Contents

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Spring 2015

ESSAYS, ART & POETRY

3 Reefer Madness. By Randall Tremba
11 ARTWORKS Gary Bergel. By Marellen Johnson Aherne
14 POETRY Ginny Fite
15 EARTHBEAT Death of a Monarch. By Mark Madison
16 The Faeries in Grandma’s Garden, Part 5. By Eleanor Hanold

PEOPLE, PLACES & THINGS

4 The Empty Chair. By Claire Stuart
5 In the Center of It All. By Sue Kennedy
6 All Roads Lead Home. By Zakee McGill
7 Chapter Two: The Big Move. By Wendy Mopsik
8 Dickinson and Wait Gallery Turns 25. By Mary Bell
9 Meet Maestro Jed Gaylin. By Betty Lou Bryant
10 There’s Poetry in Shepherdstown. By Stephen Altman
17 Taking Community Seriously. By John Case
18 Philip Wenner. By Hannah Cohen
19 ARCHIVE John Wesley Harris. By Margaret Demer
20 St. Agnes Catholic Church. By John King

FAITH, HOPE & CHARITY

21 Religious Communities
22 Donors and Rumsey Radio Hour
23 Business & Service Directory

Cover Artist

Gary Bergel is a multidisciplinary Eastern Panhandle artist and teacher. Building on training in research science, photography, and studio arts, he is drawn to solitude and “seeing,” exploring and capturing the “isness” of things—light, layers, occurrence, nuance, silence, mystery, faith, beauty.

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GOOD NEWS PAPER
P.O. Box 1212 • Shepherdstown, WV 25443
Reefer Madness

Randall Tremba

Why does the government give our children the impression that alcohol is a safer choice than marijuana when clearly it is not?

Three years ago my son was arrested for possession and distribution of marijuana. He served time in federal prison. He deserved it, I figured, because he broke the law, and the law is always right. Or so I thought.

At that time I knew very little about the criminalization and demonization of marijuana. But I began reading books and reports and listening to law enforcement agents and health professionals, and I have come to believe that marijuana should be legalized, controlled, and taxed the same way alcohol is.

Six million Americans are in prison or under probation! More than half were convicted of nonviolent drug-related offenses. In most cases the drug is marijuana, and most of the inmates are young black men. (See The New Jim Crow; by Michelle Alexander.) The prison industry is booming and state budgets are breaking.

According to the Bible (Psalm 104), God gives us bread to make us strong and wine to make our hearts glad. For thousands of years, wine and cannabis—which is the proper name for marijuana—have relaxed many a body and made many a heart glad. Cannabis, like wine, also has many well-known therapeutic effects. But that's a different argument for legalization.

Take a little wine for the stomach's sake, the Apostle Paul advised his young friend Timothy. That's in the Bible. But so is this: Do not be drunk with wine.

Certain people should never ever again take a sip of alcohol. They are alcoholics, and the consequences of their drinking are dire.

Certain people should never ever again take a hit of pot. They are hooked, and their continual use of pot will do them great cognitive and emotional harm.

Millions partake of both of those drugs, and about 10 percent will become addicted. They are sick and need help. It's a serious health issue but it isn't a crime.

Still, there are many people who can drink alcohol or smoke pot with little negative effect; they do good work and never do harm to children or others. At least 200 million Americans use these drugs regularly and safely.

The three most popular nonprescription drugs are alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana. Each is harmful to the body and each creates social problems. Of the three, alcohol and tobacco are proven killers. Of those two, tobacco kills only its user (although secondhand smoke is no minor health hazard to others). Tobacco does not fuel violence toward others. Nor does pot. Only alcohol does.

Two popular relaxants—alcohol and pot. You might wish that they weren't available or that neither was ever used, but prohibition of alcohol is not coming back! Nor is universal abstinence likely to break out.

Ask almost any law enforcement agent or health professional which drug creates the most mayhem in society, which destroys more brains, more lives, and more families, which turns people violent, crazy, out of control, and guess which drug will be named?

It's hardly a secret! Those who abuse alcohol die by the thousands, including many young people. Why? Because with millions of dollars for propaganda—and billions to be made—the beer industry has romanticized and glorified alcohol consumption, especially for college students. It's a virtual patriotic rite of passage to get drunk as a skunk!

On many campuses if you get caught drunk, your wrist will be slapped. Get caught stoned, and you could lose your scholarship or student loan, be kicked off the football team, or go to prison. And good luck finding a job after that.

Every year thousands of adults and hundreds of students die from overdosing on alcohol.

No one has ever died from an overdose of pot.

No one. Ever.

Still, pot is not entirely safe. Children and youth should never use it, just as they should never use tobacco or alcohol. The American Psychological Association and the American Medical Association have published warnings that cognitive and neurological damage from early pot use is comparable to that from early alcohol use.

Both pot and alcohol can be harmful if misused or abused. And yet only one is illegal.

Pot isn’t illegal because it’s more dangerous than alcohol. It’s dangerous because it’s illegal. Drug dealers never ask to see an ID. And many drug dealers have more than pot in their pocket. Even so, alcohol, as it turns out, is a far busier gateway to other drugs than pot is. And yet alcohol is still legal!

Soon after Prohibition was repealed in 1933 and Americans could legally buy the “devil’s brew” again, something happened. Harry Anslinger, chief of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, proclaimed—without any medical or scientific support—that pot was the “devil’s weed,” a drug that drove users to rape and kill. He made it clear that this was a scourge mostly among Hispanics and blacks.

Instead of “cannabis,” the drug was now officially referred to as “marijuana” to associate it with Mexican farm workers in Texas. At that time William Randolph Hearst allegedly had financial and racist reasons to vilify Mexicans and cannabis. His nationwide chain of newspapers published lurid stories of murder and rape fueled by pot. It created national hysteria inflamed, in part, by the propaganda film Reefer Madness. Each state rushed to criminalize marijuana.

In 1972 the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse, headed by Republican Gov. Raymond Shafer of Pennsylvania, studied all the available evidence on marijuana and concluded: Looking only at the effects on the individual, there is little proven danger of physical or psychological harm from the experimental or intermittent use of the natural preparations of cannabis.

That report was rejected by President Richard Nixon, who was convinced that Vietnam War protesters were crazed by pot supplied by communists. He wanted hippies sent to jail. And thus began the “War on Drugs,” the militarization of police forces, the packing of prisons, and the terrorizing of otherwise law-abiding Americans.

During this “war,” 40 to 50 million Americans have continued to smoke pot. Why? Because they see through the government’s lies.

Since 1965 more than 20 million citizens have been arrested for possession. Not all went to prison, of course. But nearly all of them had their lives ruined in one way or another, and nearly all live under constant dread of re-arrest and imprisonment.

We are a nation of laws. I do not advocate breaking this law. I advocate changing it so that our children and our grandchildren will have a chance, a real chance to know the truth, the real truth, about the real dangers of both alcohol and cannabis, and so that adults in our nation can have the legal right to choose—as they once did—the one that is really far safer.
The Empty Chair

Tales of a Cat

Claire Stuart

The rocking chair in front of the potbelly stove in O’Hurley’s General Store sits empty now—but not quite. It is decorated with pictures and cards from friends of Milo the Magnificent, the cat who held court here for 14 years and passed from this earth just before last Christmas.

Sitting in front of the fireplace in the Great Hall, Jay Hurley reminisced about the long life of this very special feline. He recalled that some 14 years ago, they had lost their store cat, and after a few months, they were ready to get another.

“We started doing cat interviews,” says Hurley, “and we were offered many cats. Milo was accepted on the second interview—because Genevieve, our manager, wasn’t here the day of the first one.”

Milo was about three years old and had showed up at someone’s house with two kittens in tow. “He was intact,” said Hurley, “and any male cat that would look after two kittens obviously had a lot of heart.”

Milo moved in, but he wasn’t sure about the place. Hurley recalled, and for the first several weeks he was less than sociable. The crowded store has more than its share of interesting hiding places, and search parties would set out to find Milo and coax him out, only to have him run back to his hidden lair. He finally started coming out of his own volition, especially when he was hungry.

Eventually, Milo made himself at home, going outside to sit on the deck, then coming in to sit in his favorite chair by the stove.

“I had to tag the chair ‘not for sale—Milo’s chair,’” Hurley laughed.

