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# PLEASANT LIVING

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Volume 28, Number 5

September / October 2014

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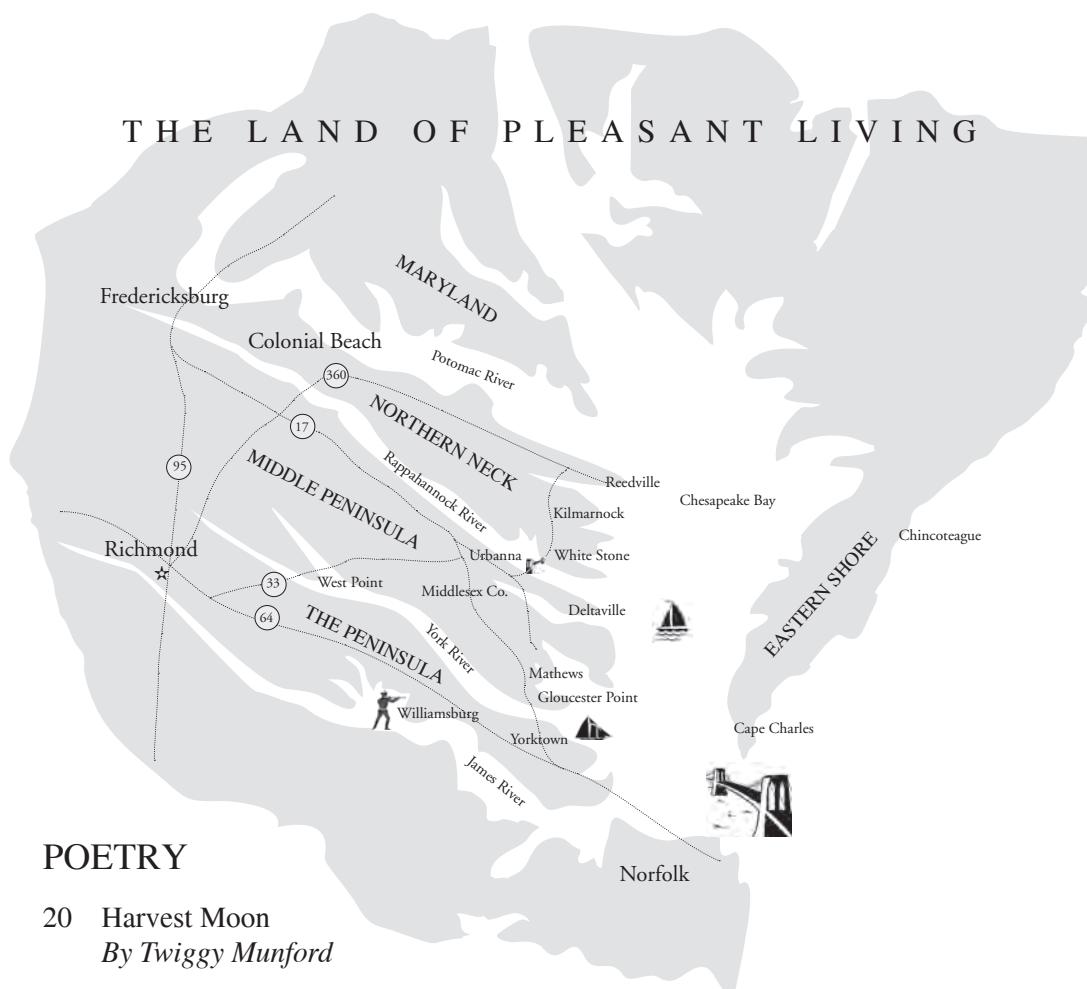
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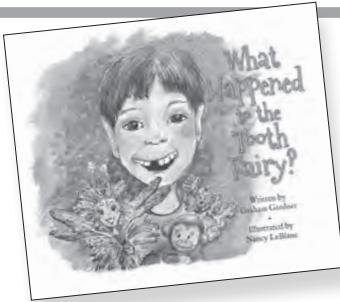
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By Gram Gardner  
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# EDITOR'S JOURNAL



## Our Love Affair (with the Past)

**A**s I've grown older, I've gotten more closely in touch with my past, and it often dredges up a rich tapestry of memories that trigger all kinds of nostalgic feelings. Baby boomers know nostalgia well. We know that ache in the heart, that yearning for a part of life, a time or place, person or thing gone and that we want to return to, but can't. Author Thomas Wolfe of *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*, knew it, too, when he wrote that "You can't go home again." There's something very powerful about this emotion that rises in all of us—if we have a heart—and it can come at the oddest and most unexpected moments.

It rose up in me when I saw the old Coca-Cola chest on the porch at Cal's Courthouse Grille in Charles City this past weekend. I remember the barbecue place in Texas where I grew up. On scorching hot days, entering that place was like stepping into a pleasure dome of ice where the AC was cranked up, the sawdust on the floor felt soft under my feet, and the most enticing beef brisket barbecue sandwich was waiting, topped with jalapenos and chopped onions. But one of the most memorable pleasures was opening the lid of the Coca-Cola chest, dropping in a quarter and pulling an ice cold Coke down the track. That bottle of Coke was so icy and so refreshing, you could feel the rush down to your toes, and the cold air rushed up to your face and chilled the sweat on your forehead.

When I remembered this image sitting on the porch at Cal's, it brought up memories of my late father who often took me for a sandwich across the street from his shop. Nothing made him happier than a good barbecue and a Coke on a hot day—and perhaps it also made him happy to have me come along.

We all get called back to the old days, whether it's the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s. Perhaps for you it's the smell of cotton candy at a small town carnival, the hood of a '67 Chevy, a Bogart movie or the theme song of the *Honeymooners*. But nostalgia doesn't have to come from a long ago memory. Perhaps for you it's that special summer two years ago that you spent with your children or the love of your life—or maybe just a very ordinary day last week when somehow you felt vibrantly alive, and now that feeling has gone. The world and time are moving so quickly now, that "old" isn't really old any more, but somehow what happened last week can seem strangely old to us. However long ago, if the memory runs deep enough, you get that twittering ache in your chest that brings a smile and tears to your eyes at the same time.

Whether you're old or young, here's to all those nostalgic moments in life that remind us of the wonder of being human. *pl*

Editor/Publisher

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## The Art of Hospitality

By Nuala Galbari; Photo by David L Justis

**I**n Ireland, during the 1950s, when I was a tiny tyke, I was often taken to visit my Aunt Ada. At five, and rather small for my age, I would reach up and ring the polished doorbell, and when the door opened, enter a magical world. It was no ordinary house; Aunt Ada and her family still lived in the Victorian era, in terms of both interior design and—to some extent—even in their dress. The large, three-storied townhouse featured an eclectic mix of styles, with Gothic and Rococo influences, plump, heavily upholstered furniture in dark wood tones and Oriental influences in pottery and wares; and ornate fireplaces formed

the center of each room. I recall how very dark the house appeared, yet the fresh linens, colorful draperies, china and floral displays juxtaposed with the dark furnishings.

The sheer excitement Aunt Ada displayed upon our arrival was something quite curious to me. My aunt would take my hand and immediately lead me through the passageways of her home down to the kitchen and into the pantry. The large pantry was immaculate and every item stored there was carefully packaged, labeled, or covered in white linen. There was a strict order to everything and I was immediately invited to climb up on

a stool and choose what I would like for afternoon tea. Aunt Ada arose each morning at about 6:00 a.m. and would begin baking—whether or not guests were expected—as she lived with my two uncles and both maternal grandparents at the time. The tea table was always covered in crisp, white linen, delicate china, comprised of varying colorful sets, fresh flowers and the most scrumptious offerings. My aunt worked for Bell's Tea Importers, so all her teas were of the finest quality. In the afternoons, she served Darjeeling, Oolong and Earl Grey tea blends to perfection. And our teas were a lengthy affair, with everyone sitting at

*You can stroll through Colonial Williamsburg on a lovely autumn day, the scent of hot, spiced cider and freshly baked bread in the air, or enjoy the warmth of a wood-burning fire by the taverns during a winter walk.*

the lovely table engaging in congenial conversation for hours. I was taught good table manners, how to converse properly at tea, the pronunciation and ingredients of the various tea blends, the correct table settings and service. Aunt Ada, a tall, stately woman with dark wavy hair and soft grey eyes, was often dressed formally, yet she wore a white linen apron over her dress. My aunt was, in fact, my first professor of hospitality.

