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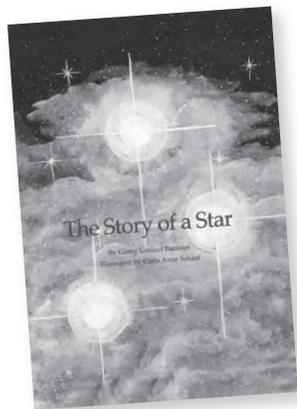
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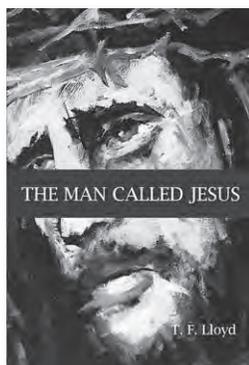
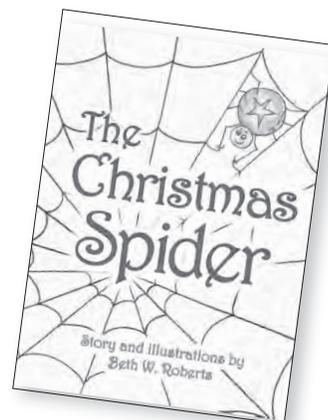
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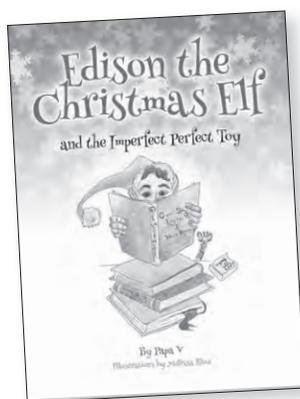
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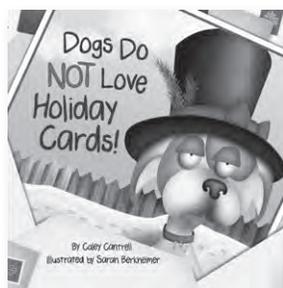
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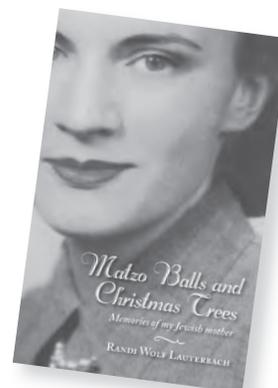


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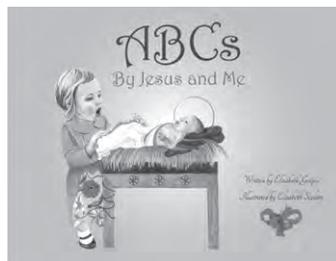
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SINCE 1989

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NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015

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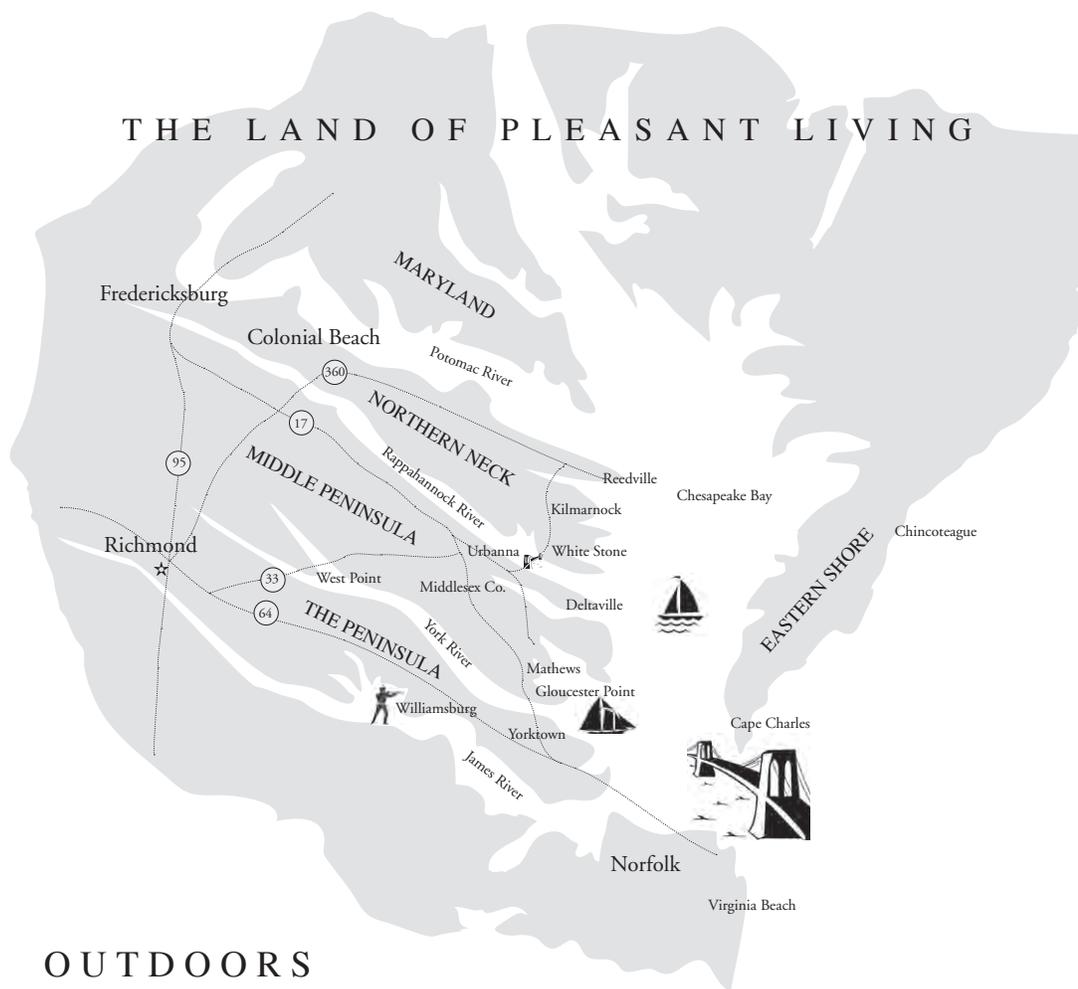
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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

One, then Many Random Gifts

It's interesting and beautiful how one random act of kindness can reverberate down through the years and affect many people along the way. My wife, Tanya, lived in Ireland as a student in the 1980s, then decided to stay for years after falling desperately in love with the Irish. She took a job at the Anti Room, an upscale seafood restaurant in Dublin, and after one challenging day, exhausted and frustrated, at 1:00am she struck out for home on foot. Knowing the buses had already stopped running because of the late hour, she was counting on the gift of a taxi along the way towards O'Connell St. Out of nowhere, a young man approached, said something that made her look, and tossed her a bouquet of flowers. Holding the flowers she had just caught, surprised and delighted, she burst out laughing, and when she turned to say thanks, he was down the block and gone. After almost thirty years, she has never forgotten that random act—a simple gift given by a total stranger who asked nothing in return. This spontaneous kindness had turned a weary disagreeable night completely around and inspired a life-long passion to pay it forward.

On one of our first Christmases together as a couple in 2007, Tanya invited me to our living room where she sat under the tree, smiling. Next to her was a vase exploding with beautiful red roses. I was totally surprised and told her that no one had ever given me roses. I soon discovered these roses were not intended for me to keep. She was inviting me to have an experience that I had never had before. They were an opportunity for me to bless twelve other people with a spontaneous and random gift of kindness by giving them each a rose.

I believe it was Christmas Eve that year that we drove around the city and found those twelve. They were a mix of young and old, poor and middle class, some already joyful, others perhaps struggling and who needed their day brightened. I remember the Hispanic woman in a Laundromat who smiled, laughed and said, "Gracias!"; an old man waiting at a bus stop who got rather teary; an exhausted nurse leaving a hospital; and an older couple entering a restaurant. All twelve of them were surprised, most of them astonished, and some bewildered by this complete stranger who handed them a rose, wished them happy holidays, and then walked away. I can't fully express the joy and delight of witnessing the faces of these people who were handed a simple gift—an experience and blessing that we continue to share and enjoy at the holidays.

After Tanya returned from Ireland in the late 80s, she began giving the roses alone, then later passed the tradition on to her mother, to friends and others. This act, among other random gifts and even her involvement in a movement to spread kindness across the nation, is a story that needs more telling than this journal allows. In a future issue, I intend to share the complete delightful history of how a late night spontaneous gift from an Irish stranger has resonated for thirty years and changed the lives of perhaps thousands (maybe even millions?) of people—if only for that special moment when they catch a rose and the kindness sinks in. *pl*



Editor/Publisher

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Steve Scala has spent his entire life in Southern Maryland and the Northern Neck, where his family roots go back to the 1600s. Along with his family, Steve spends much of his time on the waters, and in the fields and woods of the lower Northern Neck.

Stephen Southall graduated from the University of Virginia with a Ph.D. in psychology and has taught at Lynchburg College since 1974. He is past-president of the American Boxwood Society. When not teaching or working with his English boxwood, he and his wife Diane enjoy traveling in their fifth wheel RV with their black lab, River.

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A SECOND CHANCE

By Patricia Parsons

Cape Charles on Virginia's Eastern Shore was once a prosperous railroad town. Sited on a beautiful beach next to a deep harbor, it served as headquarters for the Pennsylvania railroad's Philadelphia-to-Norfolk rail line. A fleet of tugboats pulling barges laden with freight cars across the Chesapeake Bay, and six ocean-worthy ferries linked the community to what we on the Eastern Shore called "the mainland." With the growth of the long-haul trucking industry and establishment of the interstate highways after World War II, dependence on rail transport waned. In 1946 the Pennsylvania Railroad found itself, for the first time in its history, operating in the red. It began to dismantle its operations in Cape Charles.

Deserted by the railroad and ferries in the 1950s, Cape

Charles became a forgotten backwater, often described as a depressed community and even as a ghost town. After half a century of decline, this lovely town of period homes has recently experienced revitalization as a tourist mecca.

Cape Charles was my hometown from 1936 to 1958. In August of 1945, the city fathers arranged to have an existing swimming hole off the town's beach dredged to make it larger and deep enough for diving. A new platform and diving board were erected.

The next summer, I was nine years old, and allowed to go into the water by myself. On the first hot spring day, a crowd of young people gathered to try out the much anticipated diving board and expanded swimming venue. Laughing and shouting, we ran through the shallow surf towards the



deeper water. Delighted by the prospect of frolicking among an older crowd, I threw myself into the swimming hole. That day no one realized that the new improvement had created a strong undertow. I was the first swimmer to be sucked into it. Helpless to extract

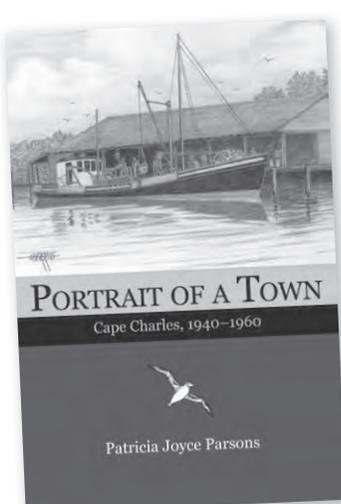
myself as I was drawn below, I tried to fight against the downward force. During my struggle to surface, I could see the events of my short life, unrolling within my brain like the projected images of a film. Fortunately, before I drowned, I was pulled from the vortex by Mary

Catherine Ames, our family physician's teenaged daughter. After I recovered my breath, she asked if I was all right. I said, "Yes" and continued to splash around that dangerous place for the rest of the afternoon.