Townfolk and visitors alike all fell in love with the big fluffy-maned cat, and everyone wanted to pet him. Hurley says that it wasn’t unusual for people to stop in just to see Milo.

“One time a car pulled up, all four doors opened, and a bunch of people got out. Everyone came in and petted Milo, and then they all got back in the car and left. I guess they had to get their Milo fix!”

People often brought in pictures of Milo that they’d taken or found on the Internet. One woman said that she’d seen a picture of Milo on the refrigerator of a friend who lived in Ohio! “Milo got so famous that we made a postcard of him,” says Hurley. “Everyone wanted to take him home, so Genevieve said, ‘You can take Milo home for 50 cents.’”

Milo liked people, but even a much-loved cat has his limits. He had decided that a spot on a shelf behind the counter was his place of refuge. Says Hurley, “After a long day of being petted, he’d go to his hidey hole behind the counter.”

They kept tissue paper on the shelf, and Milo’s determined efforts to claim the site and make it into a snug nest was ruining the paper, so the paper was moved and a cushion was installed for his comfort.

O’Hurley’s Great Hall vibrates with music every Thursday night, when folks gather for the weekly jam sessions. While some animals flee at the sound of live music, Milo enjoyed it. When the music began, he’d saunter in, looking around intently and yet ignoring the overtures of people who tried to make up to him. He was a cat on a mission.

“He’d act like he was seeing or sensing something that we couldn’t see,” recalls Hurley. “But Milo definitely had something important in mind. He was looking for the perfect lap. He’d find one, even if it was a stranger’s, and he’d jump up and curl up there and listen to the music.”

Hurley never claimed Milo as his own. “He wasn’t my cat,” he says. “He was the store’s cat, everyone’s cat. My animals were my 120-pound black dog, Bear, and my horse that I had 20 years. Dogs have a master, cats have a staff!”

Milo would sit by the door until someone would open it for him. When he was ready to come in, he’d stand up on his hind legs with his paws on the door until someone would let him in. “Sometimes he’d play the starving cat routine at shift changes. He knew that the new shift wouldn’t know whether he’d eaten or not, and he’d get them to feed him. He got up to 22 pounds and I had to tell everyone, when they started a new shift, not to feed him.”

Milo came and went as he pleased, and he knew his territory to the end, even when he got old and his eyesight was failing. He was road-wise, as he’d have to be to survive in O’Hurley’s location. Once he vanished three days in a snowstorm and they thought they’d seen the last of him, but he came back.

“He didn’t act like he was hungry, so some neighbor probably took him in and fed him.”

He was very healthy up to the end. He ruled the store for 14 years and was about 17 when he died.

Nobody knew exactly how old he was, so the vet looked in his mouth and gave him a birthdate. They didn’t know what kind of cat he was either, and the best guess was that he was a Maine Coon–Himalayan mix.

Milo died of a blood clot the week before Christmas. “Someone gave me a piece of aromatic cedar and I made a coffin,” says Hurley.

For the Thursday night jam, they had a memorial for Milo. “We played ‘Eternal Friendship’ because everyone knew the tune. Then we wanted to end on a more upbeat note, so we sent him off with ‘Fat Cat Fandango.’ We didn’t talk much because nobody could talk much without breaking up. There were a lot of adult tears. It was the end of an era. Sunday morning we buried him.”

Will they get another store cat?

“The right animal will show up,” said Hurley. “I’m voting for an orangutan next time!”

Claire Stuart loves to write about animals and their people. Do you know any special animals? E-mail: clstuart@wv.net
In the Center of It All

Sue Kennedy

Have you ever stopped to realize that spring is the only season that bursts into your life? Every year summer slides in, autumn unfolds, winter creeps up, but spring bursts. One morning you wake up and the air has gone from chilly to sweet. Little sprouts and buds are popping up all over the place; the robins are back and everyone’s in a good mood. Early springtime is a magnet for those who just want to get out, shake off winter, and enjoy Mother Nature as she prepares a full bloom of her magnificent finest. And it’s here.

Shepherdstown, widely known for the charm of its location and historic authenticity, is at its breathtaking best in the spring. That is just one of the many reasons it hosts visitors from all over every year. Spring calls in the beginning of the year-round visitors’ season.

Right in the heart of the town, at the corner of South Princess and East German Streets, in the old Entler Hotel, is the Shepherdstown Visitors Center. It offers everyone, townpeople and visitors alike, a trove of knowledge not only about Shepherdstown but also about other points of interest in the area. The visitors center is a welcoming repository of information but never as excitingly so as it is today under the direction of Jan Hafer.

Hafer grew up in Middleway and Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Her parents, Rachel and James Hafer, and their five children lived in Middleway until their home was destroyed by fire. The Hafer family moved to downtown Shepherdstown and settled in the Trinity House (the old Snyder House). James Hafer was a professor of history at Shepherd University.

Hafer graduated from Shepherd with a degree in education in 1974. She went on to earn a master’s degree in deaf education from Western Maryland College and then a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from the University of Maryland. Thus began her 38-year professional career in the education of children who are deaf. She taught deaf children in Martinsburg, the West Virginia School for the Deaf in Romney, the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick and Columbia, and, for the 20 years preceding her retirement, at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. There she was the director of the general studies program supervising a faculty of more than 60. She has published articles on deaf education and early intervention. In working with deaf children, her passion and focus is the critical importance of early parental intervention. “If you can just work with the parents of a deaf child, get them involved, the outcomes have a much better chance of being successful for the entire family.”

In 2009 Hafer moved back to Shepherdstown with an eye toward retirement and began looking for ways to serve the community. Fluent in American Sign Language, one of the fastest growing languages in the world, she along with Donna McAleese and Karen Valentine established a conversational sign language group, Sign Chat. It meets every Thursday morning at 9 a.m. at Mellow Moods. Everyone is welcome, regardless of skill level.

She has been director of the Shepherdstown Visitors Center for more than three years. Under her directorship, the center has remained the town’s first stop for information, but it has branched out to major involvement in townwide events.

This year, for the second time, Shepherdstown celebrated Halloween with BooFest. Spearheaded by Hafer, BooFest was organized by BEST, a committee under the auspices of the visitors center whose purpose it is to help organize festivals and events to attract visitors to Shepherdstown. The weeklong festival, with the Vampires Ball, Haunted House, horror movies, and more, culminated with the traditional and wildly popular Halloween Trick or Treat night on October 31.

This year, in order to attract even more holiday visitors to Christmas in Shepherdstown, a 20-year tradition, Hafer, with co-chair Pam Berry and committee members Meredith Wait, Judy Shepherd, and Amy Boyd, planned the expansion of events. For as long as she’s been director of the visitors center, she has worked to offer visitors, and others, the delight of visiting the Little House and the Little Barn. Today, she and Rachel Crum from the Office of Student Engagement at Shepherd have succeeded in expanding the schedule and opening the house and barn on a regular basis with the help of Shepherd student volunteers.

From Thanksgiving weekend to the Sunday before Christmas finds Shepherdstown a festival town with a monthlong series of holiday events.

Hafer is one of the most recognizable faces around, supporting town and Shepherd University events and local shops and restaurants. You could say that, like the Shepherdstown Visitors Center, Hafer is an ambassador of goodwill. It’s not just her supportive work that makes her so well liked; she has an award-winning smile and knows how to be a good friend.

Jan Hafer, the forward looking, inspiring, and intelligent director of the Shepherdstown Visitors Center is proud of the work being done and the innovations being made. “People come to Shepherdstown to shop, sightsee, and eat,” she said. “Through offering expanded family-friendly activities, we’re going to give people more reasons to visit and keep them coming back. This wouldn’t be possible, though, without a volunteer corps. We have 35 dedicated, enthusiastic volunteers, and they all bring their own special way of welcoming visitors to our town. That’s a healthy number, but we always need more.”

When she has a little downtime, Hafer spends it with her daughter, the beautiful Annelise Frey, and her incomparable four-year-old grandson, Henry, at their home in Frederickburg. Henry also visits Shepherdstown frequently, and once you’ve met him you do not forget him. He is delightful, energetic, and adorable. Henry, like his grandmother, brightens every room he enters.

