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Jordan Hensley

embraced life, hugged it dearly, roaming across the globe to experience all of it in its myriad manifestations. Witty, bright, silly, engaging, a stickler for detail, and as her mother says, "stunningly beautiful". Jordan was extremely protective of her brother Chad, five years her junior; when he was an infant she treated him as her own son. She loved her father dearly, and Jordan and her mother were best friends. Everything changed in an instant as she was driving west along Route 290 from Austin to Fredericksburg, deep in the heart of Texas. Thousands now know of her death, mourn her loss, yet celebrate that life so well-lived through One Life, Don't Waste It, which her mother, Areina, now a life coach, created as a lasting tribute to her beloved daughter.

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One Life, Don't Waste It In Memory of Jordan Hensley
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A book that keeps me up at night and consumes my thoughts during the day is one I want to share with you. "Yonder" is just such a book. Author Jabari Asim has added a compelling fictional account of the dark era of slavery to the growing assemblage of novels set during that time period.

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PUBLIC ART

A Memory Box Honoring Rescue Squad and the Lakeside Community

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



Nico working on the towering mural on Lakeside Avenue.

NICO CATHCART brings her unique talent to the Lakeside Volunteer Rescue Squad with a massive mural that contains scores of individual elements nestled among hundreds of flowers, all of which celebrate the selfless volunteers of the squad, as well as the surrounding neighborhood of Lakeside. This mural, which was a community effort, should be completed by late September.

Meryl Butler, who headed up the mural committee for the squad, says that after an exhaustive search, the committee chose Nico to create the mural. “The committee voted on who captured the spirit of what we were trying to achieve the best, and that was Nico,” says Meryl. “It was very important for us to not only celebrate our EMS community but also the community at large that does support us.” This local community of Lakeside—a sort of modern-day Mayberry—is responsible for about 85 percent of the Rescue Squad’s funding.

The idea for a mural on the building actually started back in 2020 when Lauren Diaz was president of the Rescue Squad. A local artist reached out to Lauren on social media and told her he was looking for a wall along Lakeside Avenue on which to create a mural. “His terms were pretty tight and ultimately the membership did not feel his vision was appropriate for our wall,” Lauren, who’s standing next to Meryl, tells me. “They felt like it did not involve the community enough. But we did want a mural up on the wall to let people know who we are and that we do care very much about our neighbors.” While still president, Lauren appointed Meryl to chair the mural committee.

After a long search, Nico Cathcart was selected. “Her vision was the one that

captured our attention and hearts the most,” Meryl says.


And the mural, in the future, will actually help raise funds for this extraordinary group made up solely of volunteers. “Through what Nico has designed for us we can continue a campaign going forward,” says Meryl. “Our future goal is to start a hashtag LVRS campaign where you can do a seek-and-find and look for all the community elements that are present, and capture a picture and tag Lakeside Volunteer Rescue Squad in it. A lot of local businesses and some of the local trivia have been included in this mural.”

To encompass the full scope and diversity of the Lakeside community, Nico gathered scores of items that serve as models for the different elements within the mural.

“When I says it’s a community effort, it really is,” says Nico. “The whole project was kind of put together like a memory box. I kind of pulled all this together so it’s literally like parts of Lakeside on this very public wall. It’s a very complex piece with many small items.”

And as a backdrop to all these items are hundreds of flowers of various species, flowers donated by another Lakeside neighbor—just a hefty stone’s throw from the Rescue Squad—Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. “They actually let me go pick them right from the garden,” Nico says.

As I’ve watched it take shape, I can see it as an act of love for Lakeside, and the 40 volunteers of the Rescue Squad who literally give life to the community they serve.

“The slogan here (at the Rescue Squad) is, ‘Neighbors helping neighbors,’” says Nico Cathcart. “And I think that encompasses the neighborhood itself, as well as the Squad which is full of amazing humans.” 



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DIVERSIONS

King William and the Emperor's New Clothes

by **FAYERUZ REGAN**

WHEN YOU FIND out there's a place called Zebulon's Grotto, you go to Zebulon's Grotto. Just forty miles outside of Richmond, this clothing-optional, LG-BTQ-friendly oasis exists for anyone who wants to shed all the layers and unwind—proverbially, and literally.

Owner Charles Snead is a landscape architect, and his strong, lean frame is a testament to his working the land himself. It's in his blood; his father worked alongside the famed Charles Gillette, known for beautifying Richmond via projects such as Agecroft Hall and the University of Richmond. In fact, when Gillette discovered that his colleague was having a baby, he joked, "You should name him after me." And so he was.