We soon learned to avoid the section of the hole that would pull us under.

Unfortunately, several visitors to Cape Charles were unaware of the undertow and lost their lives in the swimming hole over the next few years. I continued to frequent this popular spot, however, and secretly took pride in the fact that I had seen something no one else had—the replay of my life passing before my eyes.

I never told my parents about the near-drowning incident, and though I only thanked her briefly at the time, to this day I am grateful to Mary Catherine Ames for saving my life. Pleasant Living Books recently released a history I had written, *Portrait of a Town, Cape Charles, 1940-1960*. In the book, I recount the story of





Portrait of a Town takes the reader on a nostalgic, invigorating journey through Cape Charles from a child's-eye-view—from playing in a swamp, to jumping off the railroad's coal chute, to fishing the barrier islands that line Virginia's oceanfront. In this collection of vignettes, Patricia Parsons portrays life in Cape Charles during World War II and beyond, from the 1940s to the 1950s.

"In Portrait of a Town, Pat Parsons reflects with warm nostalgia on her experiences growing up in a lovely and proud Victorian bayside village on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Her delightful portrayal of daily life during WWII, and of Cape Charles's struggle to survive the changing times, provide valuable insight into the history of the area."

— John M. Barber, Fellow, American Society of Marine Artists

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my rescue by Mary Catherine.

On September 14, 2015, I travelled from Richmond to introduce *Portrait of a Town* at a book reading and signing sponsored by Friends of the Cape Charles Memorial Library. The event was held in one of the town's landmark buildings, a former Presbyterian church that in 1926 became the town library.

When I was a child, the library offered half-day kindergarten for any five-year-olds whose parents chose to enroll them. Attending kindergarten was not a requirement for first grade registration, so there was no attempt to teach us to read and write. We simply enjoyed coloring, small craft projects, and the stories the kindergarten teacher read to us. I loved to sit quietly and work at a table in the soft light that filtered through the Gothic-shaped windows. The library moved to larger quarters in recent years, and the old building now serves as the Cape Charles Civic Center.

On that balmy September evening of 2015, I entered the great open space of the Civic Center for the first time in over six decades. Several people clustered just inside the front door, were busily setting up a refreshment table. Much of the audience had already gathered. Someone handed me a cup of fruit punch. A woman with stylishly coiffed white hair approached and introduced herself. "I used to date your brother, James," she told me. "What a wonderful dancer he was!" One by one, ladies bearing serving platters slipped through the street-side entrance. Soon, a generous assortment of home-made desserts covered the table.

After the reception, I made my way to a podium near the apse of the former church. As I looked back over the scene, the rows of chairs that had been set out for the audience faded momentarily. In memory, I could see the shelves of books that used to line the walls, library tables in the center of the room, and the golden light of mornings past bathing

Pleasant Living November / December 2015

the very space in which I had attended kindergarten seventy-four years ago!

I read a couple stories I had written to portray the way families lived in Cape Charles in the 1940s and 1950s, then our moderator, Emily Cullen, joined me at the podium to make a special announcement. Mary Catherine Ames Valak was in the audience! With a thrill of delight, I stepped from the podium. Mary Catherine rose from her seat against the wall. We ran towards each other and hugged. The audience applauded vigorously.

After the program, we talked and I was finally able to thank Mary Catherine

privately. "Mary Catherine," I told her, "if you hadn't pulled me out of the undertow that day, I would not have lived to be here tonight. I have never forgotten you."

Sometimes life gives us a second chance. *pl*



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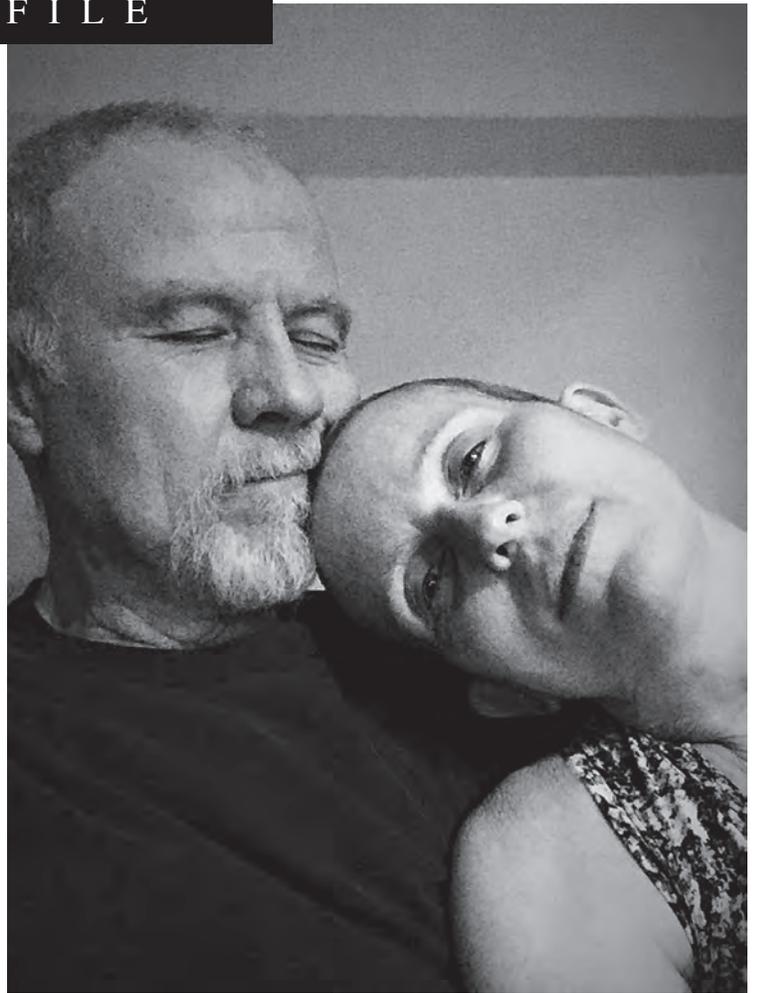
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Writing Through the Tears and Laughter

A Conversation with Norma Woody

By Nikki Clemons /
Photos provided by Norma Woody



Norma and husband, Richard

On my way to meet Norma Woody, I had the chance to drive through Powhatan for the first time. The long stretches of trees, fields of flowers, and expanses of green grass are a picture of eastern Virginia. These scenic panoramas are the backdrop for *Impressions Behind the Pink Ribbon: Writing Through the Laughter and Tears With My Metastatic Breast Cancer*, Woody's new book about her diagnosis and journey with terminal cancer.

Woody met me at the door. She was warm and friendly, wrapped in a cardigan despite the summer heat. The first thing she showed me was the spot where she writes. "This is where it all happens," she said, gesturing to the comfortable chair set up by the window. Next she showed me the notepads she keeps around the house, in case a thought comes to her in the middle of the night.

The notepads came in handy as we talked. She spoke eloquently and with purpose, as if she was writing through speech. She took down a quote she said that was particularly profound: "It's strange how in what was supposed to be the easiest time of my life, I was struggling, and now that I'm in the toughest, hardest time of my life, I've found peace." Peace, and finding peace, is a central theme of *Impressions Behind the Pink Ribbon*. Peace with her diagnosis, peace with the loss of

friends and family, peace with the disease spreading through her body. As she talks about in her book, writing is a way to focus and help her through the pain and frustration of being terminal.

Woody first started writing in the 6th grade, when her teacher chose her to submit to a writing contest. "I was the only one in my whole class, I remember," she said. She's been writing ever since. "I would write a lot and then throw it out," she told me. "Until my therapist, who has been helping me through this, suggested I start keeping them." She gave a piece to her pastor, who then read it to his congregation and came back the next week asking for another. She gave a piece to her friend who read it and said it was the favorite thing he had ever read.

Since her diagnosis, Woody has put her talent to use, speaking for those unable to speak for themselves about cancer. After talking to patient after patient, caregiver after caregiver, Woody noted, "I'm not unique. Where I'm unique is where I can put it into words." Since the book came out, she has received several meaningful texts, emails, and phone calls from patients reveling in seeing what they've always felt, but were unable to put into words. The book takes a hard look at the reality of a disease that takes away so much, from the

ability to clean the floor, to friends who were supposed to always be there.

"I was shocked," Woody said in regards to the disappearance of prominent people from her life that came with her diagnosis. "Some things I thought would be there weren't." This is a pattern she has seen with many cancer patients. "We're made to think if we don't remain positive we will lose the people around us. We try too hard." But a big part of *Impressions Behind the Pink Ribbon* is learning forgiveness, and Woody writes about learning to forgive and understand those who left her in her time of need. "It's a human thing. Not anything personal with me."

While some people disappeared from her life, others rose up to offer their support. A life long resident of the Richmond area, Woody said the Powhatan community was a big source of comfort for her. "It [the sense of support] is everywhere. I couldn't have landed in a better place. I've had strangers in this county reach out and offer to be there for me. It's comforting." Woody received cards from strangers in the community, and the local congregation prays for her on a regular basis. "The biggest thing I learned is how many little things so many people will do," she said. Having support come from all angles is important to those who have been diagnosed. "What we all fall into is the security of knowing, oh, they have their husband, or their mother. But when you're terminal, you reach out to anybody and everybody."

In addition to her community, Woody has had the support of her friends and her family. She's married, with three adult children and eight grandchildren. She met her husband through her daughter. They were both divorced, and their teenage daughters knew each other through school. Their first date? Fireworks on the 4th of July. "I guess the fireworks worked," she laughed. "That's the hardest part—leaving him."

Her family helped her organize the files and work on *Impressions Behind the Pink Ribbon*. "My husband and granddaughter Casey spent lots of time with me taking turns with reading the book on the final edit. Actually, we had a lot of fun



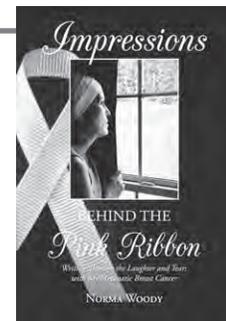
doing that together." Her granddaughter Casey also had the closing word in the book. "When I started this book, I was in chemo. And I was sick. But as I got stronger, I started writing again." Because she was ill when she finished the book, she wanted to avoid ending it on the solemn note of her last passage. So, she approached Casey. "I told her, 'End it for me, Casey.'" And she did.

Woody's family and community have been tremendous sources of support for her. Her other biggest resource is her faith. A life long believer, she says her faith has developed with different "life triggers" that have happened. Life triggers are events that have been notably joyous or hard. During these times, she fell back on her faith as a resource. "Where I have gained so much from God's word working through me... it is within this verse: James 4:8. 'Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.' I found this to be true." Faith is a huge theme in the book, with Woody discussing the origins of her faith, and how it has kept her going through her diagnosis. "If God has a purpose for me, He'll hold me up," she told me. "And I think this is my purpose."