Sue Kennedy lives in downtown Shepherdstown and is really looking forward to spring.
“W hen they come out of the coal mine, black and white all look alike,” said Monroe Burger Jr. “I never heard my father talk about racism or incidents like that in the mine. I guess they all needed each other to survive.”

Burger doesn’t recall Jim Crow designations either, growing up as the son of a coal miner in McDowell County, West Virginia, south of Bluefield. Blacks and whites lived in single homes provided by the company in proximity to each other, and they all died from the same malady. The sheriff in his township was black. Burger’s father, a tough-as-nails disciplinarian, raised seven kids with a wife who worked at home. He could argue with whites over the price of the hunting dogs he bred, traded, and sold.

“They all died from black lung. But my father and one of his friends never looked sick from it. People said it was like a miracle that he lived to 83, his friend Roscoe to 90, like they had a charm on them,” he chuckled.

In high school Burger went to segregated schools, but he and his buddies could go to the town diner for hot dogs and a pitcher of beer on Fridays and fishing and hunting in the mountains without fear of lynching.

This was in contrast to the more vulnerable lives of his cousins in nearby Virginia, where, in disbelief that someone would actually try to kill him, he had to jump a fence to avoid being run over by a pickup truck of young, thrill-seeking white boys.

Soon after graduating high school he took off on a bus to Newark, New Jersey, to live with a brother. He later joined the Air Force.

Securing Minuteman missiles at Ellsworth Air Force Base would be the backdrop for Burger’s real introduction to the face of race hatred. In the small South Dakota town outside the base, he and fellow airmen went to a bar for some R&R but were told, “We don’t serve your kind here.”

A fight broke out, the military police were called, and the next day the commander informed the black airmen that they had not been “briefed” sufficiently about restricting themselves to a certain side of the town, “literally across railroad tracks.” So they confined themselves to the only bar there—inside a brothel run by three black women, and frequented, ironically, by white soldiers as well.

Shortly thereafter, Burger witnessed General Benjamin O. Davis Jr., the first African American Air Force general, descend upon the base to investigate the segregated practices and threaten to declare the town off limits to Air Force personnel unless the mistreatment stopped. The general returned a year later to confirm that Jim Crow had gotten better in Rapid City, South Dakota. But Burger opines that Native people were still routinely mistreated by whites.

A few years after his time in the Air Force, Burger met Barbara Kelly, a music and English graduate of Rutgers and Fairleigh Dickinson, and they married in February 1967. He completed his associate degree in business from Essex County College and then attended the New Jersey Institute of Technology. The collaboration between the handsome former airman and the beautiful vocalist has to date scored three children, four grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

Retiring to Shepherdstown after 32 years with General Motors, Burger says while smiling at his wife, “I’m sitting back now, but she’s still running.”

Barbara was born in Wilmington, North Carolina, where her father worked in the Navy Yard and her mother at home. When she was four, her parents moved their five kids to northern New Jersey where, she notes, she did not experience segregated public schools.

From running her own personnel agency in New Jersey for 12 years, to managing the Vocational Department of Job Corps in Harpers Ferry, to singing with Shepherd University’s Masterworks Chorale, Barbara Burger is driven by her desire to share knowledge and experience.

“I started out four years ago volunteering what was supposed to be a couple hours a week with the West Virginia Achievement Project, but it becomes a passion,” she says. “The kids become a part of you, and you want them to succeed. It’s my obligation to give back some of what I’ve learned. I have a need to give back to the world.”

She assists as many as 30 minority and first-in-family white high school students to enroll in advanced placement courses and hone test-taking skills in order to pass the national AP exams and put them ahead of the curve for collegiate success.

The two have different remembrances on how they ended up in Shepherdstown. He recalls a serendipitous discovery on a road trip with his best friend; she cites a more logical conclusion to her geographic research. What they do agree on is that they planned to move here along with very dear friends, another couple with whom they had traveled the country and the world. “We didn’t know anyone here, but it didn’t matter because our friends were going to build here too.”

The Burgers bought two huge rustic lots and proceeded to build their home on one, anticipating living side by side with their friends. Heartbreakingly, the husband of the other couple became ill and died. His widow decided to stay in New Jersey with her children. The loss is palpable.

Despite Burger’s assertion that he’s “sitting back,” he has joined a walking group that meets three times a week, followed by a coffee klatch. He enjoys fishing and hunting, is trustee at Asbury United Methodist Church, and runs after the couple’s six-year-old granddaughter who attends Shepherdstown Elementary.

And Barbara Burger isn’t satisfied teaching just her own precocious granddaughter or brilliant high school students. She’s embracing any kid from kindergarten through eighth grade with Spanish and music instruction, as well as tutoring in all subjects, if they find their way to Asbury Church’s “School Sharpener” afterschool program, open to all children in Jefferson County.

The road to their homestead opens out onto an expanse of snow-laden fields, as wide open as their hearts and the world they’ve traversed in seven decades. This is home for now, anchored by family, church, and the community they serve. Yet the Burgers describe their first trip to West Africa, and the tears that were shed on Goree Island, home of “the door of no return” for many enslaved people.

“That was really hard, very emotional,” Barbara Burger admits and lowers her gaze. Then she looks up with a gleam in her eye. “But when we first landed in Senegal, I had this sense, I heard this inner voice say, you’re home, you’ve come home.”

Zakee McGill does medical consulting, co-hosts “The Are You Crazy?!? Show” on Shepherd University radio, Wednesdays from 7:30 to 9 a.m., and is a proud and loyal member of his canines’ pack as well as the granddad of brand new baby Nalani.
Chapter Two: The Big Move

Wendy Mopsik

As platitudes, they abound. They are the stuff of commencement speeches; wannabe writers overuse them; and Disney movies animate them. But in fact they accurately describe Maria Cooper Allen, owner and originator of Maria’s Taqueria, now located in the Register Building at 108 East German Street. Some of these words and phrases that so aptly fit are passionate, zealous, exuberant, goal oriented; holder of lofty dreams, lover of friends and family, and believer in the good of the universe.

The Shepherdstown and Shepherd University communities and visitors to town know Allen as the face behind the counter at the tiny carryout restaurant that was sandwiched between Shepherdstown Pedal and Paddle and Two Rivers Treads on German Street. Conceived as a way to help her and her fellow students combat the recession, in June 2008 Allen created an affordable, user-friendly place where tacos filled the stomach and conversation filled the air.

Over her five and a half years in that location, Allen managed to employ 32 people, describing them as the kindest and most hard-working employees imaginable. Her safety net provided the mostly student work force with part-time jobs until they could secure something more permanent and more in line with their majors.

Fast forward to January 2015 when, many tacos later, Allen has moved, expanded, enhanced, and improved her original concept of an affordable, user-friendly restaurant. The new Maria’s Taqueria can now accommodate 25 seated customers who may choose to dine in or carry out, rather than six spaces for carryout customers. Staff has increased to 10 from the seven who came with Allen.

The commercially outfitted kitchen is spacious and efficient and now includes a fryer for chips and fish (because fish tacos require fried fish), allowing for more menu choices. Allen is excited about having the space to experiment with new ingredients and combinations. Pork belly with kimchee slaw, cilantro, and jalapeno aioli is just one of the fusion-designed dishes she envisions.

Additions to the new restaurant include a license to serve beer and wine, local music featured monthly, and a rotating exhibit of local art on the colorful walls.

“Our new theme is the sugar skull, which is seen in a large stenciled drawing on one wall of the restaurant and on our outside sign. During the Day of the Dead in Mexico, this symbol is a reminder to pay homage to past relationships but also to honor those who were supporters along the way,” explained Allen. “It isn’t meant to be dark or sinister but is really a happy recognition of those who brought us here.”

Various ceramic suns from the original taqueria decorate another portion of the wall. These represent expressions of luck and good fortune and were given to her by friends and family when she took the first leap into the food business.

Allen is both sunny and sentimental; she connects with symbols and mysticism but is grounded in reality. She is always looking ahead but hasn’t forgotten from whence she came. Where she comes from might explain a big part of the dichotomy. Her warm, congenial family currently lives in Tysons Corner, Virginia, and has a farm in rural Purcellville, Virginia.

Rebecca Allen, Maria’s mother, is proud of her daughter’s instincts and applauds her “journeys” as she called them. “I have always told her to do what makes her heart go pitter pat!”