Years later, when I left school, I studied hospitality management, joined a large hotel group and later moved to an airline career as a flight purser. I believe my aunt was responsible for instilling passion in two areas: my great love of fine teas and my desire to serve others. Certainly, my aunt always travelled with me in spirit over the years, but it seemed that I never quite found the true feeling of contentment I used to feel when in her company. No matter the occasion, my aunt just knew how to make you feel content and perfectly at home.

In 2005, after residing in various countries and other U.S. states, I moved to Virginia. I had visited the state several times over the years and spent time in Colonial Williamsburg, Yorktown and surrounding areas, but only for short durations. I had become a seeker of sorts, looking for a place I might call my second home. Upon each visit, I felt a particular draw to the state and began to feel sadness each

time I left. What was the attraction to Virginia, specifically, and what made it feel like home in my heart?

Driving down from Minnesota, where I had lived for many years, we visited Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky and West Virginia enroute. On the fifth day, we crossed the Virginia border and stopped at the welcome center. I sat down on a bench beside a full-size figure of Thomas Jefferson, and while listening to the welcome sounds of the fifes and drums of Colonial Williamsburg, I burst into tears. The journey had been enjoyable, but we travelled with a Siamese cat, named Tinky, and an old, disabled Corvid named Reginald, which made the trip a little more stressful, as our feline and corvid friends had to be quietly smuggled into the hotels at night, and transported in the elevators, secured beneath our coats.

However, the long journey was not the reason for my emotion. The two ladies behind the hospitality desk immediately came to my aid without having any idea as to the cause of my sudden outburst. One threw her arms around me and hugged me. I tried to explain—through blubbing and tears—how much I had missed Virginia and they both laughed heartily. I had come home, and the sign, ‘Welcome to Virginia’, had pulled the heartstrings.

I have lived in Virginia for nine years now and I know of her many assets—

but the greatest among these are her people. No matter where you hail from, there seems to be a place for you in this welcoming state. Virginians embrace the true concept of hospitality—the warmth, charm and style with which guests are taken into the home—and it shows in their daily lives. In Colonial America, after all, homes served as hubs of most community activity. Gatherings in homes were the primary means of entertainment, cultural intercourse and news dissemination.

Virginia offers a life that is delicately poised between past and present. Its rich historical tapestry, scenic beauty, intellectual and social life create an environment where anyone can thrive. Sometimes I am reminded of the life in Irish country homes where guests are always dropping by at any time of day, whether it is to say hello, bring presents, or to borrow some sugar. The doorbell often rings, and it is quite acceptable in Ireland to just show up at homes without calling in advance.

Virginia is as welcoming as Ireland. When you visit an Irish home, you often receive warm hospitality in the form of a meal, good conversation, a tour of the garden or musical entertainment. As a youth, I would visit an old farm where the owners, Joe and Nellie, would welcome us any time of day or night. Nellie would prepare wonderful lunches or high teas at the farmhouse, while Joe would recite his poetry—of which he had written volumes. If you

didn't want to eat, Nellie would soon change your mind. In most states I have visited, an American may offer you tea or coffee or something to eat when you visit. If you say 'no thank you', that is often the end of it. But in Ireland you can't get away with that so easily.

"Oh, go on," your hostess will say, "just try a few sandwiches."

"Thank you," you will say, "but I am really not hungry."

"Och now, you are, aren't you? I made them fresh and the kettle is on the boil."

"Thank you," you'll plead, "I have just eaten recently."

"Ah now, there's room for more—have a lovely sandwich or some cake. The cake is good."

And so it goes, until you eventually concede. It's the same in Virginia, the offerings and dialects may be different, but they pack you full of food and good cheer and share their hearts and homes with you.

One day, two years ago, I visited a beautiful horse farm in Gloucester. I had only met Debbie Basta once or twice, briefly and we arrived at the farm with my nephew in tow, during his trip from Belfast. My nephew still speaks warmly about his visit, and as a managing director for Citibank, he travels the globe frequently. Yet he landed in Virginia for the first time and was completely charmed by the residents he met. Debbie, with little notice of our visit, disappeared into her amazing pantry and reappeared to serve the most excellent spread of home-made dishes, cheeses and a selection of wines, all delivered with great humor, conversation and the warmest heart. I considered how Virginians have been entertaining in great style and with aplomb through the centuries. It seems there are angels in our midst and no one is ever turned away. While

the communities are close, Virginians also know how to respect your privacy when you need it, yet will always be at the door when you enjoy company. At any time when you call to arrange a gathering of friends, they are there bearing gifts.

Virginia has softness in her climate and a fragrance in the air; there is elegance in the swaying loblolly pines, her lovely rivers and bay. There is serenity in her landscapes and seascapes. When you crack the windows open on a summer's night, a chorus of wildlife lulls you to sleep. There's a pervasive thread of welcome in all communities, no matter where you go. It's the land of storytellers, and what better way to connect with all generations. Virginians love their storytellers, artists and musicians. Even with all the modern forms of communication, there is nothing as delightful as a good storyteller who weaves an interesting tale.

You can stroll through Colonial Williamsburg on a lovely autumn day, the scent of hot, spiced cider and freshly baked bread in the air, or enjoy the warmth of a wood-burning fire by the taverns during a winter walk. In summer, you can hear the cannons in Yorktown, the smell of the gunpowder drifting across the York River, or sit by the docks and observe the sailing ships, gently pulling on their ropes at sunset. And when you have had your fill of history or nature, there's always an Air Force jet flying overhead to bring your thoughts back to the present or a drive across the causeways to marvel at the U.S. Navy vessels, or the small craft where someone is simply fishing on the bay.

To a newer resident such as myself, Virginia has everything to offer; it has a timeless appeal. Perhaps that is why so many come here and stay. We are in

good company among past residents, friends and family in a lifestyle that balances work and play, the old and the new.

Virginia is a stunningly beautiful state where great hospitality is as natural as her flowing rivers, bay and poetic mountains, where people genuinely say, 'Welcome Home', and life is a daily celebration. *pl*



By Caley Cantrell  
Illustrated by Sarah Berkheimer

**T**he holidays are coming! It's that time of year. Time to send cards full of tidings and cheer. We'll need a family photo.

Everyone gather 'round. Now, wait just a minute, we're missing the hound! The family's all ready to be in the shot, except for the four-legged star . . .

. . . who is NOT.

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# MAYOR UMPHLETT

*Photo courtesy of Town of Kilmarnock*

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By Thea Marshall

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The brand new mayor of the town of Kilmarnock wants to make a difference. The brand new mayor of Kilmarnock has already made a difference. That's because the brand new mayor of Kilmarnock is a LADY, and her name is Mae Umphlett.

The first woman mayor in the United States is believed to have been Susan Salter, who served as mayor of Argonia, Kansas in 1887. Since then, women have been elected as mayors in cities across America and around the world, but not here in the Northern Neck. That all changed recently, when Kilmarnock—known as the business hub of the Northern Neck—elected its very first female mayor in all of the Northern Neck. I asked Mayor Umphlett... “Why? Why run for mayor?” She said, “I had been on the town council and understood more fully how local government worked and how I could make a difference. I love this little town I grew up in and just felt the time was right for me to play a larger part.”

And then I asked her, “About the election—or any election—it must feel so good to have the support of not

only your friends and neighbors, but perfect strangers.” She told me, “Having the town’s support means a great deal to me, and I hope the citizens will be proud of the job I can do and the job the whole council will do to keep Kilmarnock the quaint, proud little town it is.”