Woody has spent most of her life helping other people, and is incredibly humble. She finds beauty and pleasure in the simple things in life. She can make bird calls. She can make fireflies come right to her hand. Before I left, she showed me the pair of slippers

she wears around her house since she has difficulty cleaning the floor. They are in the shape of penguins, with red earmuffs, and she laughed as she showed me. Perhaps it is best said in her own words; "Other people keep telling me, you're an extraordinary person. I'm an extraordinary person who has lived a very ordinary life."

Cancer, as she writes in her new book, is in her genes. She saw her aunt lose her battle with breast cancer, and then was diagnosed herself. "You think you know it. I thought I knew it, before I was diagnosed," she said. "But from the second they tell you that you have cancer, you say, *I don't know this.*" Her advice for people facing similar diagnosis? "Appreciate the precious stuff that's always been there. Slow down. Don't miss anything. Love and give love. If you haven't already, learn understanding and forgiveness. Understand that it's out of your control. Accept the things out of your control. Keep the faith, keep the faith, *keep the faith.* You're never alone." pl



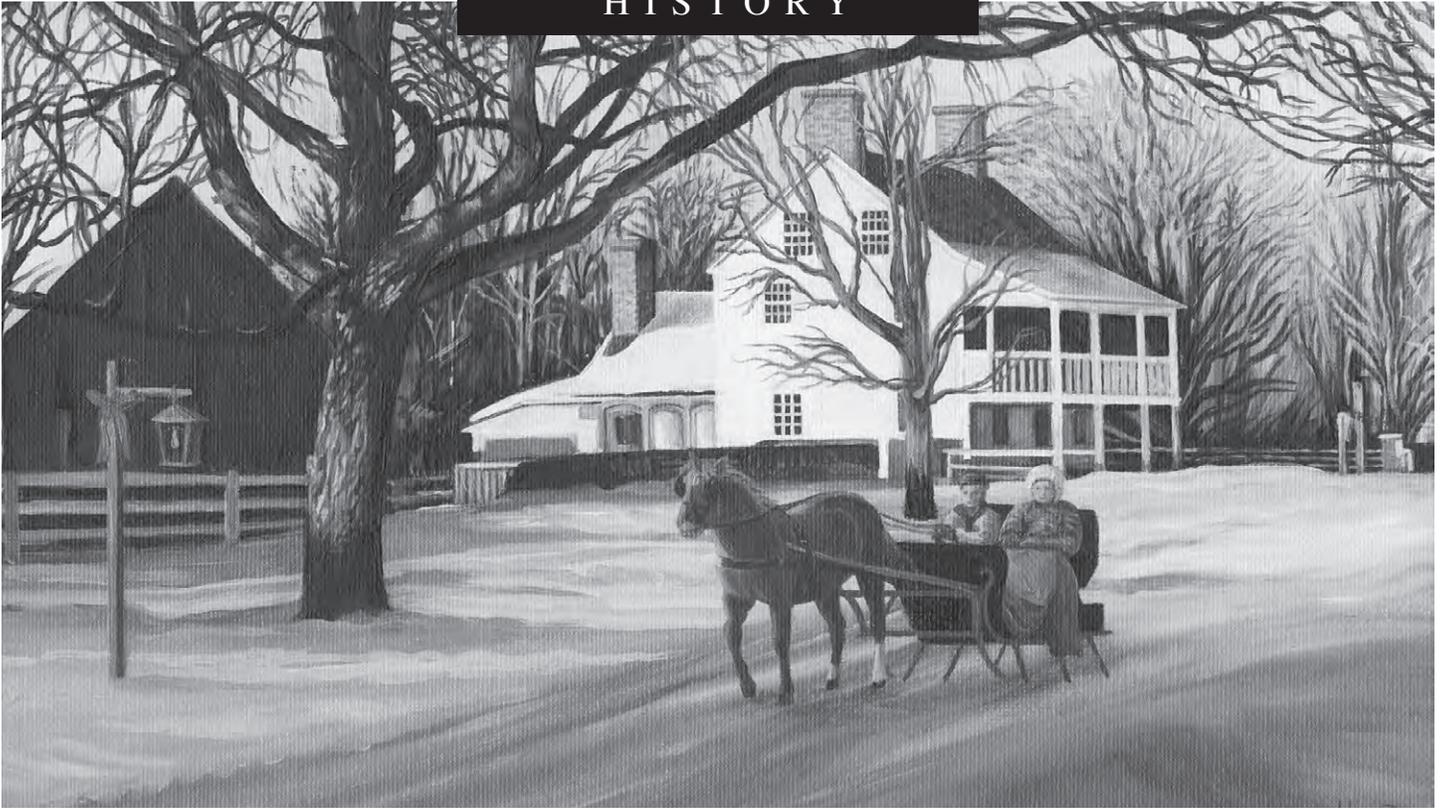
Impressions

Behind the Pink Ribbon

By Norma Woody

Following her diagnosis of an aggressive form of metastatic breast cancer, Norma Woody found herself the bearer of two seemingly unendurable burdens: the knowledge that she was dying, and the realization that too much of the life she had left would be spent in solitude and pain. Yet as the door to her physical life was closing, a window to her inner life was flung open. In her time spent alone wrestling with thoughts and disappointments, Norma found solace in writing, and was able to explore her creative mind and unlock feelings long denied her.

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RECALLING CHRISTMAS PAST

Ruby Lee Norris contributed to PL for more than twenty years. This article appeared in our November-December 2007 edition and is in memory of her love of the holiday season. Ruby Lee passed away in 2013.

by Ruby Lee Norris

My come-here friends inevitably turn back to their perception of the beginnings of America, and I detect an admiration for the broad sweep of our celebration and a pride to be living in Virginia where the first English colony in America was settled. It occurred to me that this is an opportune time to talk about Christmases past.

Our knitters group, dubbed Knit-Wits by one of us, purred and knitted at our last meeting and chatted about our childhood memories of Christmas. From this gathering of retirees to River Country, a pattern emerged reflecting America's melting pot.

It was not English traditions, in spite of Dickens's Christmas carolers, that we envisioned, but memories of mothers making German and Scandinavian cookies that dominated our reminiscing. Recalling Christmas decorations made from materials at hand brought smiles and misty eyes as each of us happily, proudly recalled a special Christmas tradition.

Pat recalled how her mother strung popcorn, cranberries and pierced walnuts together to make garlands for the tree. At my

childhood home, the children arose while it was still dark on Christmas morning and waited until our parents swept open the door to the living room, which had been closed on Christmas Eve when we went to bed. There was the Christmas tree standing in the corner, glowing with flickering flames of tiny white tapers seated in sockets that were clipped to the boughs of a cedar tree cut from our forest. Awestruck by the magic of those lights twinkling in a completely dark world both outside and inside, we almost forgot to see if Santa Claus had left gifts.

We recalled how live boughs of holly, cedar and pine outlined mantels, the tops of picture frames, mirrors, dressers and doorways. Those freshly cut boughs added a forest scent forever afterward associated with other Christmas scents, such as baking fruit cakes, pies, roasting turkeys and special Christmas cookies.

When we talked of outside decorations, Ann recalled the big colored bulbs, as big as those we use in our lamps today, which her mother and father strung around their front window. Her mother insisted on staggering the colors according to a pattern.

When her mother suggested switching colors yet another time, her father, just off the ladder, said, "Damn it, Betty, it's freezing out there."

Almost all of us agreed that boxwood wreaths define a real Virginia Christmas wreath. Surely this tradition dates back to the eighteenth century when boxwood was the signature plant for landscaping and defining English gardens.

Rochella, who recently moved here from Texas, reminded us that placing luminaries along a pathway or walk is a tradition from Mexico. Luminaries are lighted candles placed in sand in a paper bag. Tradition says that they lighted the way to the Christ child.

While sleigh bells are not a decoration, this Christmas past talk evoked their sound in my memory. We have the bells that my parents used on the harness of Woodrow, our magnificent chestnut-colored horse, to pull the sleigh whenever the snow was deep enough to hook him up and take a ride to a neighbor's house for a drink of hot cider. We always hoped the snow would come on Christmas Eve; it never did. My parents rang them late at night on Christmas Eve to tell us that Santa Claus was coming to our house. After I married and rang them late at night on Christmas Eve for our son, I still believed that marked the time Santa Claus came.

At this moment of recalling Christmas past, I spoke of how my grandmother made mincemeat for our pies by cooking the pork, raisins and spices for hours on the back of our big black cast iron cook stove. I also recalled that just after Thanksgiving I helped my mother-in-law chop fruit to make the fruit cake early enough to let it season with some bourbon before Christmas. One of the ladies said that at her house, right after the ladies cleaned up from the Thanksgiving feast, they started making the Christmas fruit cake. What an ingenious way to capture workforce while available! Have you thought of how much hand chopping went into preparing fruit for a cake in the days before Cuisinart?

As my childhood Christmas Eve memories resurfaced, I recalled how we hoped that Santa Claus would take time to eat the cookies and drink the glass of milk we had left under the tree. They were

our grandmother's oatmeal raisin cookies, our favorite.

Now our conversation turned to cookies of German and Scandinavian origin. The German *pfeffernusse* or peppernut cookies enjoy a special place in Pat's memory. They get their name from having a healthy potion of black pepper as the main seasoning ingredient in the original recipe. The idea was to pop a whole cookie in your mouth and get an immediate "bite." Now *pfeffernusse* recipes incorporate spices, orange peel and almonds. Here is a recipe from the eHow Food and Drink Editor.

1 cup all-purpose flour, 1/4 cup baking powder, 1/8 teaspoon soda, 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, 2 tablespoons brandy, 1/2 teaspoon cardamom powder, 3/4 teaspoon cinnamon, 1 egg yolk, 1/4 cup toasted ground almonds, 1 teaspoon fine ground lemon peel, 1/4 cup molasses, 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg, 1 tablespoon finely minced orange peel, powdered sugar for dusting, 1/8 teaspoon salt, 1/2 cup sugar, 1/3 cup salted butter

Combine flour, baking powder and baking soda in a bowl. Combine rest of ingredients, except powdered sugar, and gradually mix into the flour mixture, beating just until blended. Shape tablespoon-sized pieces into balls. Dust hands with powdered sugar to prevent sticking while forming cookies. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm.

Place balls an inch apart on prepared baking sheets and bake 15 minutes at 350 degrees or until slightly cracked. Cool slightly on baking sheets before removing to a wire rack. When cookies are slightly warm, roll in powdered sugar. Store in airtight container.

I spoke of the *spritzes* that my next door neighbor from Denmark taught me how to make when we lived across the hall from each other during World War II in suburban Philadelphia. The name *spritzes* comes from a German word "spritzen," meaning "to squirt." We used a cookie press gun to work the soft dough through decorative templates (Santas, trees, stars, etc.) onto a baking sheet. We would decorate them with fruits or sugar or just

dust them with powdered sugar. Here is recipe from a 1959 Mennonite cookbook. We used almond extract instead of ground almond.