Charles purchased the property 25 years ago, admiring the slow-growth nature of the area. In 2018, he received his permit to open business, and it quickly became a haven for Virginians, and people far beyond. "Our visitors come from all walks of life, but I would say our typical guests have high-pressure jobs. We have politicians, lawyers – people who really need to unwind." Zebulon's Grotto has become a destination for travelers up and down the Eastern Seaboard. New Yorkers en route to Miami, or Californians who stop over after a work trip to D.C..

As Charles guided me around the property, I was stuck by how it was at once rugged and extravagant. The lake is ringed by wildflowers and gazebos. Slate pavers lead guests around the property. The "glamping" tents are set up on platforms, with fresh linens, a covered deck, and television. Beside the saltwater pool is a hot tub topped by a metal cupola, strung with Moroccan lanterns.

Though Charles's dream has become a reality, Zebulon's Grotto is being threatened by a few vocal neighbors. When Snead planned to expand his on-site services at a Planning Commission meeting, an Uno reverse card was pulled. The Commission not only denied his expansion plans, but neighbors showed up to complain about the resort, aiming to revoke all of his permits.



The main gathering area at the Grotto.

Luckily, there were more supporters than detractors at this meeting, with some coming from as far as Connecticut. Military veterans spoke up for Zebulon's Grotto, explaining how the serenity of the resort helps their PTSD. Yet, neighbors had free rein to go beyond their allotted time, spouting religious testimony to sabotage this free enterprise—an enterprise that pays the county \$157,000 in annual tax revenue.

When I asked if the attack was legal, Charles explained, "King William is known as a complaint-driven county. A lot of people here don't like change, or outsiders. There are no breweries, wineries, and there's only one wedding venue."

Before even meeting Charles, I knew neighbors were an issue. The tiny house next to the resort's gate had a spindly wooden cross nailed to its door. A 12-foot-high cross was erected in the yard. Like the Esmeralda character in Edward Scissorhands, these religious zealots claim to be repulsed by the differences between themselves and their neighbors, yet their actions border on obsession.

One flew a camera drone over the private property, and was charged with trespassing. When they tried to appeal, they were charged again. Others cut holes in the hedges in order to peer through. One neighbor went so far as to disguise her van as a FedEx truck. With a camera facing out of the windshield, they plowed past the parking lot into the RV area, before people noticed that the trespasser was in scrubs, and had faked the decals. I wonder about what they

were hoping to see.

Currently, Charles is swaddled with red tape surrounding his expansion. He was cited for zoning violations, but kept the receipts. It turns out that he paid multiple visits to the zoning administration. The high turnover had him dealing with three to four different officers, all of whom provided inconsistent feedback. He has permits for a bed and breakfast, tent camping area, and recreation area. Apparently, a "campground permit" differs from his "tent camping area" permit, forcing him to fork over \$1,000 to the board of zoning appeals, and ride out the months-long delays that come with the county.

I can't stop the thought that one sharp attorney could turn this ship around. It would make a hell of a Netflix series.

We're constantly hit with buzzwords telling us to "support local," but this goes beyond. It's black-owned, LG-BTQ-friendly, and doesn't associate nudity with shame. Virginia needs pioneers that challenge fear and ignorance, because they provide a sense of identity and belonging to so many. Places like Zebulon's Grotto are what makes Central Virginia a cultural destination. And it gives us guts. **NR**

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IN MEMORIAM

Sylvia Phillips Regelson

1926-2022

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

ATE LAST MONTH,

Richmond lost one of her greatest treasures with the passing of Sylvia Regelson. She shared her wealth of knowledge freely, and owned the most impressive shops I have ever entered—Ouroboros at the Antique Village in Hanover County. She was kind, she was generous, and she was extremely intelligent and would not tolerate intolerance. To read more about Sylvia, please visit northofthejames.com/sylvia-phillips-regelson



Sylvia in a rowboat.

The following is an obituary lovingly penned by Sylvia's children:

"The family of Sylvia Regelson announce her passing with deep sadness and celebrate her amazing life of 95 years with profound joy. Sylvia was born in Harlem, New York in 1926 to Gussie and Sam Phillips, immigrants from Eastern Europe. Her first language was Yiddish, but she quickly became an eloquent communicator in English and

telligence to everything she did, including becoming a noted expert in the fields of American art pottery, African art and vintage postcards. Sylvia worked to the end of her life and always said, "There are two dirty words: retirement and boredom." She was an ardent advocate for the Richmond public schools and a keen participant in politics - global and local - and a defender of justice."