Her major priorities for Kilmarnock include ”Keeping the town business friendly, keeping service costs ‘market competitive’, creating and maintaining amenities that keep Kilmarnock an attractive place to live, work and visit.”

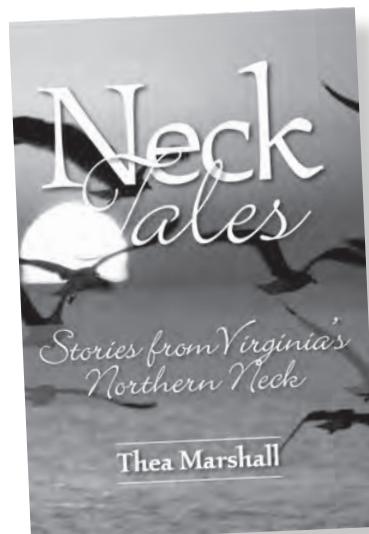
For a time, Kilmarnock was touted as the New York of the Northern Neck. . .well, not quite. It’s weathered major fires, hurricanes, and business doldrums, but today it’s alive with its antique malls and shops, art galleries, restaurants, its own museum, and trendy clothes shops. Well, it couldn’t be more different today than when it was known as the Crossroads, then Steptoes, to honor William Steptoe, the grandson of Anthony Steptoe, who came to the Neck in the 1600s with that early band of adventurers as an indentured servant, worked his way out of his six-year debt and lived to grandfather that very first Northern Neck entrepreneur,

William, grandson of Anthony.

I think it's safe to say that for William and Anthony, crossing the ocean was their first step at making difference, in their own lives—and in doing so, made a huge difference in the lives of those who followed them here.

And Mayor Mae Umphlett's election moves her along on her path to making a difference here. . .in the Northern Neck. *pl*

*This commentary aired on NPR's WCVE radio on August 6, 2014. Reprinted by permission.*



## Neck Tales

*Stories from Virginia's Northern Neck*

Join National Public Radio

**J**commentator Thea Marshall for an historic and contemporary journey through Virginia's Northern Neck. First broadcast by Ms. Marshall on NPR, these stories paint a vivid portrait of this part of Virginia that's a world apart—from the region's wine, watermen and Chantey singers, to its poets, patriots, kings and citizens.

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— Roger Mudd, former anchor, CBS News

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# The Coles Point Tavern

## *60 Years of History, Lore and Fun*




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By Scott Duprey  
Photos provided courtesy of Coles Point Tavern

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**T**he year was 1954. Americans stood in front of a relatively new invention called the television and watched Senator McCarthy self destruct in his obsession with tracking down alleged communists in the government. Rocky Marciano won the heavyweight boxing title that year. The average car cost \$1,950; the average house, \$17,500. A gallon of gas was 29 cents; a loaf of bread, 7 cents. A gallon of milk was 92 cents, and a stamp, 3 cents. The Giants swept the Indians in the World Series.

Also in the summer of '54, Loren Landman, an entrepreneur from Maryland, migrated to the Potomac shores of Virginia and began building the Coles Point Tavern with plans to install slot machines and a package store. Since it was built over the shores of the Potomac, the Tavern was and remains under Maryland's jurisdiction,

which allows customers who enter the Tavern on the Virginia side to enjoy the gaming and liquor prices enjoyed in Maryland.

The newly built Tavern sustained damage when Hurricane Hazel blew through the Northern Neck in 1954. The slots were phased out in 1958, but the Tavern then became a thriving nightspot with a dance hall that rocked to the beat of the incoming tide. "It was a great place to come and dance and have fun," according to Sam Landman, Loren's son. "We had 40 or 50 regulars. A lot really dressed up when they went out. People had more class back then," he adds.

The Tavern had a rough and tumble waterman's reputation in the 50s, especially from the point of view of the surrounding farming community in local Westmoreland County. Tempers sometimes swelled between Coles Point watermen and the beach crew about who had the fastest boats, who could tong and cull the most oysters, and how



fast.

Whatever differences the watermen may have had in the 1950s blew over when they became allies during the “oyster wars—a feud between Maryland and Virginia brewed by the charter of 1785, which gave Maryland lawful jurisdiction over the Potomac. In 1865, Maryland legislated that any Virginia waterman caught dredging oysters illegally in Maryland—on both sides of the river—must be tried in Maryland. That law was struck down in the U.S. Supreme Court. Maryland’s jurisdiction over the river still prevails, however.

By the 1950s, the Maryland Tidewater Fisheries had at least three patrol boats on the Potomac, the *Honga River*, the *McKeldin* and the *Pokomoke* in service against the poaching oyster “pirates,” as they were dubbed in Annapolis. The *Pokomoke* was World War II surplus, outfitted with a water-cooled machine gun mounted on its bow. Sam says he still remembers seeing the law chasing the night-dredging “Mosquito Fleet” up and down the river in front of the Tavern. “They’d lay out off Ragged Point in

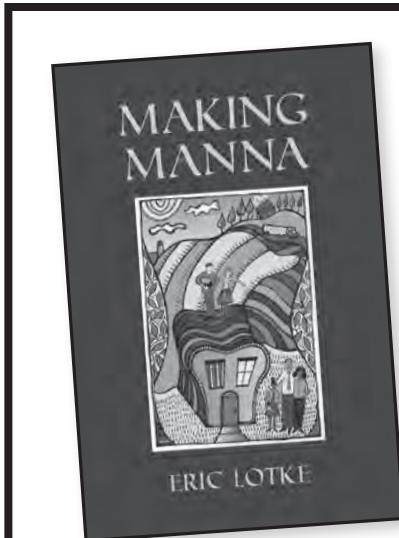
the dead of night and dredge 40-50 bushels,” Sam claims.

Sam also remembers the early morning of April 8, 1959 when the *Honga River* and the *McKeldin* bore down on the *Ann*, Harvey King’s boat.

Berkely Muse, also from Colonial Beach, was onboard. King and Muse were dredging off Colonial Beach before daybreak, not far from the Reno Pier. The *Ann*’s two seventy-horsepower motors could run circles around the *Honga*, but not the gun mounted on its bow. After a spray of bullets shot across the *Ann*’s deck, King was shot in the leg. Berkeley Muse was shot dead. Some called it murder.

Hurricane Isabel slammed into the Neck in 2003 and took out a portion of the Tavern’s 154-foot pier. “The high tide surged into the front door,” Sam recalled.

Sam was back at the Tavern this past June to help celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It’s clear that the Tavern’s unique location “off of” Coles Point, and its history and lore still beckons those who troll by boat or car to “walk the planks” for good food and fun, nautical history and adventure. *pl*



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## MAKING MANNA

BY ERIC LOTKE

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# The Mississippi Delta and the Hot Tamale Trail

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Story and Photos By Dan Gill, Ethno-Gastronomist

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I was on my way to the mountains of Virginia in my pickup truck for a short vacation, with my fifth wheel trailer and motorcycle in tow, when I stopped at a little Mexican restaurant in Martinsville for breakfast. The handwritten sign on the side of the road read, *La Juquilita, Taqueria Mexicana* (Mexican taco shop). I could tell right away that this was a rare find, as everything was written in Spanish and all of the patrons were Hispanic. I discovered that the owners and staff were all from Oaxaca, the land of the seven moles, and that they made their own *mole negra*, a dark, complex sauce of many ingredients, including chocolate and several varieties of chili pepper. They also make their Oaxacan-style tamales on Sunday and sell them until they are gone, usually by Tuesday. I have never been impressed by the tamales typically found on the East Coast, which tend to have too much masa (Mexican corn meal) and are somewhat dry and mealy. These were wonderful; hand

rolled in cornhusks, moist with rich flavors and not too much masa. I decided then to change my plans entirely and head for Mississippi to ride the famous *Mississippi Delta Hot Tamale Trail* from Memphis down to Vicksburg. I also planned to spend a few days in Memphis sampling world-renowned barbecue. These were two culinary adventures at the top of my bucket list.