Restaurateur Allen gives a nod to her mom’s Carolina background for the love of cooking and eating barbecue and to her mother’s insistence that the family travel beyond their comfort zone, where

she was exposed to more exotic cultures and tastes.

Sister Kate Aytes is a full-time mother who resides on the Purcellville farm with husband Jason, daughter Mackenzie and Cooper, gather to celebrate the launch of the new taqueria.

Maria Allen (top left) mother Rebecca Allen and sister Kate Aytes with Aytes’s children, Mackenzie and Cooper, gather to celebrate the launch of the new taqueria. Owner Allen is proud of her new commercial kitchen where a larger space, a fryer, and a griddle will allow for more menu choices.

Maria Cooper Allen, now located in the Register Building at 108 East German Street.

Wendy Mopsik and husband Stan eat everything and everywhere in Shepherdstown. We checked out the fish tacos with slaw and aioli and enthusiastically recommend them! Can’t wait to sample the funnel cakes.
Dickinson and Wait

Gallery Turns 25

Mary Bell

Time flies, according to Debbie Dickinson and Meredith Wait, partners and proprietors of Dickinson and Wait Gallery. They are genuinely surprised that their gallery, which features unique work by professional artists and craftspeople, turns 25 this year.

Wait moved to West Virginia from New England in 1972, when her father accepted a job as a lobbyist. “That makes me almost a native,” she quips. At first, the family moved to Rockville, Maryland. “I hated it,” Wait adds.

After a year in the suburbs, they longed for a rural setting, and they found Jefferson County. It reminded Wait of the rural Massachusetts countryside she loved, and the family made its home here.

Dickinson, an accomplished potter specializing in raku, moved to Shepherdstown from Baltimore in 1990 to pursue her art and open a gallery. She and Wait met, and a partnership was born.

The partners rented a storefront on German Street, where Grapes and Grains is currently located, and things literally heated up. Dickinson explains that to achieve the desired glazes and effects, the raku method of pottery requires firing pieces in a kiln and then placing them on a surface that flames. Meanwhile, Wait was working as a graphic designer in the same space, and both women were working with customers and clients.

“There was a lot going on, including billowing smoke out into the street,” Dickinson explained.

In addition to Dickinson’s work, the partners decided to offer the work of other artists and craftspeople. Their gallery features local, regional, and nationally known artists. Almost all of the artists shown at Dickinson and Wait are American—or North American; you’ll find a few Canadians’ work in the gallery. Over the 25 years they have been in business, they’ve developed relationships with artists that have lasted. Dickinson and Wait get together with their suppliers at wholesale and retail craft shows once or twice a year. “When we first knew our artists, everyone talked about their young children. Now everyone talks about grandchildren,” notes Wait.

Dickinson and Wait explain what they do in their own words: “Our mission for 20 years has been to carry the finest, most well-made (and often the cleverest) handmade art and craft in this country. We have a personal relationship with all of our 120 or so artists and have been friends with many of them for over 25 years. They are wonderful, professional craftspeople who work in one-person studios or have grown small craft industries employing other talented people in their town.”

In the 25 years since Dickinson and Wait Gallery opened, many craft galleries have gone out of business.

Dickinson and Wait’s formula for success is pretty simple. They discovered early on in their partnership that if they both like an artist’s work, it does well in their gallery. If only one of them likes it, chances are their clientele won’t be drawn to it. Also, Dickinson modestly credits Wait’s determination and perseverance.

“If it had been up to me, we would have closed in six months,” according to Dickinson.

Both Dickinson and Wait observe that a lot has changed since they first opened their gallery. They credit outstanding employees for allowing them to spend less time in the gallery and devote more time to community matters. In 2012 and 2013 Wait chaired Shepherdstown’s 250th anniversary celebration, an undertaking that consumed most of her time. She observes that it was both the most difficult and the most rewarding project she’s ever undertaken, and it would not have succeeded without hundreds of other volunteers. Currently, she serves on Jefferson County’s Commission on Tourism. Another change Wait and Dickinson observe is that Shepherdstown has transitioned to an economy based on tourism.

“The Sweet Shop used to be a grocery store,” explains Wait. “And people came into town to transact most of their everyday business and for goods and services.”

The location now occupied by Greentree Realty was a full-service pharmacy; this was before Food Lion and Rite Aid located outside of town and before Maddex Farm was developed. Now, Shepherdstown is primarily a destination for cultural and recreational activities that the town, the university, and the natural beauty of the area offer. Also, 25 years ago, more of the houses and buildings along German Street were residential. Since that time, new businesses, the annual Contemporary American Theater Festival, and music and other programs at Shepherd University have brought an energy and vibrancy to downtown Shepherdstown that attracts visitors and residents.

Along the same vein, Dickinson and Wait agree that the relationship among business owners, the town, and the university has never been better. Mayor Jim Auxer, Shepherd University President Suzanne Shipley, and the Shepherdstown Business Association talk to each other, listen to each other, and work toward solutions for sticky problems—even parking. While parking is still an issue, Dickinson and Wait remain optimistic that it will be solved, balancing the concerns of residents, businesses, tourists, and students.

As for the future of Shepherdstown, Dickinson and Wait see that, most importantly, “The small town has remained small”—that is, there is a continuity of spirit that keeps Shepherdstown Shepherdstown. And, the town’s exciting, welcoming core is a place where entrepreneurs with new ideas can thrive, thanks to the support of the local community and visitors, whom Dickinson and Wait consider “the world’s best customers.”

As far as their own futures go, Dickinson and Wait have no plans to change the model of their gallery. It works just fine as it is. Perhaps someday they’ll retire, devote even more time to community activities, and spend more time enjoying what Jefferson County has to offer. We’ll find out in another 25 years.

Mary Bell is a Shepherdstown resident who enjoys strolling and shopping along German Street.
Meet Maestro Jed Gaylin

Betty Lou Bryant

In fall 2013 Jed Gaylin stepped onto the podium to conduct his first concert as music director of the Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra, a local orchestra founded in 2008 by then music department chair Dr. Mark McCoy. Since that time Gaylin has made friends locally, and audiences have been impressed with his talent, warmth, and generous spirit.

Gaylin, the third of four children (two boys and two girls), was born in Chicago, where his father was finishing graduate studies in psychology. When Gaylin was four, his family moved to Chevy Chase, Maryland, where his parents still live. He said, “I always loved singing. On car trips we would sing songs: rounds often or simply with spontaneous harmony.” When he was six, his father started learning to play the recorder, which fascinated his young son. Gaylin was given a recorder and, he said, “I couldn’t put it down. I learned to play it quickly.” When he was eight, his parents found an old spinet for him to start lessons. “I hurried home from school to immerse myself in that world of harmony and melody. I really did love to practice.”

He was an enthusiastic student, and he played flute in orchestra and band until he started attending Bethesda Chevy Chase High School. “I actually had no desire to play in the marching band so I pretty much stopped playing flute.” He continued studying the piano and performed as soloist: the Schumann Piano Concerto with the orchestra and one week later Rhapsody in Blue with the band. He was class valedictorian and won the Yale Book Award. He took his piano lessons at American University Preparatory Department and studied with Milton Kidd.

In the “It’s a small world department,” he said the music store about a half mile from his home “was a place of magic and inspiration for me.” This is where he bought his flute, his piano books, and his first orchestral score. Did you guess it? It was Ellsworth Studio.

After graduating from high school he enrolled at the Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio. He graduated with a bachelor of music in piano performance. This was followed by a master of music in conducting from Oberlin. During the summers he worked as a lifeguard for a couple of years, then moved on to playing piano for ballet classes throughout the D.C. area and in restaurants. “I performed jazz standards, show tunes, and some classics. I continued playing in restaurants after graduating from Oberlin, playing in Cleveland and New York City until graduate school at Peabody Conservatory where I received my doctor of musical arts.”

Early in his career, he was awarded the prestigious Presser Music Award to conduct in Russia and a

National Endowment for the Arts award to conduct in Mexico. Since then he has forged close relationships with musicians around the world and relishes making music in different countries. He is consistently invited for return engagements as audiences and orchestras are drawn to both his artistic and human qualities.