Sylvia at Ouroboros.

maintained a passion for reading throughout her life. In high school, Sylvia received an award for French excellence from the actor Charles Boyer. She went on to major in French with a minor in Fine Arts at Hunter College."

"She applied her abundant enthusiasm for life and her astonishing in-

"Sylvia and her husband, Bill Regelson, a respected physician and scientist, who died in 2002, raised a family of six children in Buffalo and Richmond. She is survived by her loving kids, Rachel (Larry), Jess (Doug), Mimi (Tsondu), Esther (Jack), Naomi (Mark) and Isaac (Sarah); plus adoring French daughter, Dominique; and local cousin Jeffie (Terri); grandchildren and great-grandchildren, many loving cousins, devoted friends and her wonderful Antique Village family. Sylvia created a welcoming home where all were recognized and loved for their unique character. In lieu of flowers, please make a contribution to the charity of your choice that would have brought joy to Sylvia, buy yourself something that would give you a "flutter of the heart" or simply "love something without owning it." Mom loved a good obit and we hope we have done her proud." 



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JORDAN HENSLEY

LIVING LIFE TO ITS FULLEST

That night, Jordan was scheduled to board a plane at Austin International, right about the time her mom, Areina, caught a flight out of Atlanta, and both of them were headed to Richmond, the city they had called home most of their lives. The next day they were planning to visit Chad, Jordan's younger brother and only sibling. He had made a very bad mistake and ended up incarcerated, and was about to age out of juvenile detention to serve the remainder of his time in an adult correctional facility. There would be a court hearing the following Monday.

But this was Friday, and Jordan had just texted her mother. She smiled as she sent it across cyberspace. Jordan had spent the morning with her friend Erin Alexander in Austin. Erin's father owned a vineyard where both young women worked. It was just seventy miles to the west in a place called Fredericksburg. Wine and travel were two of Jordan's greatest passions, and she had just learned that Claude Alexander, the man who owned the vineyard, was grooming her for international travel and wine. It was a life dream about to be realized.

Early that afternoon, the skies over Austin opened up. Rain cascaded like a waterfall, storm sewers backed up, flooding the streets, and Claude told the young women to stay put, that the vineyard was closing in a few hours. No need for them to come. But Jordan, who had a deep work ethic, decided to make the trip along Route 290 anyway. They got in the car, fastened their seat belts, and Jordan flipped on the headlights and windshield wipers. The rain was letting up, but the roads were still slick, so Jordan kept the speed down to fifty. They had just passed through the one-horse town of Hye and were nearing Stonewall, just a few miles from the vineyard. And that's when the end began.

A tractor-trailer drifted across the yellow lines, side-swiped a car to Jordan's left, and then jackknifed. Jordan's car smashed into the semi-trailer with such force that both young women died on impact.

Areina was finishing out her week. She'd seen the message her daughter had sent earlier. It read, "May the Fourth be with you." On this fourth day of May, she would soon be reunited with her daughter in Richmond. She and her boyfriend were standing outside of their home when Areina's cell phone chimed.

The number was unfamiliar, and the feminine voice on the other end quavered. "Jordan has been in an accident," the voice said. And as Areina turned to look at her boyfriend, planning to tell him they needed to change plans and fly out to Austin, she could hear that phantom voice sobbing, and in Areina's skull her own voice erupted and yelled and pleaded, "Don't you f**king say it. DON'T YOU F**KING SAY IT!"

That's when the woman on the other end said clearly, "Jordan didn't survive."

Areina tossed the cell phone against the side of her house, and then passed out.

"I was out," Areina tells me. "I don't know how many minutes, but I was out." Her thin cheeks are streaked with tears as she remembers the moment this monstrosity entered her life, changed everything forever.

On Sunday, as planned, Areina went to visit Chad in juvie. The young man asked his mom why Jordan wasn't there, and Areina told him that Jordan's plane had



Jordan picking berries.

simply been delayed.

"I had to sit in front of my son for two hours and pretend that nothing had happened because I needed his head in the right place when he went to court the next day," says Areina. "My world

will never be the same. Things like that happen to other people; it's the call we never can imagine. I can tell you the only thing that I can think of that's worse is a missing child or watching your child suffer from something."