According to author Davis Cohn, in *Where I was Born and Raised*, "The Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg." The *Mississippi Delta*, or simply *The Delta*, is not really a delta but a flat, rich alluvial floodplain lying between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers and is often referred to as "the most Southern place on earth." From Memphis to Vicksburg, the delta consists of mile after flat, monotonous mile of corn, soybean, rice and cotton fields (roughly in that order) interrupted by the occasional small rural community and only a few towns. Technically, The Mississippi



*Towboat pushing a tow of 28 barges rafted four across and seven long. From my campgrounds along the river, I could hear the deep throb of large diesel engines at all hours of the day and night.*

River Delta is three hundred miles to the south where the river fans out to dump into the Gulf of Mexico. Culturally, the region is primarily black with some Anglo-Saxon, Mexican, Sicilian, and assorted vagabonds thrown in for variety. Isolated except for traffic up and down the Mississippi, this is where the Delta Blues evolved and morphed into Rock and Roll.

I began my Delta adventures at the beginning—the lobby of the Peabody Hotel. The epitome of southern splendor, the Peabody is an opulent landmark filled with marble, art, jade, piano players and history. At 11:00 am every day, four mallard ducks (three hens and a drake) accompanied by a uniformed “duck master,” ride the elevator down from their elegant rooftop pen and march across a red carpet to spend the day in the lobby’s central fountain. At 5:00 sharp they are marched back across the red carpet (which has just been unrolled for them) to the elevator for a ride back up to their sky-palace for the night. This is quite a spectacle and the lobby and mezzanine areas fill with hundreds of people twice each day to watch and photograph the procession. The tradition goes back to the ‘30s when the manager of the Peabody returned from a hunting trip with only his live decoys and a horrendous hangover. The decoys ended up staying in the hotel enjoying the fountain. Soon the owner realized the promotional value, and with the help of an animal trainer from Barnum and Baileys, made it into a show. Every three months the ducks are rotated back

to a nearby farm and four new ducks are brought in to be trained.

Delta cuisine consists primarily of Memphis-style barbecue, fried catfish and Delta hot tamales. Delta tamales are unlike those found anywhere else. Though every vendor in the region makes them differently, and no one gives up their secrets, they are generally spicy, moist, and addictive. Delta hot tamales are typically small, only about an inch or so in diameter and about four inches long. The filling is usually finely chopped or ground beef, but may also be pork, turkey, chicken or a combination. Coated with a thin layer of cornmeal mush, rather than masa, Delta tamales are then wrapped in cornhusks, tied in bundles and simmered in a liquid instead of being steamed. Some vendors use cheaper parchment paper, as it is easier to handle than cornhusks. The predominant seasonings are chili peppers, garlic and cumin, but each practitioner has their own secret spice mixture. Spices may be incorporated into the meat, or the cornmeal, or the simmering liquid or any combination. Delta hot tamales are often accompanied by packets of plain saltine crackers, which are surprisingly effective at smoothing out the spiciness and absorbing the juices. Though no one gave up much information, I was able to pick up bits and snippets here and there.

I had planned to stay in Memphis for only a couple of days, but there was so much to do and so many good restaurants that I ended up staying well over a week. I will

tell all about those adventures in a future article. Before I left Memphis, though, I began my Delta hot tamale tour at Hattie’s mobile hot tamale stand on Lamar Street. They were nice and spicy but not overly

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*Sho-Nuff in Greenville from the outside*



*Scott's Hot Tamales is another Greenville legend.*



*Solly's Hot Tamales in Vicksburg*

hot and were moist and tender with a nice balance of finely ground meat, seasonings and soft cornmeal mush. What a revelation! I was hooked. Unlike tamales back East, these had only a thin layer of soft moist cornmeal surrounding a forcemeat filling. These tamales were evidently machine rolled and were wrapped in parchment. I tried both the hot and mild versions, the only difference being the amount of spices in the simmering liquid. The hot was nice and spicy and the mild only a little less so.

From Memphis I went south to Clarksdale and the crossroads of routes 49 and 61 — one of the many crossroads where Robert Johnson supposedly sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for guitar mastery. The legend actually originated with Tommy Johnson (no relation), another influential Delta Blues innovator. *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* had it right. Nearby, Abe's serves hot tamales created by a Lebanese immigrant back in 1922 to feed hungry workers. Unlike most vendors in the Delta,

Abe's consists of pork; lard is added to the simmering water, a slightly different blend of (undisclosed) seasonings is used and they are somewhat vinegary. Abe's tamales, served with slaw and saltines, were outstanding. Hick's is just down the road and offers hot and mild beef tamales in cool weather, but only mild in the heat of August.

On down route 61 toward Greenville, the self-proclaimed “hot tamale capitol of the world,” I stopped by Delta Fast Foods in Cleveland. Here I started to pick up on more salt and cumin, characteristic of Greenville tamales. In Greenville, I tasted hot tamales from Hot Tamale Heaven, Doe's Eat Place, Scott's Hot Tamales and Sho-Nuff Hot Tamales. Most of the Greenville tamales tended to have too much cumin for my taste, to the point of being somewhat bitter and were noticeably salty. Then I rode my motorcycle across the river to Rhoda's Famous Hot Tamales and Pies in Lake Village, Arkansas. Rhoda's hot tamales ended up being my favorite of the entire trip: Nicely balanced and spicy, but not too hot, and not too much cumin. In business for forty years, Rhoda and her husband machine-roll their three meat (chicken, beef and pork) tamales, then hand roll in cornhusks. The fried catfish was also excellent.

The Delta Hot Tamale Trail ends in Vicksburg where the market is dominated by Solly's and The Tamale Place. Solly, who died in 1992 at 100, learned to make tamales in Cuba. After bumming around the country and riding the rails, he settled in Vicksburg and started making his version of Delta hot tamales. Before he died, he had a falling-out with his family and gave everything to another family who had helped him out and had learned the business. His real family then opened The Tamale place. Solly's great-grandson took my order and told me a little of the family history. The tamales were similar in both places—more cornmeal than most other Delta shops. The tamale pie from The Tamale Place was covered with melted cheese and jalapeno peppers and was excellent. There is also a donut shop downtown that served tamales, but I found out that they came from Hot Tamale Heaven in Greenville, which has its own processing plant and supplies tamales to restaurants and other vendors who don't make their own, and ships to customers around the country. I didn't care much for their tamales as they were heavy on cornmeal, salt and cumin. Before leaving Vicksburg, I had to officially end my Delta tour with a visit to Catfish Row—now mostly parks, playgrounds and



Doe's Eat Place is probably the most well known tamale joint in Greenville and usually the first to be recommended by locals. Tamales were machine rolled and wrapped in parchment.



Hick's World Famous Hot Tamales in Clarksdale. Hand-rolled and simmered in a special sauce. 43 years in the business.

museums with only a few bars and eateries remaining. I went to the Klondike Trading Post, a small historic honky-tonk, where I had the best hand-cut chicken-fried steak that I have ever encountered.

The Mississippi Delta is a cultural and culinary adventure not to be missed. I would recommend, however, visiting in October or March as it is generally so hot and steamy in August that on many days I took the air-conditioned truck rather than the motorcycle.

By the time I left Vicksburg, I had eaten enough tamales and barbecue to hold me for a while and was ready for a nice big juicy steak in Alabama. Coming back from Mississippi reminded me of coming home from Viet Nam and encountering civilization and cooler temperatures again.  
*pl*



## Harvest Moon

By Twiggy Munford

Harvest moon—  
what does it mean?  
Time of leaves dying  
and binding sheaves of corn?

Harvest moon shine  
Shine into dull eyes wide  
for visions to take home,  
speed traveling into dark tunnel  
at life's end.

Harvest moon scene—  
lovers with steaming cider,  
heads together, whispering to each other  
their autumn love of pumpkins carved  
and honking geese flying south,  
and oh, the color of orange on painter's brush.

Harvest moon,  
pining for its spring-time sun.  
Wonder if they intertwined, became one.

Oh, if I could only be young again,  
pick up remaining combined corn,  
rake leaves in piles to jump in.  
I dare to dream those sweet old times  
in harvest moon.