1 cup butter, 2/3 cup sugar, 3 egg yolks, 2 1/2 cups flour, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/4 cup ground almonds, 1 teaspoon vanilla

Cream butter and sugar together. Add vanilla. Add beaten egg yolks. Add ground almonds. Sift flour; add salt and measure; sift again. Gradually add flour to creamed mixture and beat until smooth. Chill dough in refrigerator for several hours. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto **greased** baking sheet. Space 2 or 3 inches apart.

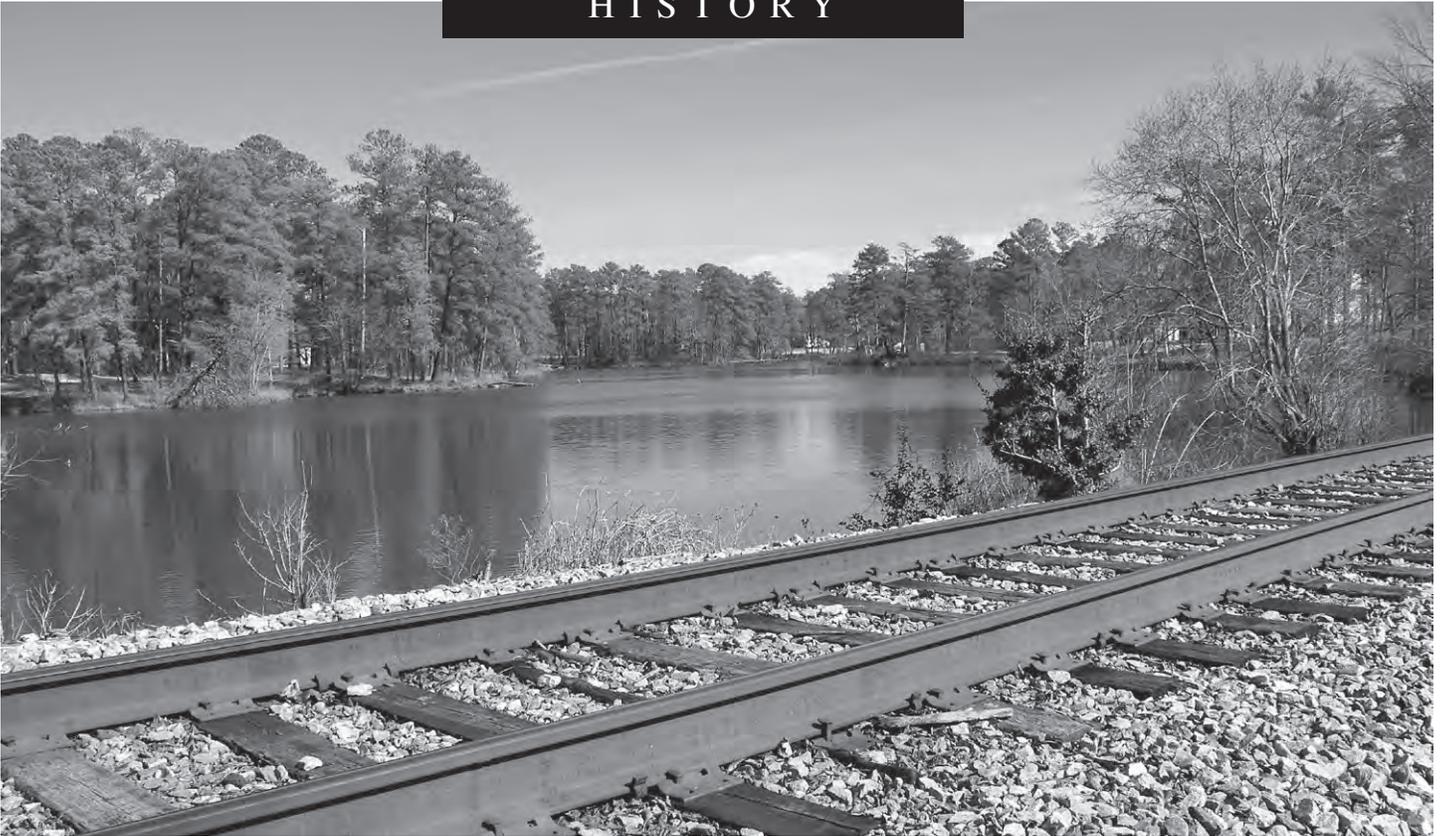
Bake at 400 degrees for 7 or 8 minutes. Makes 4 1/2 dozen cookies.

Among our family recipes I found our oatmeal raisin recipe with a note to my grandchildren that says, "This is your Great Grandmother Ruby's recipe modified by your Grandmother Ruby Lee." Here it is.

1 cup margarine or corn oil, 1 1/2 cup light brown sugar, 2 eggs, 1/2 cup sour milk, 2 cups flour, 2 1/4 cups oatmeal, 1 teaspoon soda, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 1 / 2 teaspoon nutmeg, 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves, pinch of salt (optional), 1 teaspoon vanilla, 1/2 cup raisins, 1 cup chopped pecans.

Cream butter and sugar. Add beaten eggs. Add oatmeal. Add 1/2 of the milk. Add flour sifted with soda and spices. Add vanilla and rest of the milk. Dough should be stiff. If not, add a sifting of either flour or oatmeal. Drop onto greased cookie sheet with a teaspoon. Cook at 350 degrees about 10 minutes. Makes about 12 1/2 dozen cookies.

As you have reminisced with us, I hope visions of sugar plums have danced through your heads and that it has brought a happy moment of nostalgia. If you are so moved, maybe you will try one of the cookie recipes at any season of the year. *pl*



Tranquil today, Tank Pond lies behind the embankment over which the Norfolk Southern Railway's track runs into West Point.

Week on the West Point Line

The unknown fate of Richard Easley

By William A. Palmer, Jr.

While my wife and I were on a cruise in the Hawaiian Islands last year, a crewmember noticed my spouse's "West Point, Virginia" t-shirt. She asked us whether we had ever seen the Cohoke ghost light. We were taken aback to realize that this familiar bit of local folklore had traveled halfway across the Pacific. Although we never had seen the phenomenon, many of our friends and neighbors claim to have encountered it. The story often told is that the light is a lantern carried by the ghost of a long-dead trainman who lost his head in a railroad accident and still is searching for it. Historical documentation for such a fatality on the West Point line of what today is the Norfolk Southern Railway is slim. However, if a ghost were to be encountered

along the stretch of single track that still carries freight to and from West Point, I believe it might more likely show up about eight miles down the line from the Cohoke crossing. I would even go so far to suggest that the ghost has a name—Richard Easley.

The night of Saturday, April 6, 1889, was truly dark and stormy as the worst nor'easter in several decades lashed the mid-Atlantic coast. Between thirty and forty vessels were sunk or driven aground in the Chesapeake Bay. Sleet and high winds buffeted Richmond, and west of the capital, snow was falling, as much as fourteen inches in Winchester. In West Point, at the head of the York River, torrential rains combined with a storm

surge at high tide to submerge the lower end of the town.

Two miles north of the town, Tank Pond was overflowing its banks and pressure was increasing on the earthen dam that had impounded its water for almost thirty years. The pond had been created when track was laid for the Richmond and York River Railroad just before the outbreak of the Civil War. After bridging the Pamunkey River at White House, the builders had only one major obstacle to overcome before the rails could reach their terminus in West Point. A tidal creek that native people called Tanks Mattadoquin meandered through a dense cypress swamp and brackish marsh before emptying into the Pamunkey.* The solution to this obstruction was construction

of a long earthen dam that blocked the upper portion of the creek and created a pond. The waters of the pond flowed into the swamp through a culvert that was bridged by a wooden trestle.

Tank Pond—no doubt an abbreviation of the Indian name—was a place where West Point youngsters came to ice skate during the colder winters of the late nineteenth century. But on that April night it had become a ticking bomb, ready to burst with explosive force as the rain continued to fall.

The inclement weather already had delayed the departure from the capital of a Richmond and Danville freight headed to West Point. Just before nine o'clock, the train, with a crew of four, was trying to make up time as it barreled across the swinging bridge above the swollen Pamunkey and along the bluff on the opposite side. In the darkness the steam engine's big headlight could do little more than throw back reflections of the wind-driven downpour. Blinded by the rain and deafened by the roar and hiss of their locomotive, engineer John Lynch and fireman Robert Durvin never knew that Tank Pond's earthen dam had just given way, the raging torrent having splintered the trestle and swept it into the cypress swamp. Halfway across the dam, the train ran out of rails. The engine dove into the abyss, followed by the tender and seven cars.

Lynch was thrown from the engine and badly scalded by the escaping steam. Durvin died beneath the wreckage. Brakeman Richard Easley, who a few months earlier had suffered an accidental head injury while climbing atop a boxcar in Petersburg, was ejected into the fast-flowing water. A second brakeman, also thrown clear and not badly hurt, somehow made his way to the opposite side of the washout, where he began to follow the tracks to West Point and help.

It was one A.M. before the surviving brakeman, unnamed in contemporary sources, arrived at the slumbering town to raise the alarm. Rescuers from West Point boarded an engine from the local yard and hurried to the site of the wreck. There they found the injured Lynch and transported him into town, where he received medical care. The telegraph wire, which had been severed by the washout, was spliced so that an alert

could be sent up the line to Richmond. Searchers picked through wreckage in the dark in a vain attempt to locate Durvin and Easley.

At daylight, Durvin's body was discovered beneath the jumble of railroad cars in the muddy canyon through which Tank Pond had poured. He was recognized by a member of West Point's Masonic lodge as a brother Mason from Richmond, and his remains were removed to the lodge's meeting place at Fifth and D streets. A few hours later, a messenger entered the Sunday morning worship service at Seventh Street Christian Church in Richmond to break to Durvin's widowed mother and younger sister the news that the twenty-eight-year-old trainman had been killed.

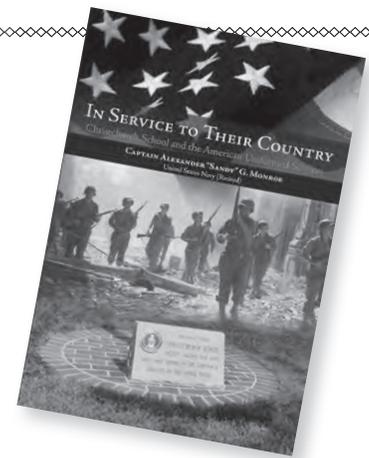
The search for Easley was continuing as a special train arrived from Richmond about noon. Aboard was the master of trains for the Richmond and Danville Railroad and the company physician, Dr. Charles William Penn Brock. Work crews set about clearing the wreckage and repairing the trestle. By sunset, the special train was ready to return to Richmond, carrying the surviving brakeman, scalded engineer, and a handful of passengers who had arrived in West Point on a steamboat from Baltimore and were eager to continue their journeys. The search for Easley's body was called off, in the supposition that it had been washed into the Pamunkey.

A West Point undertaker, secured by the Masons, prepared Durvin's remains for burial, and they were sent on to Richmond on Monday morning. There they were received by a committee from the Richmond Randolph Lodge and the R. E. Lee Council, Junior Order of American Mechanics. The fireman was laid to rest in Oakwood Cemetery, where he lies beneath a stone engraved with the Masonic compass and square.