He has conducted numerous orchestras worldwide—in Barcelona, Spain; Beijing and Shanghai, China; Bucharest, Romania; St. Petersburg and Moscow, Russia; Poland; Italy; and Mexico as well as Naples, Florida; Nashua, New Hampshire; Baltimore, Maryland; numerous places in New Jersey; and Wheeling and Shepherdstown, West Virginia. In 2012 Maestro Gaylin was named artist in residence at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

Gaylin and his wife, Lia Purpura, were introduced by mutual friends from Oberlin between Oberlin and graduate school. Currently, they make their home in Baltimore where he is music director of the Hopkins Symphony. She is a poet and essayist and a writer in residence at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. They have an 18-year-old son, Joseph, who is an avid debater and is competing across the country.

Gaylin has been music director of the Hopkins Symphony since 1993, during which time the orchestra has grown in size, prominence, and artistry; it’s now one of the country’s most accomplished university orchestras. He was music director of the Loudoun Symphony, Leesburg, Virginia, for five years until he was offered the post of music director of the Bay-Atlantic Symphony, which performs throughout southern New Jersey, where it is based. The symphony is now not only consistently praised for its amazing level of artistry and precision but also viewed throughout New Jersey as a model for how professional orchestras can become a vital focus and source of identity in their communities. As a sought-after creative partner throughout the region, the Bay-Atlantic Symphony has forged residences with three area colleges, many towns, music festivals such as Cape May, and even casinos.

It is a remarkable accomplishment for a university the size of Shepherd, as well as a community the size of Shepherdstown, to have Jed Gaylin as musical director of the Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra. Although our population is small, our residents are culturally rich, and they appreciate opportunities such as experiencing this orchestra.

The next performance of the Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra is scheduled at 8 p.m. on March 28, 2015, at the Frank Creative Arts Center. The program will open with Béla Bartók’s Romanian Folk Dances, followed by two works featuring clarinet soloist David Drosinos: Paul Ben-Haim’s Pastorela Varíee and John Williams’ s Viktor’s Tale. The final offering will be Haydn’s Symphony No. 104 in D (“London”). Tickets are reasonably priced and can be purchased by calling (304) 876-5675 between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. or via www.sufom.org.

At noon on Friday, March 27, the Friends of Music Guild will host a luncheon at the Bavarian Inn. Special guests and speakers will be Maestro Gaylin and soloist David Drosinos, who will share information about the concert program to be played the following evening. For information about the luncheon, call me at (304) 876-3897.

Betty Lou Bryant has been a resident of Shepherdstown for 24 years. She has written a number of articles for the GOOD NEWS PAPER.
There’s Poetry in Shepherdstown

Left of the Bank, Beneath the Purple Roof

Stephen Altman

S hepherdstown’s premier annual poetry event is called Left of the Bank. This clearly makes no sense. Anybody standing on South Princess Street, in front of the converted bus garage where Left of the Bank is staged, can plainly see that it’s to the right of the Jefferson Security Bank. You stand there wondering, “Maybe I’m supposed to be inside the bank, looking out.”

But then you hear the story—everything in Shepherdstown has a story—that the current venue isn’t the original venue, and the bank isn’t the original bank. Moreover, the original bank wasn’t a bank at all, but the Yellow Brick Bank Restaurant at the corner of Princess and German. The original venue, which Left of the Bank outgrew, was a dress shop. The name, however, stuck.

In just a decade, Left of the Bank has become a major fundraising event for Friends of Shepherdstown Library. Half a dozen poets are chosen to read, musicians are rounded up to play, and FOSL volunteers are there with—as the program describes them—“delectable comestibles and libations.”

“But by now, it’s really a cherished local tradition,” said Christa Mastrangelo-Joyce, who owns Jala Yoga in Shepherdstown and has read twice at Left of the Bank. “The poetry and music, the food and wine, it’s a kind of ‘essence of Shepherdstown’—all these fun, quirky people gathered in a fun, quirky venue.”

Fun and quirky are probably apt words for the converted 1930s-era cinderblock bus garage that is the home of Carlos Niederhauser and Liz Wheeler. You can’t miss it. It’s got a purple roof. The first floor consists of one room measuring 40 by 70 feet. The walls are carmine; the floors are covered with oriental rugs; the ceiling is stamped tin. The room is an expanse of comfortable spaces defined by all manner of eclectic old furniture—couches, tables, bureaus, wine racks, bookshelves. And, oh, two grand pianos.

Among the room’s other contents are a dozen working computers, a dozen candelabras, a dozen chandeliers, uncounted works of art and photography, sculptures, Mexican masks, hand-made pottery, and fascinating tchotchkes from it, appears everywhere. It’s a room in which a bare surface is hard to find. A 19-year-old black-and-white cat named Sophie prowls it.

The owners each arrived in Shepherdstown in the 1970s. Wheeler, who is director of the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board, said, “This area tends to attract highly educated people who value the arts. Many who have moved here, and many who have lived here all their lives, make art and support others who do. They make music, they dance. There are craftspeople and writers and painters and photographers and theater people. We have what you’d call a high creative index.”

One day every April—National Poetry Month, by the way—FOSL volunteers appear at Wheeler and Niederhauser’s door to clear the center of the room for Left of the Bank. “It’s definitely all hands on deck,” said this year’s chairman and coordinator of the event, FOSL board member George Hanold. “For FOSL volunteers, it starts early and ends around midnight, long after the poets and musicians and the audience have gone. Hauling stuff to the venue, moving the furniture and the chandeliers, setting up tables and chairs for about 100 people, adding those extra touches like tablecloths and flower arrangements and real wine glasses, serving the drinks and home-made goodies. It’s a remarkable community effort.”

Hanold drew a breath. “And when it’s over, we put everything back the way it was. And wash the glasses.”

That Left of the Bank raises money for Shepherdstown Public Library programs is reason enough to go to all the effort of planning and doing, Hanold said. But he added that the satisfactions are broader. “Just by being there, we get to show how much we appreciate the things the library stands for—literacy, poetry, talent. And it’s great to have poets on hand to read their own work. Who’s going to do it better? You feel closer to the poet itself when you hear it from the poet.”

One such poet is Nancy McKeithen, who edits Fluent, an online literary journal. McKeithen has read twice at Left of the Bank. “Writing poetry is a private pursuit,” she said, “so it’s quite a moment when you’re in front of an audience and they’re reacting to what’s come out of you. So much was going on inside my head—preparing in advance, gearing up to read, getting up before so many listeners—that, afterward, I didn’t remember if they had applauded. But I do recall that, my first year, one of my poems made people laugh, and the second year, one of my poems made people cry. I liked that.”

Dylan Kinnett, who grew up in Shepherdstown and last year read at Left of the Bank, said he listens for something he calls poetry noise. “This noise is spontaneous and immediate. It happens right at the moment of impact—not politely at the end of a piece or a set—so you know it’s real. It’s the sound one makes upon realizing, recognizing, or remembering something. It usually sounds like a thoughtful hummm. That’s the good stuff right there.”

“I think it is because of the strong literary community in Shepherdstown that I became a writer,” he added. “I remember, as a teenager in the ’90s, hanging out with the Bookend Poets, who would meet at Four Seasons Books. I remember the other writers’ work, their voices as they read it, but most importantly, I remember their revisions, their process.”

Bookend Poets is no more, but Four Seasons Books remains. That so small a town supports an independent bookstore like this one is a likely indicator of what it values. But here’s another indicator: The store has six shelves of poetry. Are the owners simply poetry lovers? “Actually, we stock all this poetry because people buy it,” said Michael Raubertas, who, with his wife, Ruth, owns the store. “Nowhere in the country is poetry a big seller, but here we do comparatively well.”

When store manager Kendra Adkins was asked about all the poetry—at least a dozen volumes or more—by poets who have some local connection, she smiled. “There’s poetry in Shepherdstown,” she said.

Stephen Altman, who writes some poetry of his own, is new to Shepherdstown. He feels blessed to have landed here.

PHOTO BY WILFRED RAMIT

Summer Outing

by Nancy McKeithen

It is time to take them out, these children—put on their leashes, load them in the car or walk them single-file to town—along the back roads and ripening raspberries, in the hot July sun. They do not care how they get out, just that they do. Polished to a fine patina, bathed and combed for their debut, they are nonetheless edgy about meeting perfect strangers on this path.