# FALL FORWARD FISHING

*September and October fishing offers some fun and surprises*

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Story and Photo by Steve Scala

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Virginia anglers familiar with the early fall seasonal flow of fish and weather in the Chesapeake Bay watershed know this time of year is prime time for a variety of hook n' line activities. Bottom fishing for spot, croaker and white perch continues, much to the delight of those who enjoy these species and the wide swath of areas where they can be caught. In September, the croakers will begin their migration out of the bay, feeding voraciously on the way. Anglers in the know will chase these fish from their locales in shallow inshore waters to the channel edges they follow when heading for the Atlantic Ocean. Much to the delight of many Virginia anglers is that spot will remain in many

inshore areas throughout the months of September and October. Other fans of the spot species are striped bass, sea trout, red drum and bluefish. These tasty bottom fish are a popular link in the predator food chain of the more popular game fish species in Chesapeake Bay, so when you find spot, you might also locate stripers, trout drum and blues nearby.

A new and not always so welcomed species on the watershed scene this fall are an ever-increasing number of blue catfish. These prolific whiskered predators can gobble up their weight a few times over and target a variety of species, including the foraging young of treasured game fish. There is evidence that blue cats are developing an

increased tolerance for salinities higher than those this species previously thrived in. Thus, they are being caught farther down river in the Chesapeake Bay's major tributaries, including the Rappahannock, York and James Rivers. Perhaps the only good news about this troubling increase in blue catfish numbers is they are great fun to catch, and the ever-growing number of blue cats in the 2-to 5-pound range is terrific table fare. They will hit a variety of cut fish baits and are also being caught in the inshore tributary inlets on lines baited with crab or shrimp.

September and October are premier months for trolling and casting action. Until a strong nor'easter or close-by hurricane force winds them along, Spanish mackerel will be providing lots of fast paced trolling action. Multiple lines rigged with planers and small flashy spoons coupled with fast-paced trolling are among the favorite types of fishing

during the month of September. Find the schools of shiner minnows and diving birds, and the mackerel will be close by. Some of the most exciting fishing around takes place when blues and stripers join in on the feeding frenzy initiated by Spanish mackerel. This time of year, all three of these species feed and forage on the same source of shiner minnows.

Jigging for fish that sound into the mid-depths or near the bottom will be an ongoing option that takes place this fall. All of the frenzied foraging that a feeding school of mackerel, blues and stripers churns up creates a smorgasbord of food sources that slowly drifts down to the bottom. Using diamond jigs or spoons with enough weight to get closer to the bottom can attract larger fish that are feeding underneath. Fish as often as you can over the next two months and be ready for a mix of tactics and ever changing angling locations. pl



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# The Last Picture Show




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By Robert H. Pruett

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If the truth be told, we have a preference for old things, and old movie houses is one of them. The Fairfax Theater in Kilmarnock, which opened with *Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*, starring Richard Barthelmess, on April 16, 1928, closed its doors to moviegoers on December 31, 1989. Watching this and other elements of small town and rural life disappear triggers a sense of loss in us. Consequently, we think it's fitting to eulogize a fading rural, small town pastime and landmark that represents another era when young and old enjoyed the picture show—perhaps more passionately than we do today.

Small town movie houses have become a part of rural mythology—like the general store that had everything, including a good share of Saturday night mirth and good conversation—and they have all but disappeared. Or like the weekly rural newspaper, so many of which have been swallowed up or run out of town by the competition. It's ironic that the old theaters and what they represent have been mythologized by film portrayals like *The Last Picture Show*, *Murphy's Romance* and others that have recreated

the romance of Friday night courting over 10-cent popcorn. Picture shows will be remembered most vividly by the generations who grew up with them—who stood in line outside Fairfax for three hours in 1959 to see Walt Disney's *The Shaggy Dog* and went to Milton Webb's drug store afterwards for a cherry Coke.

Of course, the Fairfax goes back even further. Some of the older folks in the area remember 25-cent admission and seeing the silent films on the small screen during the late 20s and early 30s. They remember when there were two shows a night and a crowd waiting for the second.

We all know the reasons for the demise of the rural theater in the Northern Neck—and across America. People stopped coming to the Fairfax when town started closing up at 6 pm—about the same time we all propped our feet up and surrendered to the television screen. Window shopping, busy downtown streets on sultry summer nights, the Kilmarnock Opera House, and James Wharton's music from the pit at the Fairfax were all part of the same era when we were more social and people were more important.

*By the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, our great-grandchildren—or theirs—will enjoy hearing stories about the old theaters.*

During the old days, six movie theaters operated in the Northern Neck. Today, wide-screen TVs, DVDs and smart phones have taken their place.

In June 1990, the Fairfax became a sporting goods store. We're grateful that the original façade and the building remained essentially the same to keep alive the spirit of the old theater. Reuse of old structures is becoming a critical aspect of architectural and cultural preservation. Too often, old buildings are thoughtlessly destroyed or renovated without regard for the original character of the structure. When this happens, we lose a significant fragment of our past we think is worth saving.

Future generations will likely ask a lot

of questions about the old movie houses. Not necessarily about theaters like the Byrd in Richmond that feature elaborate architectural craftsmanship, rising organs, or spiral staircases, and not cluster movie theaters. Just your simple, everyday, unsophisticated theaters with rather bland facades. By the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, our great-grandchildren—or theirs—will enjoy hearing stories about the old theaters. They'll wonder how they looked and what it was like to see newsreels and cartoons in a dark theater on Main Street while their parents did a little shopping in town. *pl*

*This article appeared in the Sept/Oct 1990 issue of PL.*



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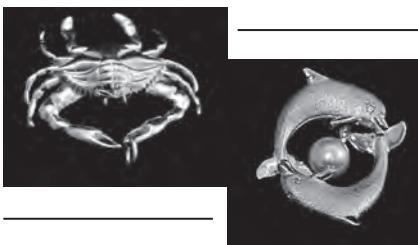
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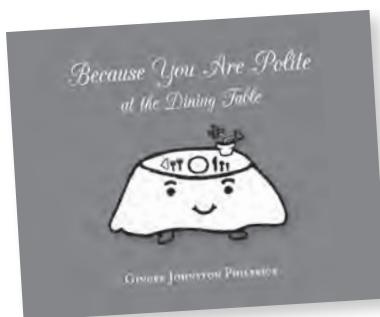


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# Hometown *Paradise*

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By Alyssa Brew

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I was speaking with one of my clients the other day at work, and she was talking about how she was from the island of Antigua. The conversation came up because I had asked her if she had been on an exciting vacation this summer. She answered, “I just went home, but to me, it *was* a vacation. Many people don’t think that about their home, but my home is paradise.” After she said that, I instantly thought about how I feel when I go back and visit the place where I grew up in the Northern Neck. However, if you asked me at the age of thirteen how I felt about living there it would have been an entirely different story. I probably would have rolled my eyes and made a remark about how boring it is and that there’s nothing to do.

I’ve heard before that when you grow up, you revert back to your childhood in the sense that you appreciate things again, just in a different way. For instance, I remember being really little living in our home in the country in Lancaster County and never being bored. We had so much space, so many animals, and boundless fields, woods, and outdoor buildings that evoked our curiosity and exploration. Since I have two older brothers, we were always building forts and having dirt wars, among other pastimes. Also, we had a pony, a dozen chickens, two dogs, and countless litters of kittens. My mother always had fresh eggs from our own chickens and fresh vegetables from our grandparents’ bountiful garden, and they lived only a few minutes down the road.

In order to do any shopping we had to go to Richmond or Williamsburg, and to see a movie (after the Kilmarnock theater closed), we went to Gloucester. Even going to the grocery store was a twenty-minute to half-hour drive. Oddly enough, I never seemed to care how long it took us to get where we needed to go. Either I was used to it or just never thought about it, but either way, I was perfectly happy and content in our serene home place. When I was eight years old we moved to Irvington, which was a whole lot busier than the farm. Looking back now it’s amusing to me that Irvington seemed so bustling in comparison. My brothers and I attended Chesapeake Academy, and it was so close, I could ride my bike to school every day. Not only that, Carter’s Creek was only a five to ten minute bike ride away! From ages eight to thirteen, most of my memories are riding my bike or roller blading through town. I even remember biking to my dad’s office in White Stone at that time, where Brandy Lane Publishers and *Pleasant Living* magazine were first born.