Areina sips from a glass of ice water, and she is crying. "I had her when I was twenty-two," she says. "Everything I did, and everything her daddy did, was for Jordan. We kind of grew up together. My friends would tell you that we had a very unique relationship. She was my best friend on top of it, literally. We were very silly, and I will never have that again with anyone else."

Their minds connected in a way that was almost telepathic. If a call came from Jordan, Areina would answer even before it rang. And if Jordan received a call from her mother, she would pick it up before it ever chimed. Years ago, as they were driving to Melbourne, Florida on a sunny, blue sky morning, Jordan, who was looking out the window, said, "Ooh they shouldn't have done that."

Immediately, without even looking at what her daughter saw, Areina said "That was an ugly color for a door." And Jordan nodded and smiled.

"We could hear what the other one was thinking" says Areina. "And that would happen quite often."

Jordan was named after one of Areina's favorite anthropology professors at Longwood College (now Longwood University). "His name was Dr. Jim Jordan and he was a consultant on bones," Areina says.

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN



Jordan in Thailand.

“I was an anthropology major with a minor in history.”

Even as a little girl, Jordan exhibited behaviors consistent with obsessive compulsive disorder. When she was just in kindergarten she made an odd request of Santa. “She kept saying, ‘I want those drawers daddy has at work,’” Areina remembers. “And we were like, ‘What the heck is she talking about?’” Turns out she wanted a filing cabinet, and on that Christmas morning so many years ago, Jordan found, much to her delight, a two-drawer filing cabinet under the Christmas tree. She labeled the top drawer A-N and bottom one O-Z. “She had it all the way through college, and she organized everything,” says Areina.

At about the time Jordan got her filing cabinet, the family moved to a large home in a still rural section of Chesterfield County just off Beach Road near Pocahontas State Park. Within the year the Hensleys welcomed the newest member of their family—Chad. From the moment he was born, Jordan developed a strong bond with her little brother. “He was a big part of her life, and she was a big part of his life,” Areina says. “They were extremely close. She was his protector and then some. They spoke every day at 10 am, even when she was traveling. He knew that call was coming so he’d take a shower, and right after the shower his sister would call. They were incredibly close, she was the person he went to with everything.”

After graduating from high school, Jordan went off to James Madison University where she majored in

journalism, but then decided to change her major to hospitality and stayed on an extra semester to earn her certification as a wine specialist.

It was during this time that life dealt a series of blows to Areina, and things began spiraling out of control. She and her husband, Jeff, divorced. After selling the family house, Areina rented a rancher so she and Chad could remain near Beach Road, and he could finish out his high school career at Manchester. Then her father, Edwin Harland Bruce, Jr. otherwise known as “Pookie”, passed away. To top it off, Areina lost her job of 20 years. And then there was the horror of the terrible mistake Chad made going into his senior year that would land him in juvenile detention. Everything was falling apart.

Jordan never returned home. Instead, after graduation, she took off for California. “She never came home after college and part of that was the divorce,” says Areina. “The home she knew and loved was no longer there, there’s nothing to come home to in her mind. So she packed up her stuff with her boyfriend and they moved out to Napa Valley. She has an incredible palate and she was an incredible salesperson. Eventually, she wanted to be an event planner.” So, in the very heart of Wine Country, along the Silverado Trail, Jordan went to work at Chimney Rock Winery. “As always, she took the bull by the horns,” her mother says.

After working at Chimney Rock for a time, she took a job at a far less pretentious winery, a place called

Tank Garage Winery in Calistoga, that operated out of a renovated 1930’s style gas station.

At about that time, Jordan was thinking about getting engaged, but she had doubts, and then her wanderlust kicked in. Jordan sold all of her earthly possessions and decided to see the world. With the money she scraped together in her pocket, and a backpack over her shoulder, Jordan headed overseas.

She began “woofing” through World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. “You go places, and you you work sometimes, you might be painting a fence or doing other labor and you stay for free,” Areina explains. “So that’s what she starts to do. She goes to Australia and then down to New Zealand.” There’s a photo Areina has of her daughter either weeding or picking berries. Jordan sports a dark blue T-shirt emblazoned with this message: One Life, Don’t Waste It. “That became her mantra,” says Areina. “The irony is she didn’t live much longer after that picture was taken.”

But she would pack a lifetime of living into what remained of her life. She continued to travel widely.