Richard Easley has no tombstone; his remains were never found. Perhaps the thought that he had been washed into the Pamunkey River was correct. A greater likelihood is that his body was caught on a cypress knee or other obstruction and covered with silt in the swamp that more than four decades later would become Olsson's Pond. There, beneath placid waters where local residents fish from

johnboats or paddle their kayaks, he still may lie today—and on rainy, blustery nights perhaps still wander—a forgotten victim of an unremembered tragedy. *pl*

** In colonial times this stream served as a dividing line between the plantations of John West, to the south, and William Claiborne, to the north. Today, most of the creek has disappeared beneath the double impoundments of Tank Pond, located behind the clubhouse of the West Point Country Club, and Olsson's Pond. The cypress swamp was flooded when, after purchasing Romancoke Farm in 1931, Elis Olsson built an earthen causeway and concrete spillway near the lower end of the creek, extending West Euclid Blvd. and creating a more than 100-acre pond. The flooded course of Tanks Mattadoquin continues to serve as a dividing line, marking the border between West Point's corporate limits and the rest of King William County.*



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BY CAPTAIN ALEXANDER G. MONROE, USN (RET.)

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Dr. Boxwood Tells All

Late Fall/Early Winter Care and Maintenance

Story and Photos by Stephen Southall

Late Fall Mulching

Many people think about mulching in the spring in order to improve appearance, to maintain moisture in the soil and to reduce weed growth during the summer. However, a sufficient layer of mulch in the fall is just as important. Pine needles, bark mulch, or wood chips are all acceptable for mulching. Do not place black plastic under the mulch. Plastic is sometimes mistakenly thought to prevent weed growth, but weed seeds will then germinate in the mulch above the plastic just as easily, therefore the plastic serves no purpose, and, in fact, is detrimental. Mulch adds organic matter to the soil and a layer of plastic prevents the action of micro-organisms, which break down the mulch, move it down into and through the soil, increasing

aeration. The plastic becomes a barrier and creates two very different environments, one above and one below. The mulch should extend from the plant stem outward to at least 12 inches beyond the drip line of the plant. Avoid piling the mulch deeper than 3 inches, since this encourages root growth into the mulch from the upper stem area of the plant.

Thanksgiving is a great time to think about mulching since most of the leaves have fallen and the mulch will be fresh and not be disturbed by the raking and blowing of fall leaves. Mulching creates a very manicured appearance as both of the holiday seasons approach.

Rationale for Fall Mulching

During the winter, desiccation or drying out of the plant leaves is a concern. This drying out can occur during those cold and windy days between December and February. Two conditions can seriously affect the health of boxwoods: the soil may be frozen solid, not allowing the roots to transport water to the leaves properly, and the wind may be blowing, which dries out the leaves. Boxwood can tolerate wind by itself with the warmer ground or a frozen ground with no wind, but the two in combination are very stressful to boxwood. Mulch will greatly help eliminate the negative impact of these factors by insulating the soil from the cold and allowing the deeper warmer soil to warm the topsoil where the boxwood roots are located. Interestingly, snow cover can serve the same function. Whenever we get a good snow that stays around for a while, it helps to insulate the topsoil from the cold winter winds and keeps it at a more moderate temperature in order that the roots can carry out their normal transportation of water. A good deep snow can also cover up smaller boxwood and protect them from the wind and cold.

Plucking – Late Fall is a great time to pluck and thin

In preparation for the Christmas season, thinning your boxwood can accomplish two purposes. First, boxwood cuttings are great for decorating. The cuttings can be made into a wreath or used as individual pieces in a decoration. Second, taking cuttings from boxwood will open the plant and allow air and light to penetrate, which will foster a healthy interior.

Making a boxwood wreath is really very simple using a straw form and nursery pins which look like bobby pins but have a wider top where they are connected. Simply lay the wreath

on a flat surface, lay a cutting on the top of the straw wreath and pin it down with one or two pins. The size of the cutting is determined by the size of the wreath. The smaller the cuttings, the more uniform the wreath will be but it will take more patience and time to make. Next, lay a cutting on the inside and the outside circumferences of the wreath in the same manner. Now the next cuttings will be placed in a manner that covers up the stems of the previous cuttings. It is only necessary to do the underside of the wreath if it is going to be viewed from two sides as on a storm door.

The second benefit of taking cuttings is that it opens up the plant. Often boxwood become sufficiently thick that sun and air cannot penetrate the canopy. This creates an environment that fosters disease and fungus. An open plant will also tolerate snow better since it allows more snow to fall through as opposed to catching on the branches.

Questions and Correspondence

For more detailed information on various boxwood topics visit www.englishboxwoods.com. Please feel free to contact me with questions about your individual boxwood needs.

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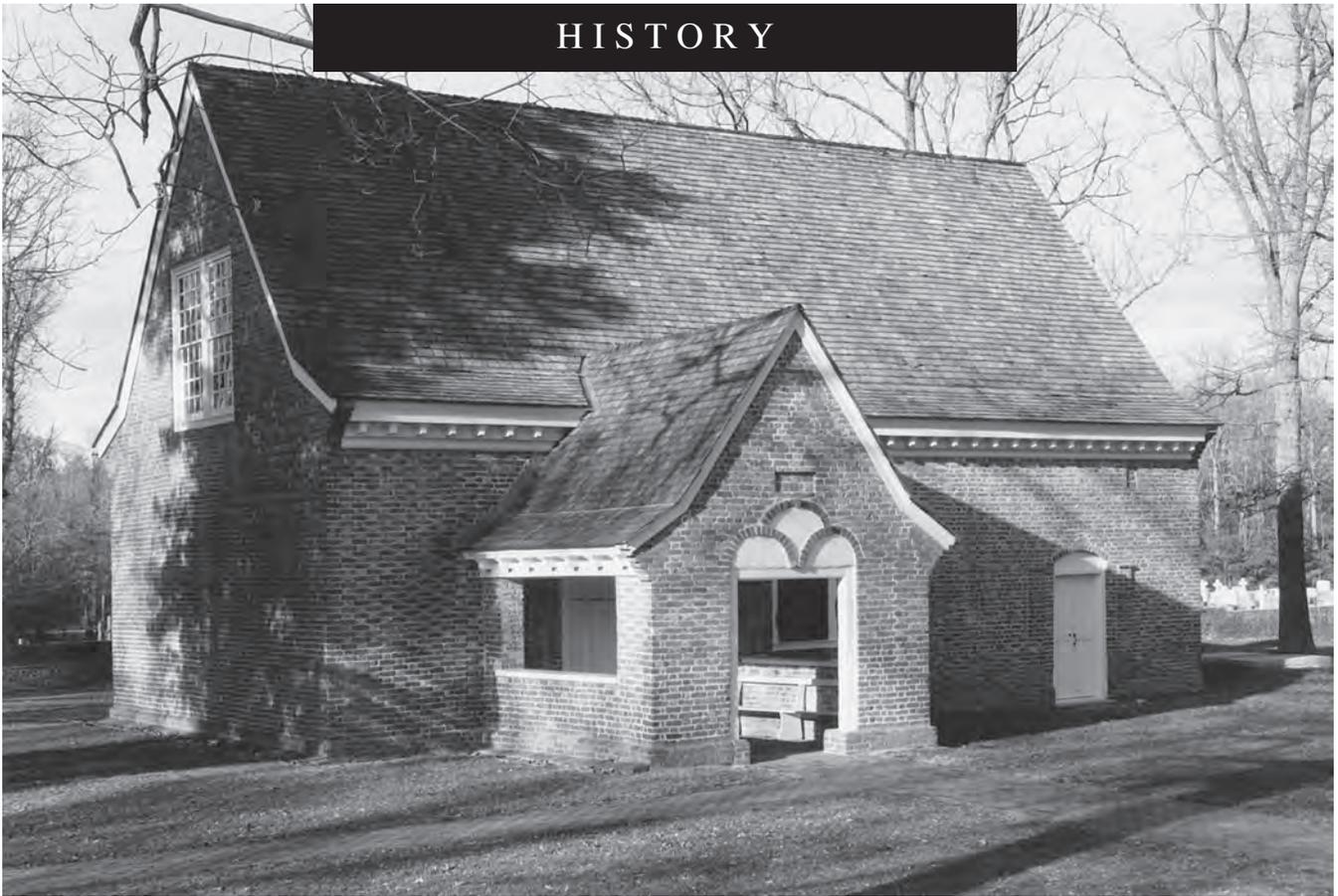
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Yeocomico Church, Through the Wicket Door

By Thea Marshall

It's been called one of the most wonderful—and overlooked—of America's colonial buildings. It's a tiny church, on a very small road in Westmoreland County, overlooking the Yeocomico River near Kinsale and Hague, Virginia. The Yeocomico Episcopal Church, built in 1706 and today a national historic landmark, celebrated its three hundredth anniversary in 2006.

If you are a church crawler, finding and exploring ancient churches, you will discover that this one is a gem. It was described by Bishop William Meade in *Old Churches and Families Of Virginia* this way: "The architecture is rough but very strong, its figure that of a cross, in the midst of some aged trees and surrounded by a brick wall; it cannot fail to be an

object of interest to one who has a soul with sympathy for such scenes." The church's claim to its not-so-modest fame is based not just on its architectural features, like its rare and fabulous entrance door, but for the procession of parishioners who have passed through it.

First, the door. It is massive, probably a thousand pounds, and so wide three folks abreast can pass through. It's a rare wicket door, a smaller door within a much larger door, the smaller used in bad weather to keep the cold air out. It's the only wicket door known in colonial America.

But it is the people who passed through the door that truly interest me, and as I read more about the church, I found myself making up a rhyme: "Through the wicket door, came the wicked and the pure." Was

I right?

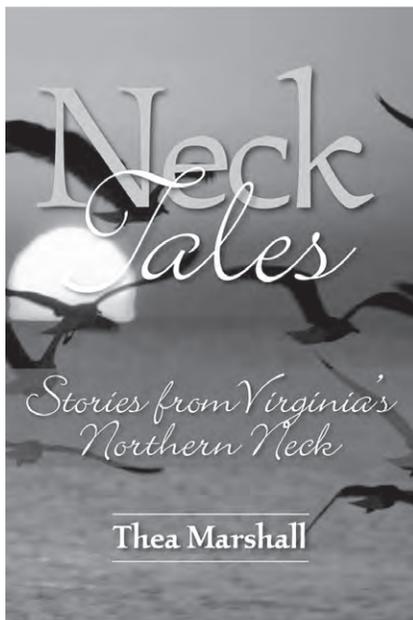
Well, I soon learned that the parishioners ranged from prostitutes to patriots and lots in between. First, the former, whose bad deeds ended up being good for the church, economically speaking. It happened in 1706 when four women, Mary Franklin, Sara Hutchins, Sara Rogers and Susanne Palmer, were convicted of prostitution. Their fine was a rather unusual contribution to the new church's building fund. They each had to pay to the fledgling parish church five hundred pounds of tobacco. (I have been unable to locate any information as to how they obtained the tobacco.)

