of just built up."

Originally bands just performed on Thursday nights. "Then we started doing Fridays and Saturdays," says Brett. "It just took off after that. I called some of the people I knew from the past and that worked out well." A number of the musicians who perform at Northside also live in the neighborhood. "There are some very talented musicians in Bellevue," Brett says. "The word

started getting around."

Unlike so many other bars and restaurants that feature live music, Northside Grille does not have a cover charge. And patrons of this Bellevue dining institution tend to be extremely generous. "A lot of

neighborhood family kind of vibe," says Brett. "When bands from outside the neighborhood play here, we see the people they bring in becoming regulars. The food's great, the staff is great. And the layout of the place just works out for the music."



Beex at Northside Grille. Photo by Rebecca D'Angelo.

bands playing for tips realized how much they could make at a place like our place," according to Brett. "There are a number of bands that make a lot of money with just the tips."

Northside Grille has always been known as a family friendly restaurant and bar. "It has that neigh-

borhood family kind of vibe," says Brett. "More and more people are coming in, and that was a big part of it from the beginning. I just wanted to create something where people would start cross-pollinating—hanging out and checking out the other bands. And even the bands are learning about other bands here.

It's starting to really create a music scene."

That's evident from the crowds that pack the restaurant and the Patio during the live music performances. I've been to half a dozen shows there in the past month, and the response from patrons is always the same. Whether on the Patio or in the restaurant proper, folks fairly bubble with enthusiasm, many on their feet, dancing or swaying, many others lining the bar or sitting at the capacious booths, nursing a drink or eating a meal.

Here's something else: the food and its consistency are as good as it gets, from signature dishes to daily specials. Regardless when we're there we start off with the lumpia, a sort of Filipino spring roll served with a sweet chili dipping sauce. You crunch through the golden casing to a center of rich, seasoned beef and pork. And then we'll get down to business with the entrees.

"A lot of places will start off being a restaurant, then they'll have bands, and the next thing you know they lose the restaurant crowd," Brett says. "But we will always be a restaurant. We have a great kitchen staff and the food's coming out quicker than ever. It all works together well."

Even the space, which is large enough, inside and out, to accommodate bands and patrons, lends itself to live music. It's an intimate space, and sound quality is superlative. "The acoustics on the patio are amazing," says Brett. "And inside the acoustics are great, for as much brick as there is in the walls, there's that much wood as well."

Because Northside Grille is a neighborhood eatery, Brett, who also lives in Bellevue, is extremely sensitive to the people who live nearby the restaurant. "We have the shows on the Patio from three till six in the afternoon," he says. "When we do it out-



Chris Grigg performing on the patio at Northside Grille.

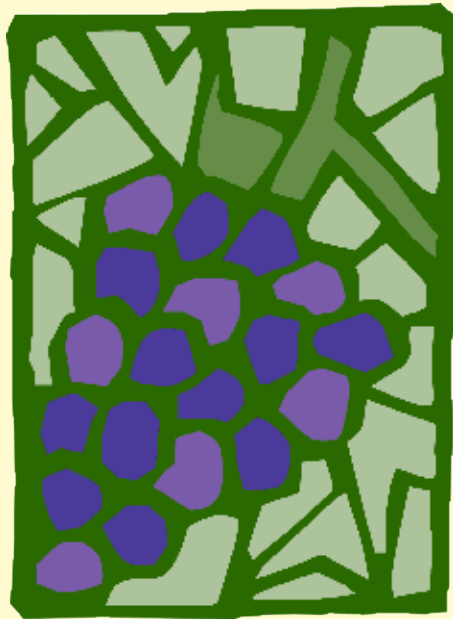
side, we don't want to do it too late. We don't want to upset the neighbors, but we always want to bring the best in live music to the neighborhood."

And that's what's happening, and there are a number of musicians who frequently play at Northside, and they represent every sort of music.

"We try to keep it diverse," says Brett. He mentions a few of the performers. "We have a lot of offshoots from the band Party Favors. We have the funk band Uncle Peoples from that, and we have Sweet Potatoes which is a jazz band. Mike Gales who's been on the road with George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic he comes in and we've been able to pair him up with some of the younger funk bands and those nights are really great. There are others like Kurt Crandall, and so many more. It's a good mix of musicians from all over."

Looking to the future, Brett wants to maintain his allegiance to the bands that regularly play at Northside. "When you start getting popular you get a lot of bands wanting to play there," he says. "We've already got a sort of lineup of really good musicians, and I want to keep that integrity." **NJ**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Monthly band line-ups appear each month in the Northside Grille print ad appearing in NORTH of the JAMES.. Or visit Northside Grille's Facebook page.



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BOOK REVIEW

Knitting Your Life

by FRAN WITHROW

ARE YOU A KNITTER?

If so, were you an SLFHM (She Learned From Her Mom)? Peggy Orenstein learned to knit from her mom at age eleven, so when Covid-19 turned her world upside down, she decided to knit a sweater “from scratch,” first shearing a sheep, then carding, spinning and dyeing the wool before knitting what she calls “the world’s ugliest sweater.” I found her sweater endearing, though, precisely because it wasn’t perfect.


Even if you are not a knitter, like me, you will find much to enjoy in “Unraveling.” This lovely book weaves together Orenstein’s sweater-making insights with the bitter-sweet milestones of her daughter’s imminent departure for college, acknowledgment of her own aging, and her father’s descent into dementia.

Orenstein’s description of the back-breaking, difficult task of sheep shearing is eye-opening. She struggles to wash the wool, to spin it into yarn, and then to dye it. This is not a task for the faint-hearted! And as she forges ahead with determination, she learns about so much more than just the basic skills needed to knit her sweater.

Why is spinning typically the purview of women and how is this process connected with the patriarchy? How has the creation of clothing been altered over time? And critically, how can we address the problem of our dirt cheap, throwaway clothes that discharge minuscule plastic pieces into our waterways and then into our bodies? The environmental and social impact alone of the synthetic materials used in our clothes could fill a book. Orenstein takes just a few pages to acknowledge that it seems daunting to try to shop for clothes responsibly. Then again, she says, we did it

with organic produce, so why not? Orenstein describes how the ever-changing ways of making clothing have altered history. For instance, mill work in the early 1900s, typically done by girls and women, was extremely dangerous. Social activists fought for change, especially after the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911, where 146 immigrant workers perished either in the fire or from leaping out windows to their deaths below. Our government had previously been aware of how terrible working conditions were, but, you know, power and profit and all. It took the crisis of a fire for real change to occur. Orenstein sees similarities between those mill workers asking for better conditions and today’s activists who urge action on climate change and health care.

Color is key, and Orenstein ends up choosing blue as the dye of choice for her sweater. This leads her to discuss the history of blue dye and its terrible connection to slavery. In addition, the expense of creating certain colors is one reason why blue, red, and purple have in the past been seen as suitable only for the elite of society.

In the end, Orenstein’s knitted sweater is the consummate symbol for life: beautiful, challenging, messy, and imperfect. Filled with unknowns, our lives might unravel at any time. Yet we too can knit together the uneven threads of life, one stitch at a time, making our own “ugly sweaters” that tell the flawed yet wonderful stories of our lives. 

“Unraveling: What I Learned About Life While Shearing Sheep, Dyeing Wool, and Making the World’s Ugliest Sweater”

By Peggy Orenstein

HarperCollins

\$27.99

224 pages

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