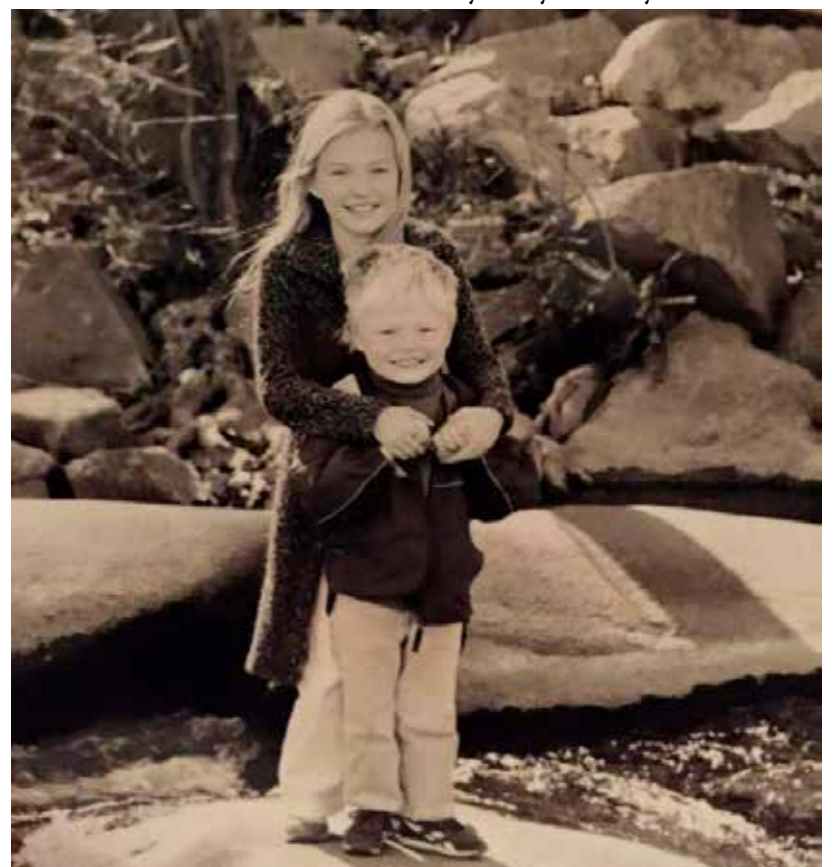
She left woofing and began to stay in hostels. After New Zealand she

took off to Bali, and then Vietnam and Thailand. “One of the greatest gifts that I have been given was to go stay with her in Thailand,” says Areina. “We both got certified for scuba, but I didn’t last twelve hours in the hostel. We ended up staying in the penthouse on top of the Hilton in Bangkok.”

From there Jordan went to England and began her travels through Europe. She spent a fair amount of time with a family just outside of Rome, Italy, working as a sort of au pair. “They fell in love with Jordan,” Areina says. “She became part of their family and they took her to the beaches, and they took her to the mountains. They took her everywhere.”

A short while later Jordan returned to the States. She no longer considered Richmond her home. “She thought, ‘Where do I go? I’m gonna do wine. I’m young. I don’t want to come back to Virginia because there’s no home so to speak any more,’” says Areina. So she decided to move to Austin, Texas where her father’s sister lived. And that’s when she got the job with Alexander Vineyards in Fredericksburg.

Which brings us back to the beginning of this story, and Areina remembers what it was like. “I went into shock,” she says. “I was beating my body and my head on the ce-



Jordan and Chad as young children.



Jordan with an elephant.

ment. I don't know how much time went by." And you can imagine a shattered cell phone nearby, no longer capable of telling the time.

But she ultimately kept it together and on the following Monday, along with other family members, appeared in court. Guards and other staff from juvie had all testified at how well Chad had done while incarcerated, but the judge ordered Chad to spend another four years in an adult correctional facility.

The day before, Areina had spoken to a pastor out in California, who gave her the following advice about how to break the news to Chad. "You cannot sugarcoat it," he told her.

After the hearing, Chad met with his mother back at the juvenile correctional center. She had already told the guards and other staff there about Jordan's death, and they all began to weep because it was as if they knew her for Chad had spo-

ken so frequently of his sister.

"So when Chad came in the door he saw us all crying," Areina recalls. "And he thinks we're crying because of the time he got."

To which Chad said, "Mom, don't cry, I'll be alright."

Areina looked Chad directly in the eyes. "Jordan is dead," she said.

And Chad broke down in wails and tears and dropped to the floor.

"And then I have to leave my son there," Areina tells me. "And then we just go from there."