There were a few other known miscreants to have come through the church doors as well. During the War of 1812, a detachment of men who were supposed to be watching

out for British forces coming down the river wandered into the church, perhaps to buoy up their spirits, though it was reported that the men used the baptismal font “as a vessel in which to prepare the excitements of ungodly mirth.” It is also said that the font was rescued by “a venerable man of the Presbyterian connection.” During that same war, the communion table was dragged outside and used as a butchering block, but happily it has been restored since then and is safely back in the church.

As might be expected, the now famous folk far outnumbered the infamous that passed through the doors of the Yeocomico church. Mary Ball Washington used to ride to church, not by carriage, but horseback, and son George Washington was baptized at this church, most likely from the very same font used almost a century later by those merrymakers. Robert Carter, grandson of Robert “King” Carter, was an early parishioner, along with the Lees and so many of early America’s patriots. Today, the church, lovingly restored, continues to be a welcoming house of worship, and it’s here, on the Northern Neck. *pl*

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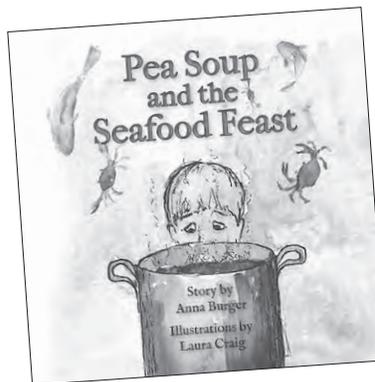
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Pea Soup and the Seafood Feast

By Anna Burger
Illustrations by Laura Craig

When his mother tells him they're having pea soup for dinner, Jack wonders how he'll survive. Then he comes up with a plan: he'll catch his own seafood feast instead! Relying on skills learned from his grandfather, the resourceful boy embarks on a seaside adventure, casting for fish, digging for clams, and setting traps for blue crabs. In the process he learns that the only thing better than a basket full of crabs or a bucket full of clams is a heart full of appreciation for the natural wonders of the bay.

“Anna Burger captures that sweet moment in life when we, like Jack, recognize our kinship to other creatures.”

— Jackie Urbanovic, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Duck Soup*

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EARLY WINTER STRIPER TIME

Story and Photo by Steve Scala

The months of November and December can mean many things to people, including change in weather, gifts, food and the first time you wear winter clothes. For those who continue to enjoy the outdoors, transition time from late fall into early winter may include some of the best striped bass fishing all year. Large brood class stripers are cruising routine haunts in search of their last menhaden meal before wintertime temperatures take over Chesapeake Bay. Its deep water trolling time for most striper anglers and that includes the same shipping channel waters that many large craft use to ply Chesapeake Bay waters from the Virginia Capes to the entrance of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. *Low and slow* are the tactical words referenced by many striped bass aficionados this time of year. Big bright lures that emulate large menhaden are the favored choices. Their names such as *Bucketheads*, *Parachutes*, *Banjo eyes* and *Crippled Alewives* are synonymous with trolling for big stripers on the move in deep channel waters.

Regardless of where you are trolling for striped bass in

Chesapeake Bay, the decision of where to troll and what to look for is one in the same this time of year. A fish finder accurate enough to locate pods of baitfish being followed by large striped bass is an important asset. A good sign to watch for this time of year are baitfish schools that are starting to rise from the lower water columns in deep channel waters towards the upper 30 feet of water depth. Look for signs of the larger fish in pursuit and attempt to troll your lures near the area where changing fish activity is occurring. This is a situation where downriggers are a valuable asset. By being able to adjust the depths of trolled lures to the same water level that striped bass are traveling in, takes some guesswork out of what is sometimes a challenging wintertime fishery.

November is also a traditional time for striped bass fishing tournaments and among the more popular is the *Casey Neal Rogers (CNR) Memorial Rockfish Tournament*. Much of the pre- and post-tournament festivities take place near an area of Chesapeake Bay waters that is often teaming with menhaden and large striped bass. The CNR

Rockfish Tournament is an important fundraiser for college scholarships in support of Northumberland County High School students and the local Fairfield Volunteer Fire Department. Casey Neal Rogers was a popular young man who loved fishing on the Chesapeake Bay with family and friends as much as he did his high school and college competitive sports. He passed away at an early age and the annual CNR Tournament is a way those who knew Casey can remember him in an upbeat and positive way. This year's competition takes place on Saturday, November 21, 2015. For information on how to enter this year's CNR Rockfish Tournament, visit the website, www.cnrtournament.com or call (804) 453-7507. Contributions to the CNR Memorial Scholarship Fund can be mailed to, CNR Memorial Rockfish Tournament, P.O. Box 464, Burgess, VA. 22432. *pl*

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Parting for the First Time

Author Susan Brown seeks to solve preschool anxiety in her latest book

By Tracy Akers

Susan Brown, a developmental psychologist and newly published children's book author, remembers the moment when her future calling was revealed. As a young girl, she recalls noticing the family of a friend interacting and living in a way that was attractive, especially compared to her own family's dysfunction. "I remember thinking, whoa—there *is* another way to be a family," Brown says. "This is the kind of family I want to have. How do you do that; how do you make *that*?"

Brown has spent the past forty years coaching parents and children as they strive to be the best families they can be. She gives guardians tools to support their children, helps kids cope with anxiety, and finds what a child needs in order to continue on a positive road of development. Over time, she grew into her calling with grace and ease. "I felt like it's what I was put here to do. So many people get up in the morning and hate going to work and keep looking forward to the weekend. But for me, it's a joy. It really is." Through her position with Commonwealth Parenting,

a parenting resource organization in Richmond, she works with many children who have anxiety. A perpetual problem solver, Brown sought to address this issue in her debut children's book, *Simon and the Worry Watch*. Although Susan was happy her book was chosen for publication, what is most important to her is the program weaved within those pages—a program to alleviate children's anxiety about going to preschool and leaving their parents for the first time.

"There is something romantic about writing a book, but you've got to have something to say." Brown smiles and shrugs her shoulders matter-of-factly. Aside from being an engaging stand alone children's story, Brown envisions *Simon and the Worry Watch* as a program geared towards kids and their parents. She believes that anxiety is a huge issue that is all too prevalent in today's world. "Say you're going on vacation and you take your dog to the kennel. The dog doesn't know you're coming back, and no matter how many times you do that, the dog freaks out. The dog never gains the cognitive concept

called object permanence—which means, even though I don't see you, I know you exist somewhere." Brown stresses that when a child first goes off to preschool, he's in the process of developing object permanence. When her main character Simon goes to preschool for the first time, he's anxious because he doesn't know where his mother is or if she's actually going to return. A 'worry watch,' given to Simon by his mother, is Simon's key to coping with and overcoming anxiety in the story. It becomes a concrete reassurance that his mommy has not disappeared, and will be coming back to pick him up from preschool.

"This is what is so peculiar and I don't know what to make of it. When parents say they got the book and that the kids love the book, I then ask them if they got the watch and they say 'no, we didn't get the watch.' If you don't get the watch too, you're missing the whole point." Brown emphasizes that children wired with anxiety will always have anxiety. However, she believes kids need to learn that even though anxiety "might sit beside

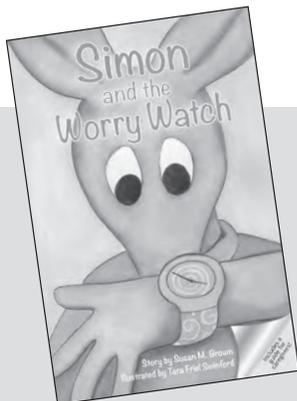
Entering preschool is often the first real experience of going out into the world without a parent

you, it does not need to sit on your lap and keep you from having a normal life, doing the things you want to do, going out and making friends, socializing, or trying new things. You learn to manage anxiety with coping skills, it doesn't go away, but you manage it." Entering preschool is often the first real experience of going out into the world without a parent, and it is a moment of true separation and anxiety. Brown's *Simon and the Worry Watch* teaches readers about an early step that can be taken, a step that will get kids closer to overpowering their anxiety and to developing in a healthier fashion.

Brown invites parents and children to brave that first moment of separation with a program that can ease their minds. She wants parents to feel comfortable reaching out and getting support in their parenting. "I wrote this book because it's a two-way

street. Just how children have to separate from us, we have to let go of them. What I tell parents is that our job as parents is to raise kids who will no longer need us. It's very hard to let go. And that's the meaning of the book's dedication to my son, Simon. I'm still in the process of separating from him."

As Brown continues to make a difference for families everywhere, she wonders about once again using the literary world as a catalyst for solving the problems she still sees eating away at children and parents. "If I were to write another book, it would be called *The Worrywart*. It would be about general anxiety and there would literally be a wart. As the child learns different coping skills, the wart would keep getting smaller." She pauses with a laugh. "But publishing books, it's a lot of work." *pl*



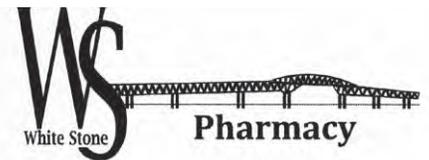
SIMON and the WORRY WATCH

By Susan M. Brown
Illustrated by Tara Friel Swinford

Simon is excited about his first day of preschool, but he is also a little bit worried! All day long, Simon worries. He worries that he might not have a friend. He worries that he might not find the bathroom on time. Most of all, he worries that he will miss his mom. Luckily, Simon's mother has a plan to make the worries go away . . .