Hanging around dad’s office was nothing but fun! Across the street was a baseball card shop, the Buoy, 7-11, and other places that were “cool” to hang out as a kid. And inside the office my brothers and I amused ourselves with the copying machine, print shop, darkroom, and light table that were around during that time. Moreover, moving closer to the water made tubing, fishing, swimming, and boating much more accessible. My true appreciation for the bay and rivers evolved during my time in

*I've heard before that when you grow up, you revert back to your childhood in the sense that you appreciate things again, just in a different way.*

Irvington. Summers consisted of crabbing right off the dock, catching minnows in a small net, and hard crab feasts for supper. At my grandparents' home, it was tradition to spread out newspaper on their back porch table and enjoy a crab feast followed by a delicious homemade dessert.

It wasn't until I turned eleven or twelve that I began to notice how little there was "to do" in Irvington, or anywhere near it. No shopping malls, bowling alleys, skating rinks, live music, or other entertainment. We visited Richmond more frequently and noticed how far from civilization we truly were. The summer before I started high school, we moved out of the Northern Neck—a move I saw at that point as exciting because I was *finally* away from boring Irvington. Charlottesville is also a small town in the grand scheme of things, but to me it was everything unknown and scary added to beginning my ninth grade year—a very difficult transition. Attending the same private school from pre-school to eighth grade with the same fifteen classmates, to a public school where I didn't know a soul, was lonely and overwhelming. Culture shock was putting it mildly! After making friends and growing used to it, we then relocated to Richmond where I started my junior year of high school, and I have lived here ever since.

As much as I wished I had remained in the Northern Neck all along, the experiences and rapid changes that have taken place in my life have made me strong and made me who I am today. Besides, if I hadn't ended up in Richmond I never would have met my husband, who happens to have spent most of his childhood in Warsaw! He understands the simpler life and rich unique culture of the River Country. He also possesses a love and appreciation for the area's people, rivers, and farmland. And when the time is right, we can't wait to move back to our hometown paradise. *pl*

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# Telling the Story of Lancaster

*The Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library*

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By Bryant Lampkin

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*Photos are courtesy of the Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library.*

If it hadn't been for one woman's determination to save and preserve the Old Lancaster Jail, the Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library most likely would have never come into existence. The Old Jail, built c.1821-1823, was shut down in 1938 when the jail was moved just across Route 3 into the newly annexed wings of the courthouse. For many years, the Old Jail sat empty and fell into a state of disrepair. In the early 1950s when a woman named Bessie Pierce heard the news that the Old Jail was to be torn down, she realized what a shame it would be to have such a historical landmark of Lancaster disappear.

Bessie had always been active in the community. She was one of the founding members of the Lancaster Women's Club, founded in 1934, and with the help of fellow Women's Club members, was able to raise enough money to save the jail through fundraising and donations, including generous support from a Ball family member named Belle Ball Baker (later on her sister, Jessie Ball DuPont, became a supporter as well). The Women's Club cleaned up and restored the jail and began collecting books to start a circulating library in the jail for the use of the community. In 1958, the Mary Ball Memorial Museum and Library was established (its name was later changed to Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library) with the mission to "discover, collect, preserve, understand, and interpret the history of Lancaster and surrounding counties."

Of course, the MBWML was named in honor of one of Lancaster County's most well-known natives, Mary Ball Washington. Karen Hart, the museum's executive director, says that because of the

name, visitors often mistake the museum site for the birthplace of Mary Ball. "Mary Ball was actually born a few miles from the museum on a farm called Epping Forest Plantation, though she left at age three," she explains. Hart notes that, considering Mary Ball Washington's historical significance as the mother George Washington, not a lot is known about her childhood in the Northern Neck, where she spent most of her life, yet she still has an important presence at the museum. "Her family [the Balls] are one of the oldest families to settle in Lancaster and have had [and continue to have] a significant presence in the Northern Neck and throughout Virginia," Hart says. And though the young Mary Ball didn't spend her entire youth in Lancaster, she most likely came back and visited friends and family frequently. It's fascinating to think that, as Hart puts it, "whatever childhood she experienced in Lancaster and the Northern Neck, it had an influence on how she raised her children."

In fact, Mary Ball Washington will be the subject of one of the MBWML's upcoming exhibits in late October that will take a look at how Mary has been portrayed by American painters. This topic will be interesting because there aren't many known portraits of Mary Ball Washington. "The exhibit will show how Mary Ball Washington has been captured by the American imagination through imagined scenes and portraits," says Hart.

The museum and library have come a long way since the Old Jail. It now includes other buildings and sites in the Lancaster Courthouse Historic District, an area listed on the National



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- 1- *The Old Lancaster Jail, saved by Bessie Pierce*
- 2- *The Old Clerk's Office was built in 1797 and was in use by the county clerk until 1937.*
- 3- *The museum works with local schools to offer educational programs for children*
- 4- *The Lancaster Court Day is a Lancaster tradition dating back to 1742 when the courthouse was moved to Lancaster.*

#### Register of Historic Places.

The Lancaster House, originally built around 1828, now serves as the main building of the museum, housing its rotating exhibits and a wonderful gift shop full of unique books about Lancaster County and Northern Neck history. The MBWML also consists of the Old Clerk's Office, the oldest standing building in the historic district that was used as the clerk's office until 1937, the original site of the Lancaster courthouse from 1742 to 1861, which once stood where the parking lot is now located, and the courthouse green, a field between the Old Jail and the Lancaster House where "Court Days" used to take place.

A small building just across the road from the Lancaster House now holds the library's extensive collection. The library has become a repository of much of the Tidewater region's rich history, particularly the history of Lancaster County. "What's unique about Lancaster," says Hart, "is that its records were never sent to Richmond during the Civil War, where most Virginia