Though Jordan was taken by the careless move of a seasoned trucker, Areina never bore him ill will. "I never blamed that driver once because that individual was not drunk and he was not on drugs," says Areina. "He did something that we probably all have done at some point; the timing just sucked. He took full responsibility from the very beginning. I have sat down many times to write a letter to let him know that number one, we're Christians; number two, that Jor-

dan would have completely forgiven him; and number three, that my own son had been forgiven and got opportunities because people loved him and knew something went wrong. Who was I to throw a stone at someone?"

But the pain she experienced by this loss is almost incomprehensible. "It's a grief you never get over," Areina says. "You learn to manage it better over time. But it is definitely a different kind of grief than any other. You won't know, until it happens, and hopefully it will not happen to you."

Not long after Jordan died, "One Life, Don't Waste It" was born on Facebook. "It's a place for people to remember Jordan," Areina says. "She had a bigger impact on people than she realized. That page has more than fifteen hundred followers now."

And from that page grew an annual fall event of the same name. It's an evening of live music, good food, a silent auction, and more. Proceeds from past events went to FeedMore

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Jordan and James Madison.


and Boston Children's Hospital. This year the event will be bigger and better than ever. Slated for October 14, it will be held at The Historic Hippodrome Theater in Jackson Ward. Tickets are \$50 per person. The beneficiary this year is Safe Harbor. "It's basically for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking," Areina says. "It's for women and children, and it's more than just a place to stay."

Jordan would have loved this. Be-

fore her death she wanted to start a sort of bed and breakfast where women with troubled pasts could come to live while learning a trade or a skill. Even as she was globetrotting, Jordan sought out grants for the project. "I want to give back," she told her mom. "And I want to help people."

Along with her many other attributes, Jordan was generous to a fault, and empathetic and kind. She would share whatever she had.

Not long ago, Areina, in a further tribute to her daughter, decided to become a life coach.

"There's a strength in me that I got from my upbringing," says Areina Hensley. "There's a strength I have called my support system. There's a strength I have called my faith; it was shaken, but it's there. There are all these things I have that were given to me by others. And a lot of people don't have that. So me being a life coach and to help others is my gift to Jordan." 

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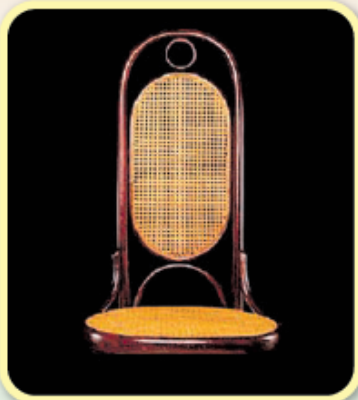
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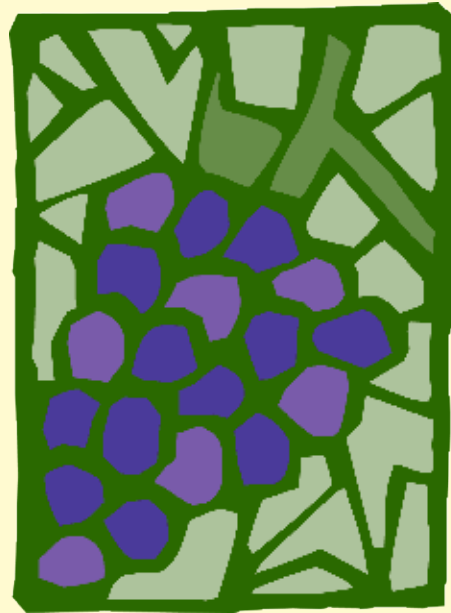
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WHAT'S NEW

Guide2Resilience

With Meghan Varner

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

MEGHAN VARNER brings a wealth of science and personal experience to a virtual coaching business she started up last November. It's called, quite simply, Guide2Resilience.

"I started it out of a passion to still be able to help people in spite of the pandemic," says Meghan.

With a clinical doctorate in physical therapy, along with seven years actively working in her chosen profession, Meghan was very selective in how she meets with clients remotely. "I use a secure client portal that's HIPAA compliant, so it's totally secure," she tells me. "With my medical background, that was very appealing to me."

Meghan works closely with her clients, helping them figure out how to best achieve health goals. "I call myself a health and wellness coach," she says. "I help individuals figure out what steps they need to take to improve their own wellness and to achieve whatever personal wellness goals they have."

These goals can range from dietary restrictions to weight-loss, and from exercise regimens to stress management. "As a coach I like to focus on the mind-body connection, and the 'gut' is a big part of it," Meghan explains. "I've helped a couple clients figure out what's going on with their gut, and how it's effecting their mood and their energy levels."