Like a perfect storm where intent and outcome exist in a bad marriage. Will they like us? Too late to go back home—the mic on, the reading begun, she is the next poet up.

PHOTO BY MELINDA SCHMITT

PHOTO BY MELINDA SCHMITT

Left of the Bank

Friday, April 17, 2015, 7–10 p.m. For tickets and information, check the Shepherdstown Public Library webpage, the FOSL webpage (foslwv.org), or call the library: (304) 786-2783.
Looking Down to See Up
The Art of Gary Bergel

Marellen Johnson Aherne

Growing older for Gary Bergel isn’t a problem. Growing older is merely an opportunity to draw on more of his rich life’s material in the creation of his art.

A mixed media, multidisciplinary artist, Bergel creates photographic art, assemblages, and installations by looking for beauty in the everyday ordinary. “Life is a shaping room. What I create is a result of my daily experiences,” says Bergel.

Bergel considers the world around him to be his palette. And by keeping four questions constantly at the forefront of his everyday life, Bergel creates stunningly simple yet wildly complex images. Who am I? Where did I come from? What can I learn? How is what I do important to me? Bergel asks himself. And his answers result in quotidian visual poems.

Bergel is frequently looking down, not just up and out, in search of subject matter. Life’s litter becomes poetic when seen through Bergel’s eye. A beautiful landscape, shot using his iPhone, upon closer examination is found to be a street curb complete with the detritus of everyday life. A shot of a discarded McDonald’s french fry box becomes an intriguing, watercolor-like thing of beauty. The garbage of daily life becomes exquisite expressions of the world around us.

“Sometimes what I capture is autobiographical. It is somehow related to my life in the moment,” Bergel explained. He always carries his iPhone. Whether bike-riding, driving, or walking, Bergel is always at the ready to capture the “isness” of things, and the happenings and beauty surrounding him.

Bergel’s life has been nothing if not interesting. Growing up in the lake shore area of Wisconsin, he began experimenting with art materials as early as grade school. Educated and creatively nurtured by Franciscans, Bergel credits his passion for pastoral beauty and the environment, and being present to the here and now, to those formative years.

Bergel attributes his passion for science and his early training in film photography to a high school science teacher who supervised a photo club and opened his dark room for Bergel’s use. There his fascination with and appreciation for the minute particles of life were fostered. His combined passion for science and art has helped create a very practical yet ethereal worldview. To this day symbols of science, particularly the patterns of DNA strands, are frequently found in his mixed media works, which he sometimes calls specimen boxes.

Operating a photo studio from his mid-teen years, shooting portraits and weddings along with research internships, helped finance Bergel’s education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. There he pursued a degree in biology with a focus on botany and lichenology specifically. His passion for art drove him to a master’s degree in mixed media from the same institution.

“I studied under the renowned potter Don Reitz, the noted private press artist Walter Hamady, and was a classmate of Dale Chuilly. We were also mentored by visiting artists from New York and elsewhere, as diverse as abstract expressionist pioneer Milton Resnik (1917–2004) and American Realist painter Jack Beal (1931–2013). It was a great cross-pollinating time. For my MA degree show I mounted an environment, now called an installation,” said Bergel.

Bergel founded and directed Space Gallery, developed and taught a live Arts and Ideas humanities course in the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Michigan University. The curriculum incorporated visiting practicing artists such as composer John Cage, poet Nikki Giovanni, Stan Lee of Marvel Comics, along with painters, photographers, ceramists, and other visual artists. Yet another passion sustained him as well.

“I’ve always been interested in the life of the Spirit, intrigued by contemplative prayer, and have become dedicated to social justice work. I was fortunate to spend a good number of years doing neighborhood reconciliation and ecumenical work,” shared Bergel. Leaving Western Michigan University gave him the opportunity to become more actively involved in transdenominational networks and to work in community development domestically, in Native American communities, and internationally. His travels often fuel his art.

Bergel’s diverse interests and abilities can be seen in his art. “I poke people toward mystery,” said Bergel. The result is art that shows reverence for the ordinary. “My art adjusts to my spiritual condition and I am committed to stay in a state of listening, looking, and learning.” By doing this, his art reflects the majesty and beauty of creation in the mundane and the sublime.

Bergel and his wife, Susan, now an award-winning canary breeder, raised 10 children, including two adopted biracial daughters. “All are unique and wonderfully creative,” said Gary. They are engaged in photography, carpentry, surf- and skate-board design, engineering, dog breeding and training, blogging, teaching piano, and more. Gary and Susan live near Charles Town, West Virginia.

Gary is represented by the Bridge Gallery, Shepherdstown. He helped found the Washington Street Artists’ Cooperative in Charles Town, exhibits at the Berkeley Art Works in Martinsburg, West Virginia, and teaches as part of the adjunct faculty at Blue Ridge Community and Technical College in Martinsburg.

Marellen Johnson Aherne is a lover of the beauty and wonder of ordinary life.
GARY BERGEL

Specimen Box of Bees

Specimen Box (Butterfly)

Shadow on the Runes

The Runes of Evolution
How the Universe Became Self-Aware

SIMON CONWAY MORRIS

How did human beings arrive in a manner that can constitute unique possibilities? How did the Universe become self-aware? In The Runes of Evolution, Simon Conway Morris revitalizes the study of evolution from the perspective of convergence, providing us with a fresh history of life's development. This book reveals the compelling scientific evidence that the human form is more plausible than once thought. The insights and understanding of evolutionary biologist Simon Conway Morris are based on the fascinating insights of Gaia, the discovery of evidence of the earliest forms of life, and the extraordinary processes of evolution.

Young Poplars Near Shepherdstown
One Fallen Pod, Shepherd University

PHOTOS BY GARY BERGEL/
www.garybergel.com

SEE ARTWORKS IN COLOR
www.shepherdstowngoodnewspaper.org
Ginny Fite: Poems From The Pearl Fisher

Beauty for Ashes
Isaiah 61:3
In this narrow vessel
is only devastation,
blasted body,
blighted vision,
dead dreams,
days of mourning
in an urn of memory.
My offering is ashes.
I carry them before me
and ask to be ignited.

And by the word that was
before a whisper of the world,
they are taken.
In their place, a garland
of peace, a mantle of love,
for the lamp to light my path.

Table Etiquette
The spent Orchids fold themselves
into neat triangles like white paper
napkins left on the table by dinner guests
who have no intention of cleaning up.
I have removed some and placed
the petals in the red clay pot
on the dark dirt
as if they were an offering to the god
of flowers,
as a supplication for more of the same.
This is a failed religion—I don’t
really believe,
but surreptitiously I watch the pot
waiting for a miracle
that will defy my expectations.

In Particular
In any given lifetime
all the human things happen:
the most important people die.
Flesh, once substantial,
turns instantly waxen.
Someone says something ridiculous
at the service,
and someone unexpected weeps.
At graveside, casket lowering
into the ground,
the heart winds itself
around memories
like a child seeking
its mother’s arms.
The last person in the world
you thought would understand
folds you in a wordless embrace;
and the soul, patient as ever,
leans softly into the wind.

Alms
The news, as always, is laughable:
the old Soviet Union crumbling
and recombining, the most absurd
men running for president,
the country in deep disclaimed decline.

I put money in a Salvation Army tin,
the least I can do and the most.
I cannot, in good conscience,
keep the two coins and barley cakes
intended to get me through this hell
all to myself.

Particle/Wave Theory
for Hal
He mentions, casually,
the translucent green of wave
as the curl is about to break.

I think words like jade,
tourmaline, knowing (instantly)
 naming misses the point.

We point to a ship on the horizon,
breaking thought into syllables,
speaking the fewest:

Words anchor us.
We glance at a cloud piled black
on a sunset of hot pink stripes
in an otherwise cloudless sky;
nothing else is spoken.
In this clear air,
with sea the color of sky,
I watch as this son
like a bouquet of fresh cut colors
on an unprimed canvas
imitates the light.
Words arrive later.

Psalm
(after Etty Hillesum)
I am a kneeler in training.
I yearn for cold stone floors.

My body is meant for kneeling.
I kneel in the living room
among breadcrumbs on the carpet.
I offer my tenderness up to the sky.