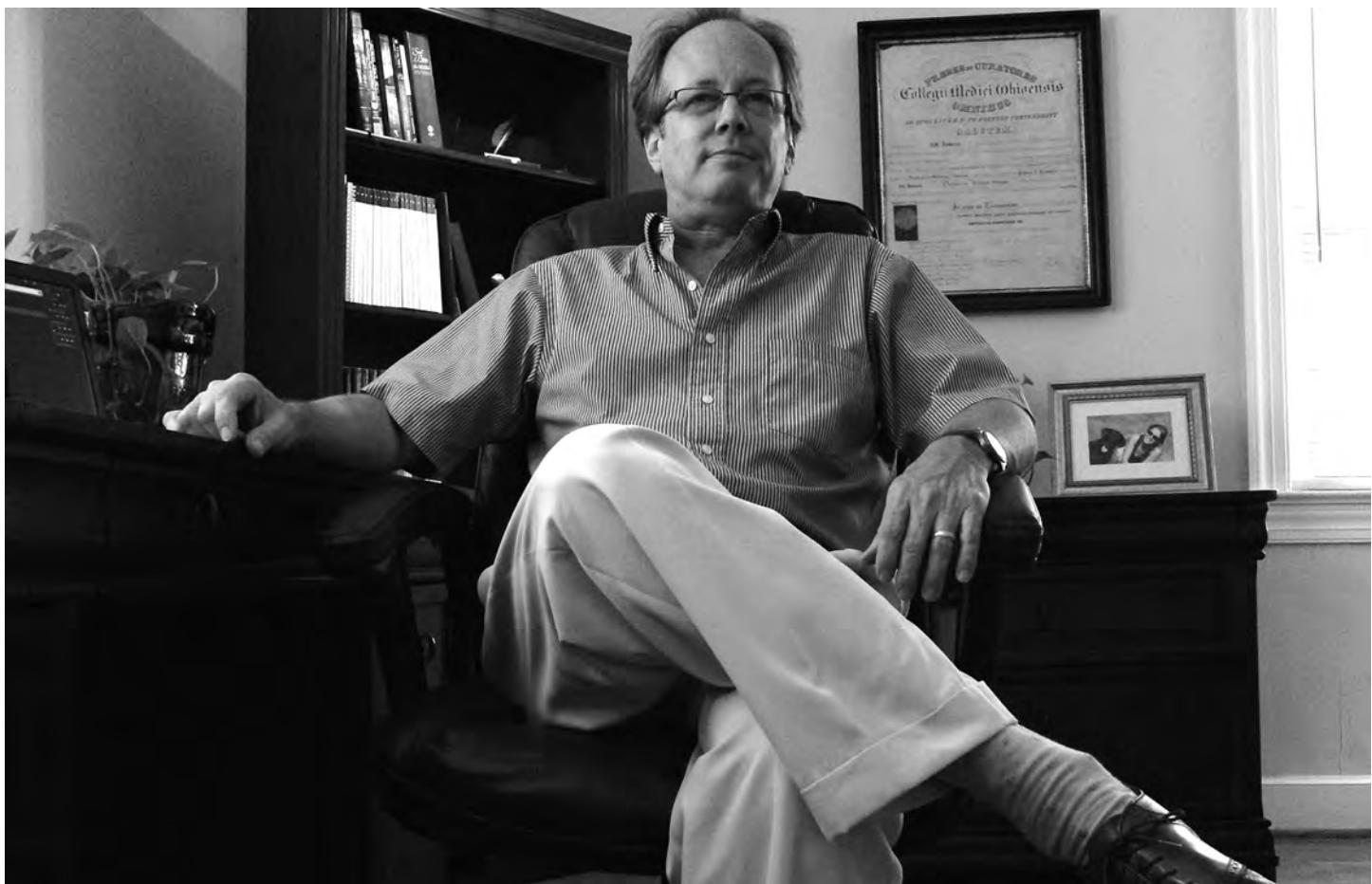
county records were burned due to the war." For an unknown reason, Lancaster didn't follow the state's orders for counties to send their records to the capital. Lancaster's records have remained intact since the early colonial period as a result.

The library has become a popular destination for those trying to learn more about their genealogy. Hart says that people have come from as far away as Australia and England, not to mention from all over the U.S. and Canada, to try to trace their familial roots. She adds that the library does not feel threatened by the role the internet has played recently in genealogical research. "People still come here because they want to see the original documents in person, walk on the ground where their ancestors walked, and talk to people who may know more about their family. A name on a scanned document on a computer screen is often only one part of the story."

The library is also extending its collection to help African Americans connect with their roots and stories with the

"Closing the Gap" project. Since the early 2000s, the library has been collecting oral recordings of the Northern Neck's elderly black community in which they talk about their family and experiences of living in the region. At the completion of the project, the library plans to host a reunion of family members to gather and celebrate the oral histories that will help preserve the history and culture of African Americans in the Northern Neck for future generations.

The museum hosts a number of events every year to engage the community with the history of the region. Two of the most popular are the Fall Oyster Roast in November and the annual Court Day, which is a sort of reenactment of the traditional Court Days that used to take place every month in Lancaster. It is through events like these, along with the impressive historical record collection of the library, projects like "Closing the Gap," and the museum's exhibits, that allow visitors to connect to the complete story of Lancaster County, the Northern Neck and its people. *pl*



# Social Security

*What does it mean to you?*

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By Gregory Stringfield AAMS  
Investment Advisor Representative

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**S**ocial Security is a subject sure to ignite many opinions and anecdotal stories, but it should not be ignored as it affects your entire retirement savings. Yes, that's right. Your decision when to take social security impacts directly the type of investments needed in your IRAs and 401(k). Here's where planning in advance can save you. Planning in advance identifies important investments you need to buy five or ten years *before* your retirement date which help you avoid pitfalls in retirement when it's too late.

Do not dismay and please don't procrastinate, for there are resources and a few easy tips to help you focus on your particular situation. This presentation addresses only general rules; therefore, you'll find convenient links to the social

security administration's website where you can find answers to your particular situation.

## Individual Benefits

One of the most important factors in determining your benefits is your retirement age. You may file at age 62, at full retirement age (FRA) or at age 70. FRA is commonly considered normal retirement age and this varies with your birth year. For example, persons born in 1955 obtain FRA at 66 years and 2 months. Filing at FRA is not mandatory as you may decide to file beginning at age 62 or anytime up to age 70.

**Filing at FRA:** This option is the most straightforward and provides 100% of your Primary Insurance Amount (PIA).

**Filing before FRA:** You may file as early as age 62 and at anytime up to FRA. However, your benefits are reduced according to how many months remain until your FRA at the time you file.

**Filing after FRA:** For every month you file after FRA, your benefits are increased up to the maximum age of 70.

So how does one decide when to file? The answer depends on your personal situation. Where have you heard that before? Fortunately, the Social Security Administration has easy-to-follow calculators and guides to help you determine your particular benefits. The Retirement Estimator calculates your benefits for ages from 62 to 70. To calculate your personal benefits, visit the Retirement Estimator on the social security website. <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/retire2/estimator.htm> On the same page, you'll find a helpful document titled, "What is the best age to start receiving retirement benefits?"

If a couple's income difference is large, a strategy known as file and suspend may be appropriate. This strategy allows the couple to begin their income stream at age 62 while still allowing the high-income spouse to maximize the individual benefit. Visit <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/retire2/suspend.htm> and "Retirement Planner: Suspending Retirement Benefit Payments."

## **Survivor Benefits**

A surviving spouse can receive up to 100% of the deceased spouse's benefit. Except in the case of an accident, a couple must have been married at least nine months at time of death. Survivor gets full benefit at FRA, and must be at least 60 (50 if disabled) for reduced benefit. Benefit is not available if surviving spouse remarries before age 60. Divorced spouse can claim

survivor benefit on ex-spouse's record if marriage lasted at least 10 years. Visit the Social Security Survivors Benefits: Protection You and Your Family Can Count On at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/survivorplan/>

## **Divorced Benefits**

If you are divorced, but your marriage lasted 10 years or longer, you can receive benefits on your ex-spouse's record (even if he or she has remarried) if: You are unmarried; You are age 62 or older; Your ex-spouse is entitled to Social Security retirement or disability benefits and the benefit you are entitled to receive based on your own work is less than the benefit you would receive based on your ex-spouse's work. Visit Retirement Planner: If you are divorced at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/retire2/divspouse.htm>

## **Medicare**

Don't forget Medicare at age 65. If you're receiving social security benefits in the month you turn 65, you will automatically be enrolled in Medicare. Otherwise, you will have to enroll yourself, and don't forget because you'll be saddled with a 10% penalty added to the Part B premiums for each 12-month period you delay, and this penalty will continue for the rest of your life.

Medicare Part B is not free. When you enroll in Medicare Part A, you will automatically be enrolled in Part B where premiums will be deducted from your monthly social security benefits. If you want to decline Part B, you must tell the Social Security Administration.

## **Retirement Investments**

Once you've determined a social security retirement date, it is then appropriate to reposition retirement investments, as the selection of these investments largely depends on your lifestyle expectations. Here's where planning in advance can save you. Planning in advance identifies

important investments you need to buy five or ten years *before* your retirement date. Planning at the retirement date restricts your options and begs the questions, "Why didn't I do this years ago? Will I run out of money?"

It's simply not a question of finding the hottest, best performing investments. If you prefer a consistent predictable retirement, you may lean towards blue chip dividend stocks and guaranteed investments. If you have more flexibility, there are industry specific stocks and alternative investments that may allow you to focus on certain sectors. Let's not forget Medicare. If you choose to retire at age 62, do you need investments to provide for your health insurance premiums until Medicare kicks in at age 65?