Meghan has an intimate understanding of what her clients are going through. "I bring a big piece of empathy because I've been through quite a bit myself with health challenges," she says.

Meghan has a form of dysautonomia—a disorder of the autonomic nervous system—called POTS (postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome). This disorder effects the body's ability to regulate autonomic functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, sweating, and body temperature.

In learning to manage her own health conditions, Meghan discovered things



Meghan Varner

that are beneficial to her clients. "A very important piece of all health conditions is managing our stress," says Meghan. "Making sure we're getting quality sleep, making sure that we're having quality relationships, and finding that purpose or that spiritual meaning in our own lives, what brings us bliss. For some that's religious, for some that's artistic, for others it's communication with nature."

She guides her patients to more healthful, and achievable, practices that improve general well-being. "You tell someone to go one hundred percent vegetarian, and they might do it for a month and then go back," Meghan says. "It's just too hard. What's doable and workable for them? The same thing with movement, and exercise regimens. You don't have to fit a mold with exercise; you can be fit for what you need."

Meghan Varner pauses, and then says, "I help people bridge the gap. I'm focused on the health aspects, like what you would be working on with your doctor. So the diet, the exercise, the sleep, the stress levels, and the mind-body connection. What I'm learning through healing my own self I am able to apply to my clients. I want to help guide others to live their best life." **NJ**

Meghan Varner

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LICENSED in VIRGINIA

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978

by JACK R JOHNSON

IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE any religion you might practice was outlawed. You could not attend services in your own church, and, in fact, the church itself was outlawed. Your preacher, priest or rabbi could be fined and jailed if they mentioned a particular religious ceremony. If you were a Christian, the images of Christ crucified would be banned even on private property, communion would be illegal as would standard ceremonial gestures, such as kneeling, or prayer.

Years ago, our founding fathers wisely took measures to prevent this. The so called 'Establishment Clause' prohibits the government from making any law "respecting an establishment of religion." This clause not only forbids the government from establishing an official religion, but also prohibits government actions that unduly favor one religion over another. Yet, the Establishment Clause apparently does not apply to one set of North Americans: the Native American Indian.

According to Dennis Zotigh writing in Smithsonian Magazine, in 1883 the Department of Interior's Code of Indian Offenses punished Native Indian religious dances and ceremonial feasts by imprisonment or withholding food, so called "treaty rations", for up to 30 days. Any medicine man (essentially, an Indian preacher, priest or rabbi) convicted of encouraging others to follow traditional practices was to be confined in the agency prison for not less than ten days or until he could provide evidence that he had abandoned his beliefs.

Of course, it wasn't just a matter of preventing the Indian religious practices. The U.S. government actively sought to convert American Indians to Christianity. During the 1870s, the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant assigned 13 Protestant denominations to take responsibility

for managing more than 70 Indian agencies on or near reservations. The Catholic Church quickly established the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions so they too could participate. In 1887, the Dawes Act included a particularly bigoted provision allowing religious organizations working among Indians to keep "up to 160 acres of federal land to support their own missions."

What was their mission? The short answer is cultural genocide.

Indian children were taken from their families and forced into boarding schools established by Christian or Catholic missionaries. As a requirement of their education at the boarding schools, the children attended mandatory Christian church services and religious indoctrination classes. These children were either encouraged — or in most cases, forced — to abandon their Native spiritual practices as well as their unique indigenous first and last names. In the name of religious progress, "Native children were forced into government-sponsored denominationally run boarding schools where many were abused physically, sexually, emotionally and spiritually, and where many of them died. The rallying cry to civilize/Christianize Indigenous children was 'kill the Indian, save the child.'"

It was well over a century later before any of the laws restricting Native American religious practices were overturned. Finally, in a move that was more gesture than action, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 was signed into law on August 11, 1978 by President Jimmy Carter. It established basic civil liberties for the American Indian (such as access to sacred sites, freedom to worship through ceremonial and traditional rites, and use and possession of sacred objects). However, there was nothing in the Act to force the U.S. to change state or federal law to accommodate particular Indian religious practices, such as ingest-



Graphic image by Catherine McGuigan

ing peyote or using eagle feathers (a threatened species) in ceremonies.