I draw prayers around me like a wall.
I imagine a time when I shall stay
on my knees for days.
I kneel on the rush mat
in the cluttered bathroom.
There is sun outside
and this room welcomes my prayers.
I would like to brush a few words
against a wordless background.
I am a prayer for all the people
in the camps.
I shall retire into my own stillness.
I shall become the jasmine, dazzling
against the mud brown wall.

There will come a night, perhaps,
when I will pray for you.

Oranges on the Bus
You shake me. “It’s morning.”
But dark. “We must hurry.”
I dress in the cave of covers,
imagining bears who sleep all winter.
You wrench me from hibernation.

You take my hand down steep steps,
past rows of empty clotheslines—
too early for wash, they pin up sky
for sun to whiten.

We race for the bus.
Running beside you I promise myself
the smell of SenSen
when you open your purse.

Newark unfolds like a clenched hand.
I bloat it out with five fingers.
We reach the palm of the city.
You pull the black cord above the window.

You open the door
to a tall narrow house,
talk to a woman, point to me.
Someone unbuttons my coat.

On the way to the play yard
I pass my sister standing in a crib
in a room full of cribs.
Escape is a hard flame like hurryng.

You are the last to come.
The women talk about us in whispers.
Outside it’s dark again
and a long walk to the stop.

On the bus, you peel an orange
saved from your lunch.
City lights make windows
of your eyes.

Ginny Fite is an
award-winning writer
and editor and author
of I Should Be Dead
by Now, humorous lamentations about aging: three books of poetry, The Last Thousand Years, The Pearl Fisher, and
Throwing Caution, and a short story collection, What Goes Around. Her poems have appeared in the Shepherdstown 250th Anniversary anthology In Good Company and the 2011 gallery show Poetry Works on Walls. She was founding president of the Washington Street Artists’ Cooperative and a president of the Jefferson Arts Council. She directed Artomatic@Jefferson 2013, and was the inaugural managing editor of Fluent Magazine. She is at work on a third novel. These poems are from her book The Pearl Fisher.
Happiness is like a butterfly which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

It is rare that a species with 35 million members is considered endangered, but the monarch butterfly is in just such a situation. This most common butterfly of summer in many parts of North America has seen its numbers decline from an estimated 1 billion in the mid-1990s to around 35 million today. This alarming decrease has led the Fish and Wildlife Service to begin the process to possibly list the species under the Endangered Species Act. The causes of the monarchs’ decline are intimately tied to its status as perhaps our most interesting insect.

The monarch butterfly is as narrow in its diet as it is expansive in its travels. Like all butterflies, monarchs begin life as eggs and hatch as larvae that then feed almost exclusively on milkweed plants. After eating enough milkweed they become colorful caterpillars, which build a pupa. What emerges from the pupa is a bright orange-and-black butterfly whose tiny wings belie its immense journey.

The monarch migration is truly one of the wonders of the natural world. Monarchs east of the Rockies migrate up to 3,000 miles down to Mexico each winter just barely ahead of the fatally cold winter. Not all monarchs migrate; it is primarily those born in late summer or early fall. The migrating monarchs can actually make one round-trip journey before they die, having seen a huge swath of our continent, bringing untold joy to children and lepidopterists everywhere. It can take more than one generation for the northernmost butterflies to return to their spring homes, the migratory route being a tradition passed down through the generations. The ancestors of these migrants often follow the same migratory route, even occasionally returning to the same tree. It is an amazing journey and still one of the great mysteries that draw so many of us to biology. These migrating groups of butterflies are evocatively called a flutter of butterflies.

So far so good, but all is not well with the fluttering class these days. The once ubiquitous monarchs (the official state butterfly of West Virginia) are suffering a three-pronged attack on their numbers. First, they are suffering habitat destruction. In particular, their Mexican overwintering sites are heavily dependent on the Oyamel evergreen trees, the object of much recent illegal logging. Stands of these evergreens are a critical resource for the butterflies when they go into their winter diapause (or dormancy).

Climate change may also be affecting the butterfly and almost certainly will impact it greatly in the ensuing years. For these agricultural lands (and through dispersion) much of the surrounding environment. The correlation is inescapable. In the prime monarch habitat of the Midwest from 1999 to 2012, milkweed has declined 58 percent on farmlands, while in that same period monarch populations have declined 81 percent. It is a reminder that, 53 years after Rachel Carson wrote Silent Spring, we are still discovering new ways our agricultural ingenuity can accidentally disrupt the ecosystem.

The current state of monarchs is grim, not hopeless. Luckily, the primary cause of monarch decline can be remedied without trying to convince Americans to give up large agribusinesses, subdivisions, or roads (all sources of milkweed decline). A movement is afoot to create “Monarch Waystations” to plant milkweed and critical nectar sources in those remaining natural niches that are not regularly poisoned. These life-sustaining plants can be grown in backyards, schoolyard gardens, business parks, along roadsides, and any other piece of land that is not regularly used to grow a crop or lawn. This truly is a ground-up type of movement, while we wait for the butterfly to enjoy endangered species protection or for agribusinesses to develop less lethal herbicides—neither of which is likely to happen soon or guaranteed to happen at all.

In the interim citizen conservationists can plant milkweed patches, teach their children to build butterfly gardens, and take into their own hands the protection of this critical pollinator and neighbor. The monarch is the victim not only of greedy developers or chemical companies but also surely of our collective insatiable appetite for cheaper food, faster roads, and bigger houses. It is also affected by the accompanying growth of human habitat at the expense of the other 8.7 million species or so with whom we share this planet. By taking up seed and shoveling we can save both a species and a little bit of our soul.

In the 1970s, chaos theory came up with a charming metaphor called “The Butterfly Effect.” Edward Lorenz coined the phrase as he noted that minor perturbations, such as the flapping of the wings of a distant butterfly several weeks earlier, could lead to a change in weather hundreds of miles away. He wrote in 1979, “Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?” The idea being that very small disturbances can lead to very large consequences, removed both in time and distance. Perhaps we are undergoing another butterfly effect, and we can only hope that the current threatened status of the monarch will have a similar ripple effect in our attitudes toward habitat destruction, global climate change, and the cavalier manner in which we treat our fellow neighbors on this planet.

If the flap of a butterfly’s wings can be instrumental in generating a tornado, it can equally well be instrumental in preventing a tornado.

—Edward Lorenz (1979)

Mark Madison teaches environmental ethics, environmental history, and environmental film at Shepherd University.
The Faeries in Grandma’s Garden
Chris Makes New Friends

Eleanor Hanold

This is the fifth and final episode in a story for children of all ages. Did you ever think that it may hurt more when someone you love has a disability that cannot be seen?

Frankie and I (Nora) hope you remember that Drs. Foster and Petunia Blossom planned to take a vacation from their work at the Science Research Academy for Faeries. And what you might not know is that the Blossoms decided to enjoy the magic of Shepherdstown for their month off from the academy. Since the last time I shared with you, Chris has been enrolled in the Shepherdstown Boys Camp for Faeries on Rumsey Hill. For the first time in several years, he does not have to cook and clean and watch out for his sisters, Kylie and Amber.

At camp, Chris has been assigned to Faery Cabin 7. He is rooming with two brothers, Maxwell and David. Max is 16 and smiles a lot, no matter that a lot of the boys at camp make fun of him. Max’s younger brother David is 14 and gets along with everyone. He is really good at sports and is very sensitive. Chris Blossom, whom you know, is 13 and has learned to be what my grandma calls an astute observer—meaning he notices almost everything. Soon Chris realizes that Max does not catch on easily. Max looks like he could learn all right but he doesn’t focus for very long.

Chris decides to explain the game of hoops to Max and David, thinking that if Max could learn to play hoops, it might be a good way for the other campers to get to know him and to realize how neat Max is. Once Max and David seem to understand the game, Chris tells them that they will need to find another team to play with them.

Soon Chris, Max, and David run into the Bright brothers—John, Jackson, and Jason—from Cabin 4, who agree to try playing hoops. As he explains the game to them, Chris observes that John is very smart and polite, Jackson doesn’t pay attention and isn’t the nicest faery in the world, and Jason is confident in his sports ability but is very rude. “We’ll need a referee,” Chris says. John Bright suggests his friend William Upandup. William has a reputation for being honest and fair, which are important qualities in a referee.