Keep it simple by starting to put the parts together step by step: Social Security, Medicare and retirement investments. It will be a relief to know you have a plan for you, designed by you. If you don't have a plan, the IRS will make one for you. *pl*

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# Wildlife Habitat at Sandy Hook's Pinegrove

*A Paradise of Mother Nature*



This essay appears in *A Long View from Sandy Hook's Pinegrove* by Ruby Lee Norris (PL Books, 2013). Ruby Lee Norris, who contributed to PL over the course of twenty years, passed away in March 2012.

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By Ruby Lee Norris

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Imagine walking toward your front porch and seeing a squirrel perched on the edge of the gutter peering at you. Imagine opening the casement window in your bathroom and having a squirrel hop away from the latch! Jasper and Jessica, as we named them when they arrived years ago, have multiplied and established residence. That is a peek at what is happening at Sandy Hook's Pinegrove this summer.

Since 1998, when we received the National Wildlife Habitat (NWH) designation, we have faithfully maintained a wildlife habitat—an environment where a plant and an animal is normally found, as described by NWH guidelines—and, incidentally, “where a person usually resides.” We are discovering that co-existing with Mother Nature’s wildflowers, plants and feathered, flying and

crawling critters requires a bit of give-and-take.

Long before the NWH designation, we allowed wild orange daylilies to flourish where they are normally found on the bank of a swale that drains toward the creek. Now there is a half-acre swath that bursts into orange flames every June. This is a fancy way of saying that our “ditch lilies” have run amok.

“Where did the wild daylilies originate?” I asked David Moore, our Virginia Tech Extension agent.

“Lilies come from Asia. I will send you some material about them.”

First of all, we must establish that daylilies are not true lilies (genus *Lilium*). They were identified and named *Hemerocallis* in 1753 by Linnaeus, the great naturalist. The name comes from two Greek words meaning “beauty”

*I look at the old well house that stands over the original brick-lined well on our property and I think that I am joining my ancestors in observing the many critters*

and “day,” for each flower of the daylily lasts only one day. A daylily aficionado told me that the flowers are at their peak at eleven o’clock in the morning in our area. I have discovered that both wild and cultivated daylilies are full blown and holding at that hour.

Pursuing my curiosity about their origin, I asked Bruce Parker, Curator of Horticulture at Virginia Living Museum in Newport News if wild daylilies are planted in their Jamestown colonists’ history garden.

“No, they were not here then,” Bruce replied. “Wild daylilies escaped from gardens planted by colonists.” Another source identifies the orange-flowered daylilies as a *Europa* clone that has naturalized along the roadways, in old cemeteries and in abandoned gardens.

Be sure to understand that these orange lilies are not tiger lilies, as they are sometimes called. If you have them growing in a spot on your natural landscape, you might refer to them as “plantation” lilies, as I heard a gardener in Colonial Williamsburg describe them.

Emily Townsend, a Garden Club of Middle Peninsula lily and iris specialist, says that these lilies, as other daylilies, can be transplanted from mid-summer through September. As you can understand, they are hardy, like full sun, do not require fertilizer and like acidic soil (pH 6 to 6.5) with good drainage and humus.

As I watch Jasper, Jessica and family scurry along the trunk of the magnolia tree outside the kitchen window, I realize that from almost every window in our home we watch the busy lives, not only of the squirrels, but also of the rabbits and birds. A pair of doves has declared dominion over the space under the bird feeders, as well as beside the birdbath and watering bowl on the

ground. I saw one of the doves with wings outspread hop, hop and hop belligerently toward a squirrel that was drinking water from the bowl. The squirrel scampered away.

Mrs. Rabbit and Peter Rabbit rendezvous every day at twilight for at least half an hour by staking out private spaces about twenty feet apart. They chew the grasses, watch each other, and on some secret signal, hop off together and disappear in the back field.

Our birds are territorial according to size: the big, noisy ones—mockingbirds, woodpeckers, blue jays and robins—live in the front yard. The bluebirds live along the fence row. Goldfinches, purple finches, sparrows, tufted titmice and chickadees live in the back yard and among the trees and natural growth there. Sometimes, from undetermined locations, a rufous-sided towhee, a red-winged blackbird, or a white-breasted nuthatch climbs down the trunk of the tree head first to visit our sunflower seed feeder.

A surprise visitor this summer was Gertrude, the groundhog who nested under the old kennel ramp. She and her one (thank goodness) offspring take turns poking their pointed noses out at the corner of the ramp and sitting in the shade of the trees in the front yard. They do not flinch when we stare at each other. I have always associated groundhogs with a farmer’s bean field. There must be some wild grass here that they like. We know that groundhogs chewed conduits for a heat pump system under a house in the neighborhood. So Gertrude is unwelcome here.

I asked animal control what to do. They said, “You can’t catch

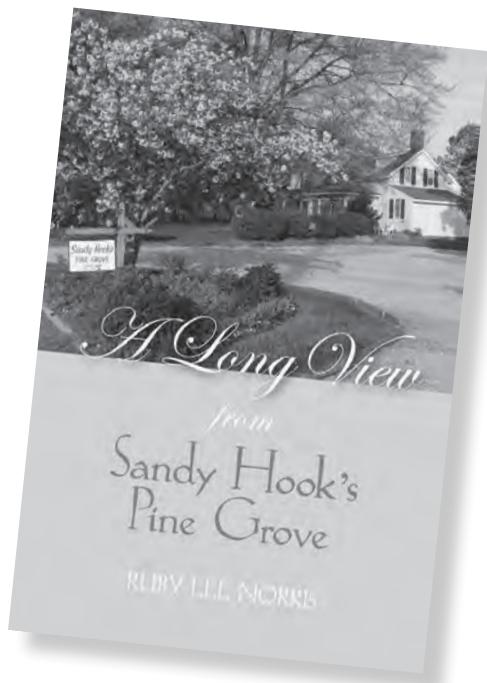
a groundhog in a trap. You will have to wait until the baby grows up and they leave. At that time, board up their burrowing space with chicken wire.”

This represents the challenging side of co-existing with Mother Nature. Big Jim, the fat grandfather black snake, and his offspring, live in the deep part of the swale where the water collects after a heavy rain. Lizzy Lizard and her offspring slither across the back steps and brick walk. Tiny earthworms wiggle out of the soil whenever we dig in a damp spot. We know that mosquitoes, gnats, horseflies and dragonflies will be sure to dart around every day.

On the other hand, the lovely iridescent blue and gold swallowtail butterflies (Virginia’s state insect) brighten the garden and yard. A box turtle has found the watering bowl near the bird feeder. He appears regularly and disappears mysteriously. No wonder he is one of the oldest critters on the planet, dating back to the dinosaurs, with almost no change in anatomy or in his instinct for survival, honed by millions of years of living and procreating.

I look at the old well house that stands over the original brick-lined well on our property and I think that I am joining my ancestors in observing the many critters—flying and crawling—and plants that have claimed this space. I wonder where Jenny Wren built her nest before we had a hood over the gauge of the propane tank where she now builds every spring. I listen to the chorus of spring peepers in the marsh on a rainy night and watch for the carapaces of the cicadas that mark the beginning of the shedding of bark from the crape myrtle trees, and I realize that Mother Nature and I co-exist in this national wildlife habitat by allowing space for each other.  
pl

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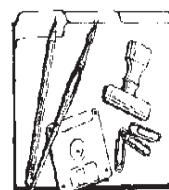
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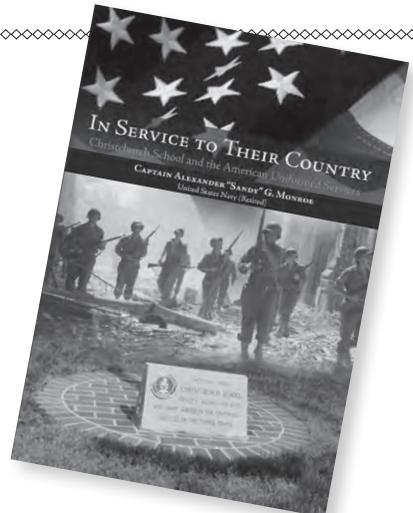
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