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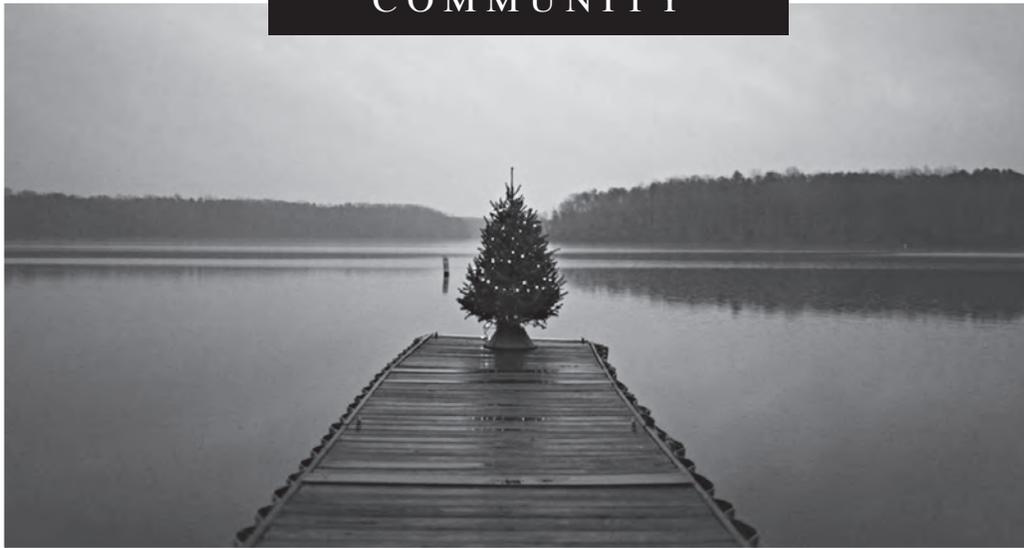
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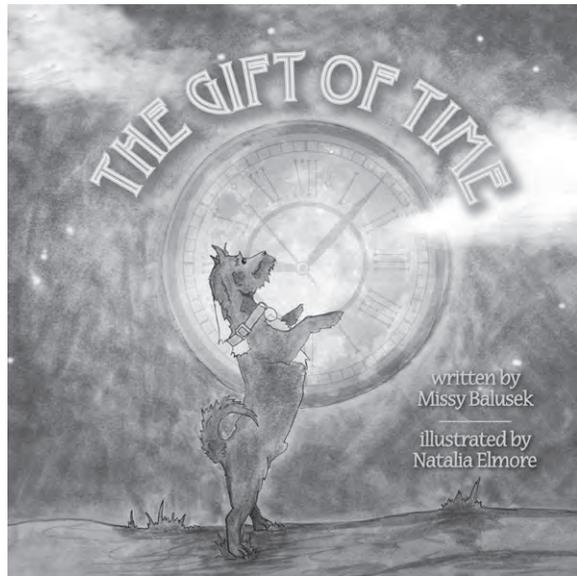
A Waterman's Christmas

By John "Sonny" Robinson

What's a Christmas celebration without a Christmas tree? In our house it had to be a cedar tree, fresh cut, to allow the sweet odor to fill all corners of our small four-room house. It was an event as important as the presents I hoped to see Christmas morning. My father, mother and I would bundle up—dad with handsaw in place—and head off the island to a predetermined farmer's woods to find the right size and shaped tree. We didn't always agree on which tree to take. My young eyes were looking for the perfect tree, and my parents wanted one that would fit in the center of our living room, mounted on the small platform used each year for the nativity scene. We never made this trip until Christmas Eve, so the tree would be fresh.

Once we arrived home with our prize, dad would trim the tree as necessary and mount it on the platform. It was left up to Santa to trim. I never saw a decorated tree before Christmas morning. Santa always seemed to decorate the same way, with angel hair covering each bubble light, and strings of green and red paper loops running around the tree. Clear plastic icicles dangled from each limb while here and there a small silver ball could be seen reflecting the lights out into the room. Around the bottom of the tree was white cotton bunting, which blended with the small white picket fence framing the nativity scene. The edges of the platform were covered with red crepe paper decorated with a brick pattern.

What a sight it was, when seen for the first time on Christmas morning. Looking back now, I finally realize the total enjoyment my parents must have gotten by providing that wonderful sight for me each year, at such a small expense. *pl*



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The Gift of Time

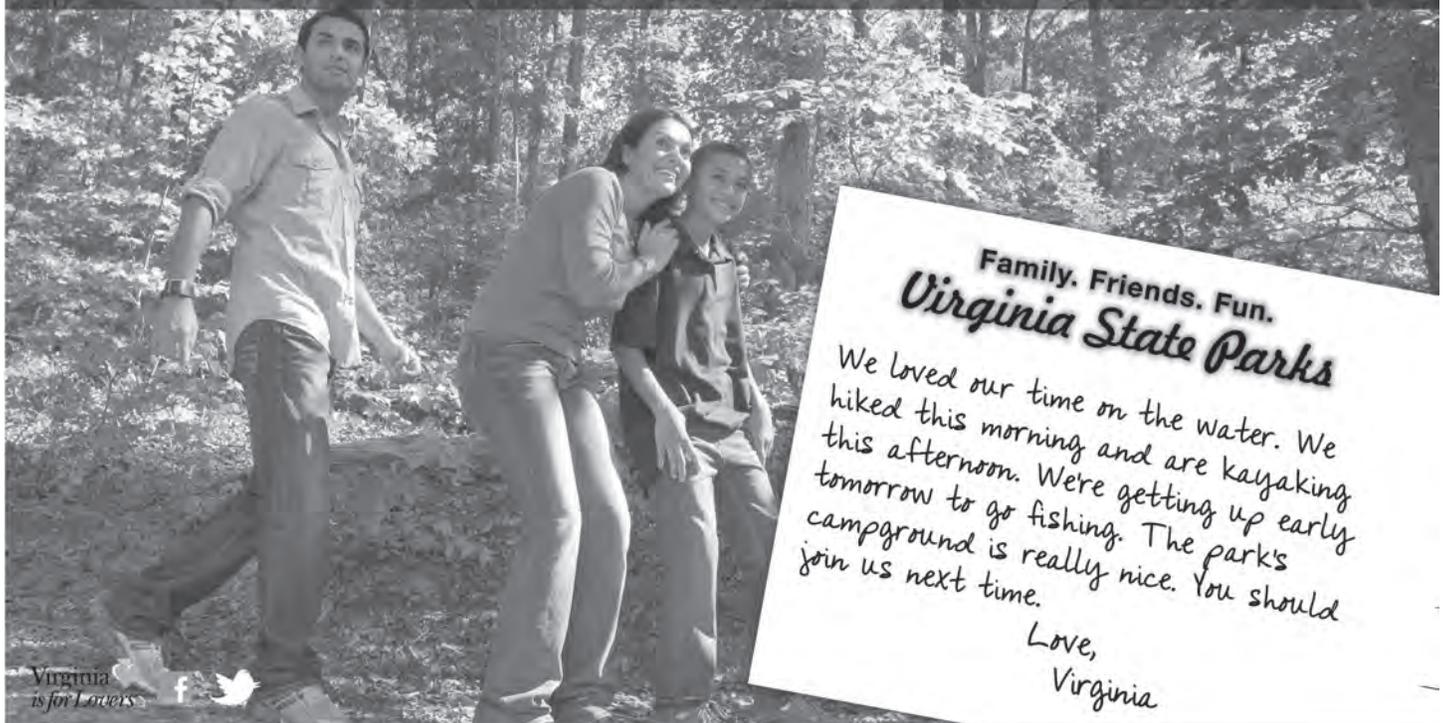
written by Missy Balusek
illustrated by Natalia Elmore

In a world full of schedules and plans, life can seem to go by much too fast. But as surely as Mother Nature moves from summer to fall without worry or regret, you can live in the moment and make the most of it if you try.

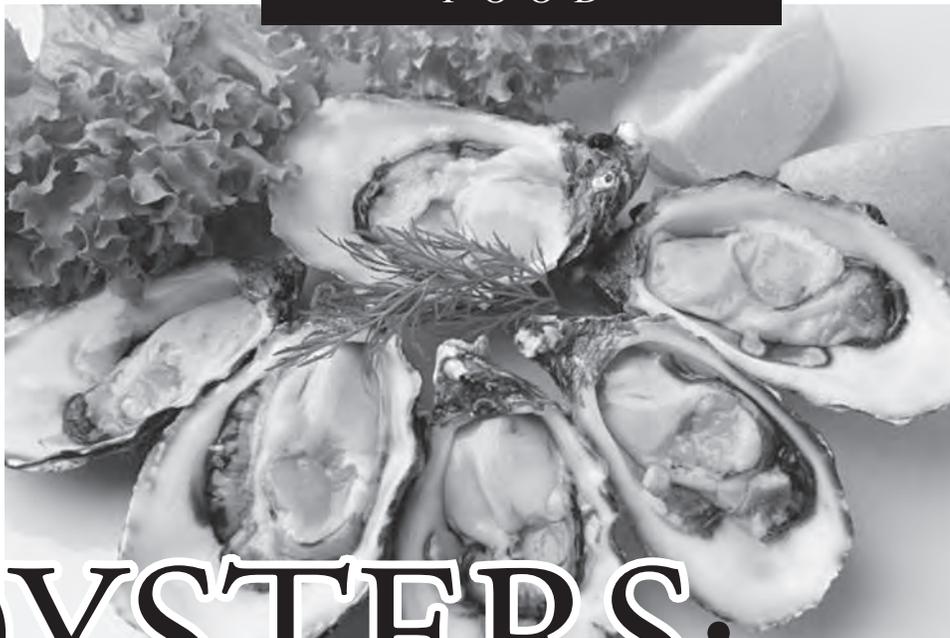
The Gift of Time sends a positive, mindful message to young readers, reminding them that every day is a treasure, that every life is a special journey, and that with the gift of time and the courage to be yourself in this moment, your dreams can take you anywhere!

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OYSTERS:

A Taste of the Chesapeake

By John L. Jones Jr.

The oyster is one of the few delicacies in the world that can be enjoyed entirely on its own, no accompaniment needed. It even comes in its own beautiful serving dish, the shell itself, sometimes with a pearl.

Those of us living around the Bay know, beyond a doubt, that the best oysters in the world just happen to come from our own backyard, the Chesapeake Bay. And there's a good chance that we just might be right. After all, seafood purveyors from around the world seek out the Chesapeake oyster, especially the Tangier and Chincoteague varieties.

For Bay folk, the oyster represents far more than just good eating. For us, the fall season begins when the watermen put away their crab pots and gear up for the oyster harvest. And we know how fortunate we are when we see these shellfish being unloaded from the workboats, heaped in bushel baskets

with sea grasses clinging to the sides. Already, we can taste the oyster brine, the very taste of the Bay itself, rich and salty.

Grand cultural traditions have grown up around the much-revered oyster. As fundraisers, many communities and fire departments hold annual oyster roasts each fall. Because these events have been "discovered," they're not quite as raucous as they were at one time, when, for a nominal fixed price, you could eat oysters to your heart's content, served up fried, roasted, and raw. The fixed price also included all the draft beer you cared to drink. And each fire department had its own recipe for oyster stew. Some of these recipes were culinary masterpieces, though many were not preserved in writing, a great loss for lovers of Bay food.

But the centerpiece of any oyster roast was the oyster itself, raw on the half shell. You lined up at makeshift bars where a half dozen of these shellfish at

a time were served up on paper plates. At each bar were bottles of Tabasco and Worcestershire sauces. There might be some oyster crackers around and, on rare occasions, a few lemon wedges. But the real oyster eaters simply slid them right off the shell and down the throat, no stops in between. It was even something of a rite of passage to get up the nerve to eat your first raw oyster. These events went on all afternoon and into the evening—the beer flowing freely, oysters consumed in huge quantities, a great celebration of the Chesapeake's bounty.

The oyster house itself is a hallowed institution of the Bay, though, sadly, it is rapidly disappearing. These eateries can still be found if you look hard enough, but Chesapeake old-timers remember when they abounded. The oyster house is just what the name implies, a restaurant that specializes in oysters, often serving this shellfish only. At one time, for very little money, you

could eat all the oysters you wanted, usually just served raw on the half shell. You could also guzzle an ocean of beer and still be socially acceptable. And in their glory days, the oyster houses were so basic that even fried potatoes were eschewed as affectations. Nothing stood in the way of oyster eating. The shells were simply thrown on the floor to be broomed out later.