Protection of Native American religious sites falls under an even more nebulous legal umbrella since many of these sites are now national parks or on federal land. In fact, federal courts have so far found that neither the First Amendment nor the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 guarantee tribes protection of or access to sacred sites. For example, in *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association*, the Supreme Court allowed the U.S. Forest Service to construct a road on USFS land, despite recognizing that construction through the cemetery would "destroy the...Indians' ability to practice their religion."

Religion to many Native tribes is very land-based, said Stephen Pevar, an attorney for the ACLU who has specialized in Indian and tribal rights cases. "Many Americans move several times throughout their lifetimes, making it difficult for some to understand how crucial land is to Native spirituality," he said. "Native Americans have a bond to the land and nearly every tribe has its own sacred lands."

Speaking of the Dakota Access Pipeline which threatens the Missouri River, Pevar said, "To the Indians, this is both water and it is religion,

whereas many white people seem to be pretty dismissive about the religious aspect and view it as more environmental." Imagine, he said, if the pipeline was being built in Bethlehem, underneath Jerusalem or a similar holy site. "That's how this is viewed by the people there," Pevar said. "White people, unfortunately, don't share those views. They don't realize the religious significance of these locations."

And both the U.S. Federal court and the Supreme Court seem to agree.

Shirod Younker, a Coquille ceremonial woodcarver, is acutely aware of the limitations of the act and the long road ahead: "It has been 44 years since this act was passed. The practices to remove and destroy our culture started more than 150 years ago, in the 1840s and '50s. It will take at least that amount of time to come close to restoring what we lost. [...] Our ceremonial ways all come from the earth. We cannot effectively understand their importance or details until we restore the environment that helps sustain us, physically and spiritually."

Put another way, the battle for American religious freedom has never been won in this country. For over two centuries it has been an ongoing struggle for the people who are, in fact, the first Americans. **NJ**

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BOOK REVIEW

“Yonder”: Another Chapter In America’s Shameful Past

by **FRAN WITHROW**

A BOOK THAT KEEPS me up at night and consumes my thoughts during the day is one I want to share with you. “Yonder” is just such a book. Author

Jabari Asim has added a compelling fictional account of the dark era of slavery to the growing assemblage of novels set during that time period. I read as many as I can, because each author gives me new insight about this shameful period in American history and how it affects today’s society.

“Yonder” tells the story of a group of Black people who call themselves the Stolen. They are forced to toil for the Thieves (White enslavers Cannonball Greene and his wife, Screech Owl) at Placid Hall in the American South. Greene and his wife make life miserable and dangerous for the Stolen on their property. Their cruelty and disregard for the enslaved people is cringe-worthy.

Several of Placid Hall’s Stolen emerge as engaging main characters. William sees such a traumatic event as a child it affects the rest of his life. Margaret, his true love, lives on another of his enslaver’s three farms. It is with difficulty that William is able to see her. Cato watches helplessly as his beloved Iris is carted away by another Thief who desires her. Despite his heartbreak, Cato later exhibits incredible courage to protect an innocent woman, and eventually falls in love with Pandora. Little Zander sees angels and thinks he can fly.

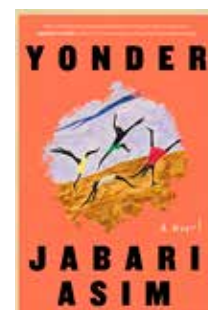
When a preacher offers Margaret, William, Cato, Pandora, and Little Zander a way yonder to freedom, they take the chance. My heart was in my mouth as I read about them walking stealthily through the woods in the dark, totally dependent on strangers, knowing the paddy rollers would be after them.

It was a constant gamble in deciding who to trust. Asim writes artfully about how terrifying it was for these enslaved people to try to escape to freedom. In his masterful hands, I read voraciously, torn between savoring Asim’s writing and finding out if everyone survives.

Throughout the book, the Stolen show remarkable bravery, bolstering each other through every tribulation. They quickly and cleverly switch between the language they use with each other and the language used when speaking with the Thieves. Thus the Thieves never realize that the Stolen are a lot more articulate than they let on. The enslaved people use a variety of tools to sustain themselves and retain hope during their suffering. For instance, they venerate their Ancestors, and the Ancestors watch over them in unexpected ways.

The writing is superb: Asim had me immediately immersed in his story and never let go until the last page was turned. This story of the Stolen, who consistently remind themselves they “come from Strong,” and that freedom will come “in Due Time” is a powerful chronicle of slavery. In Asim’s skillful hands, the reader is swept along, cheering for each character as they set out yonder. Will they all make it to freedom? You’ll have to read the book to find out.

NJ



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