The Church Dinner

Perhaps the Bay's most time-honored culinary tradition of all is the ham-and-oyster dinner. Held each fall, these dinners are often hosted by church groups. They seem to say that summer is over, the oyster is in season, it's harvest time. Attending a church dinner is a way to sample genuine Chesapeake cookery. Church members cook at these events with their home recipes, using fresh ingredients and shellfish straight from the Bay.

I have a mental list of my most memorable food experiences, and very near the top of the list is a church dinner I attended one fall at a Methodist Church in Davidsonville, Maryland. I was in elementary school at the time and spending a few days at my great grandmother's beach cottage, just south of Annapolis. My great grandmother, Ma, loved genuine home cooking, and she preferred church dinners to restaurants. At that time, these dinners were listed each day in the local paper.

In the gathering darkness, we left the shores of the Bay in Ma's old Chevy convertible and traveled to Davidsonville, making our way out into farming country on unlit two-lane roads, almost no traffic, passing deep woods and flat fields. Occasionally, we'd see a farmhouse with smoke rising from its chimney.

Ma parked under the trees that lined the dirt-and-gravel driveway of the church. In the church's brightly lit

basement, tables and wooden folding chairs were lined up, real cloth on the tables, and the plates and silverware seemed to have been brought in from someone's home. I was about to experience a cooking like no other, the cooking of the Chesapeake farms, where land and sea meet.

As soon as we sat down at one of the tables, I felt welcome. The other diners greeted me as if I were an old friend. The food was being passed around family-style. And what fine food it was. The platters were piled high with cured ham and fresh turkey, home-baked dinner rolls, vegetables that tasted as if they'd just been picked—string beans, tomatoes, corn on the cob. And there were bowls heaped with mashed potatoes, turkey dressing, along with pan gravy in gravy boats.

There was no skimping here. These church folk were truly filled with the spirit of generosity. In fact, they seemed to revel in it. Each time a platter looked as if it might become anything less than filled, a farmer's wife would come from the kitchen to replenish it. These good women, dressed in long, no-nonsense dresses and aprons, kept telling everyone to eat plenty. And all of us were glad to do just that.

This was a traditional fall dinner, and the oyster played a key role. Platters of oysters were being passed around, some oven-roasted, some in casserole form, some fried. Although I'd spent much time around the Chesapeake region, somehow I'd never gotten around to eating an oyster. But then a platter of deep-fried oysters came my way. They were breaded and golden, and I just had to try at least one.

That one oyster turned into many. It had just the right bite, and the batter was delicious. And the very taste of the oyster reminded me of the Bay itself, the taste of salt water in my mouth, the very essence of the mighty Chesapeake. I loved it. And I thought it made the perfect accompaniment to poultry.

I later learned that this view is shared by many lovers of Bay food and that serving poultry and seafood together is a Chesapeake tradition.

I certainly had my share of both seafood and poultry that night. But I'd also experienced something far more important, something I'd remember for a lifetime. I'd had the good fortune to be on hand for harvest time on the Chesapeake.

Unfortunately, the Bay's oyster population has dwindled in recent years, but state governments are doing their part to reverse this trend by seeding the oysters and cleaning the waters of the Chesapeake. If all of us do what we can to "Save The Bay," it will be possible to have a bountiful supply of one of the world's most delicious shellfish for a long time to come. *pl*

Batter-Fried Oysters

For this recipe, you can just buy a pint of already-shucked oysters—Chesapeake oysters, of course!

Drain oysters, remove grit, and dry on paper towels.

Mix one cup of flour with one cup of breadcrumbs. In a shallow bowl, beat two eggs with two tablespoons of light cream. Toss the oysters in the flour mixture, then in the egg mixture, then in the flour mix again, coating the oysters thoroughly. When done, sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

In a heavy iron skillet, heat one stick of butter with one cup of vegetable oil until sizzling and then reduce heat.

Fry oysters a few at a time. Do not crowd the pan. Each batch will take two or three minutes. When oysters are a golden brown, remove from pan and drain on paper towels.

This dish goes well with tartar sauce and lemon wedges, and some oyster house veterans swear by ketchup mixed with horseradish as a "cocktail" sauce.

Eat hearty. Enjoy the taste of the Bay!

I m Sorry, Are You Talking to Me?

A glimpse at modern communication

By Roger Dale Loring

This is the age of the cell phone, and because of this apparently useful little device, people are now talking more than ever. Wherever you look, there are people talking on cell phones. They talk while they are backing out of their driveways, standing in line at grocery stores, watching movies, walking down streets, delivering babies, baking sweet potato pies, and the list goes on forever. It is quite obvious that talking on cell phones is the thing to do.

Despite the increased amount of talking that is taking place, I maintain that conversation is still becoming a lost art. I realize this seems to be a rather large paradox, but nevertheless, that is exactly what is happening. While there are indeed large numbers of people talking and talking and then talking some more, real conversation is not taking place. There is not a verbal exchange of ideas. People are talking, but no one is communicating.

The reason for the lack of communication nowadays is because even though people are talking a lot, with or without those beloved cell phones, no one is listening. Everyone has something to say, but after they say it, they quickly want to say something else. Responses to what they say really are not

necessary. In fact, responses just seem to get in the way. You see, conversations today are actually monologues. Only one person is actually participating.

Evidently many people are so preoccupied with their own lives, they don't even have a passing interest in anything else. So, when talking to such people, you may notice that they smile, ask questions and pretend to be concerned about what is being said, but it is all a guise. The fact of the matter is that absolutely no attention is being paid to what is being said to them, and the questions they ask only provide a break in the action so they can think about what they will say next. I'm of the belief that one could talk utter nonsense to such people and they would never notice. Actually, I tried such an approach the other day when I encountered someone I hadn't seen for quite some time....

Me: Hey, Ralph, long time no see.

Ralph: Hello, Rog, how have you been?

Me: Not so good. When I was taking a shower this morning, all of the fingers on my left hand fell off. I hate when that happens.

Ralph: That's great. For myself, things aren't so good. First of all, I've been fighting a cold for weeks along with terrible

migraines. But I've got way too much to do to let that slow me down. How's Lana?

Me: Wow, funny thing about Lana. Lately she has really started to grow. We measured her this morning and she is almost eight feet tall now. We are pretty sure the Lakers are going to offer her a contract next week. She'll probably turn them down because she wants to be a shooting guard instead of a center. How's Sally?

Ralph: I'm glad to hear Lana is doing well. Sally is fine, but she does stay busy. Right now the PTA takes most of her time. She basically runs our PTA. Actually, she pretty much runs every group she's in. Say, speaking of the PTA, are you still a teacher?

Me: No, I quit teaching recently when I was elected President of the United States of America. I miss kids though, so I plan to visit both houses of Congress a lot. The members there act just like the kids I used to teach.

Ralph: I'm sure the kids miss you, too. As usual, I'm busy, busy, busy. I've been putting in a ton of overtime lately. They just can't seem to function at the office if I'm not there. I can't tell you the last time I've been able to kick back and watch a football game on TV. By the way, who's going to the Super Bowl this year?

Me: What? Didn't you hear, they are going to cancel the Super Bowl this year because no one seems to care anymore. On Super Bowl Sunday, instead of a football game there is going to be a tag team mud-wrestling match between Sarah Palin and Tina Fey against Hillary Clinton and Amy Poehler. How cool is that?"

Ralph: Shucks, I was hoping the Redskins might have a chance. I sure do envy you for having time to watch football. You always could manage your free time better than me. My problem is that I don't really have any free time. Did I tell you I built a deck on the back of the house, put a new transmission in my car, and painted the guest bedroom while helping my son become an Eagle Scout? I've been busy.

Me: Well, I've been doing a little woodwork and car work myself. I just built a garage out of toothpicks that is an exact replica of the Taj Mahal and I souped up a Model T Ford and won the Daytona 500 while driving backwards. I had to wreck Jimmy Johnson on the last lap to win, but that's just the way I roll.

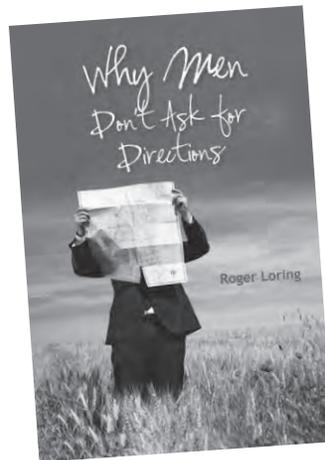
Ralph: That's nice. My problem is that I'm under so much pressure at work. I have so many important decisions to make every single day. My job has a tremendous amount of responsibility. The bottom line is that I do what I have to do. I wouldn't be where I am today if I couldn't stand the heat in the kitchen.

Me: Pressure? Responsibility? Heat? Man, that's what I felt when I pitched a no-hitter in the seventh game of the World Series last year. And then the very next day I devised a plan to pay off the national debt by the end of next month.

Ralph: That's great. Say, look, it's been great seeing you, but I have to get to work. The boss is coming in today and I have to be there. I'm pretty sure I will get a big promotion today. Take care and I hope to see you soon.

Well, there you have it. Ralph and I talked, but we sure didn't communicate. I'd

like to believe Ralph and all of the Ralphs of the world have a hearing problem, but I know better. The problem is that people just don't listen anymore. Hello? I said, people just don't listen anymore! *pl*



This selection is from Roger Loring's *Why Men Don't Ask for Directions and Other Life Observations*, published in 2013 by Belle Isle Books. Available from amazon.com, bn.com and from the publisher.



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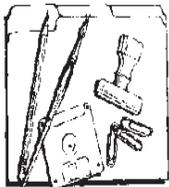


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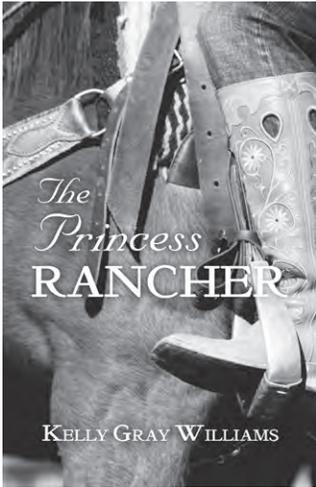
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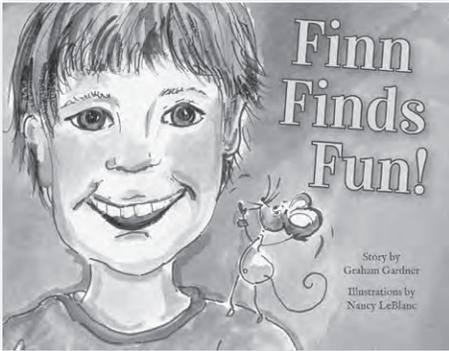
By Kelly Gray Williams

Kelly Williams wasn't born into ranching. Before she ever learned to ride a horse, her life was one of globe-trotting and high comfort as a national food distributor. But when her marriage fell apart, it set her off on a new path that would lead to open spaces, tangles of barbed wire, and the sweat, dust, and tears of cattle ranching.

Through it all, the thing that remained constant was Kelly's love for food, and her memoir serves as an ode to the ages-old tradition of the men and women who toil from sun-up to sun-down to put beef on our dinner tables. It's a story of risk, reward, and reinvention that captures a disappearing, American way of life.

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