The Blossoms already have set up a circular field for Chris and his friends. The two main hoops are painted blue and red. A bucket has been filled with acorns. Since the game of hoops involves fast and furious flying and everyone but Chris is a beginner, it is decided that the first team to score in each game will be the winner. The two teams are ready.

William blows the whistle! Max receives the acorn from Chris, flies swiftly to score, but dumps it in the wrong (red) hoop! Jackson and Jason laugh at Max’s mistake. David yells to Max not to feel bad and to keep playing. David and Chris intercept the acorn from the red team when Jason shoves Jackson out of the way so he can catch the acorn from John. Max catches the acorn again and this time he goes to the right (blue) hoop but flies through it with the acorn in his hands! Jackson and Jason shout: “Two nuts went through the hoop—an acorn and a boy named Max.”

Max gets so upset that he lands on a nearby tree, hitting his head on a branch. Jackson and Jason shout: “Poor Max. Hit his head and now he’s red, not that we want him on the red team!”

David angrily slaps the acorn away from Jason and Chris yells to Max to look out. Max looks up, sees the acorn coming toward him, reaches out to catch the acorn, slaps it hard, and the acorn flies and falls through the blue hoop. William throws his arms in the air and shouts: “Max scores. The blue team wins the first game!” David yells: “Max, you did it!” Max, stunned, says: “I did it?” and then falls out of the tree. Jackson and Jason fly off, shouting “We’re done here. Max is such a nut. You guys just got lucky!”

Chris and David help Max up and each puts an arm over his shoulders as they walk back to their cabin. David tells Max that he shouldn’t pay any attention to Jackson and Jason, that they are just sore losers. Max shrugs and says: “I really don’t care.” David shouts, “Well, I do. You are my brother and I don’t want anyone talking about you that way.”

Each faery cabin has only one room with a fireplace, three beds, a table and chairs, and a dresser. Cabin 7 is especially neat and cozy. David sits down by the fire and begins to scratch his dog Cocoa’s ears. “Why,” he wonders as tears run down his cheeks, “do faeries pick on my big brother?” He asks Max: “Why can’t faeries see what an amazing guy you are? You’re always smiling, you try, and you never complain. I can’t be that way; things get to me.” Chris puts his hand on David’s shoulder and says he understands. Max hangs his head and sighs.

Cocoa starts to bark. John and William are outside. They say they have an idea and Chris invites them in. “So sorry about my brothers,” John says softly, “They are such bad sports. William and I were talking. Is there any reason we can’t play hoops with teams of two? We think it’s a great game! We can choose up sides each time before we play.” Chris, David, and Max look at each another.

Max grins and says: “Come on guys, let’s play hoops.”

Eleanor Hanold believes that all families are exceptional and that all family members have exceptional needs.
Superintendent of Schools
Alan Sturm
Taking Community Seriously

John Case

L ifelong West Virginia educator Alan Sturm, now 74, retired in 1998 to Shepherdstown with plenty to do. His vast—and still accumulating—collection of West Virginia political memorabilia includes interviews, buttons, autographs, baseballs, and correspondence associated with many political figures in the state, the high and the low, the good and bad. These items alone could continue to entertain and enlighten him, and his fellow citizens, for the rest of his life. His enthusiasm for West Virginia politics, and cooperative projects with Dr. Ray Smock, director of the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies at Shepherd University, could consume most every day. His compilation and editing of interviews with the late Senator Robert Byrd is an ongoing project. He promises we will hear more about it in the near future.

Sturm’s two children and six grandchildren, including one grandchild still serving in Afghanistan, are more than a sufficient source of pride, devotion, and hope. The challenges, frustrations, and exertions of upstream swimming that come with highly responsible and visible public positions, like superintendent of schools in Jefferson County, would make some shrink in dismay.

Nonetheless, upon his retirement and relocation to Jefferson County from Upshur County, Alan Sturm learned the lesson of confessing he had retired here. He immediately became a candidate for a host of community services supported by volunteers. He joined the board of the Shepherdstown Day Care Center, and in 2004 he headed the call to get involved in education by getting elected to the school board, serving as its vice president until 2012, when urgent family matters compelled him to not seek re-election.

Yet we are not surprised that those who have led productive and rewarding working lives should respond to the call to service from their community or country. It is a strong West Virginian, and American, tradition. It is perhaps more surprising that we take less advantage of the talents of our retired population than we could. It is a testament to his commitment to service that upon resolution of family concerns, Sturm chose to run again for school board this past fall. A hiatus from politics is often a liability. In an atmosphere of heightened concern, following some less than complimentary testing results and the retirement of former superintendent Susan Wall, some newcomers—Kathy Skinner and Laurie Ogden—came in ahead in the vote count. Yet, confronted with a need to stabilize and re-inspire the school system while a national search for a permanent superintendent is launched, Sturm’s competitors turned to him to fill a job considerably more demanding on body and soul than sitting on the school board.

Alan Sturm was born in Upshur County, West Virginia. His father was a painter; his mother a stay-at-home mom. Both his mother and father were only able to reach eighth grade because of family responsibilities in surviving the Great Depression and the Second World War. “Yet they never wavered in the conviction that I would go to college,” recalls Superintendent Sturm. “My father said he would break both of my legs if he ever saw me on a ladder!”

He took his parents’ passion seriously and gained a bachelor’s degree in history from West Virginia Wesleyan College, and a master’s in administration from West Virginia University. After a stint in Maryland teaching high school English and social studies, he returned to Upshur County.

There, as classroom teacher, principal, curriculum director, and assistant superintendent, he toured nearly every level of the West Virginia educational system. Asked for his best job, he said “classroom teacher” and direct contact with students and parents. To this day he remains focused on the “action in the classroom” as the most important measure of educational performance. Teacher morale is therefore a top priority. But he views education as a kind of dynamic, three-legged stool. The legs are: parents (and their kids), the teachers and employees of the school system, and the taxpayers. “All three have to work together. If one fails…” and he shakes his head as if to say the system would topple.

Asked for the worst job, he immediately comes back with “principal. Now that’s a 24-7 job!” he laughs. “The phone could ring all night long, on any day of the week!”

There is a charming W. C. Fields quality to Superintendent Sturm’s demeanor. He makes his points simply and directly, but with just enough irony and self-deprecation to earn your confidence in his humanity. Discussing middle school, he recalled visits from distraught, tearful parents whose children had performed perfectly throughout elementary years, but frequently went through dramatic personality changes on hitting seventh grade. “Puberty,” he declared, “can turn a middle-schooler upside down and inside out.”

H owever, he argues, it is not just biology that changes behavior. Peer-group relations and pressures are far more important in child development than many parents realize.

Superintendent Sturm welcomes many modern improvements in educational theory, infrastructure, and practice. Yet he feels that there has been a breakdown in some areas, too. Like civics. That is, how government works, and how to participate in it. “Some believe the civics material can be incorporated into general social studies, but that hasn’t worked as well as hoped.”

There is also an active controversy around the “common core” educational standards supported by the U.S. Department of Education. These standards strive, by linking federal funding to tested performance in English, language arts, and mathematics, to compare the performance of different state education systems, as well as U.S. performance to other nations. Sturm supports the common core concept as necessary to evaluate overall performance, although he feels it could have been implemented better, including correcting some distortions that may result from “teaching to the test.”

When asked his favorite book, Sturm responds instantly: To Kill a Mockingbird—the famous novel by Harper Lee published in 1960. The book won the Pulitzer Prize and has become a classic of modern American literature, renowned for its warmth and humor, despite dealing with the serious issues of rape and racial inequality. The book’s principal character, Atticus Finch, has served as a moral hero for Sturm and as a model of integrity. Discussing movies, he singled out The Searchers—an unusual John Wayne western (“He really could act!”) focusing on the corrosive effects of racial hatred on an otherwise heroic and decent man.

Superintendent Sturm has about six months to a year in which to refocus Jefferson County schools in a difficult budgetary and political environment. The models he has chosen to emulate, and the wisdom of a lifetime of dedication to, and obvious affection for, West Virginia students and families give us plenty of reason to wholeheartedly support his efforts.

John Case is a retired union organizer and software engineer. He hosts the “Winners and Losers” radio program on WSHC.
Philip Wenner

Hannah Cohen

Looking at a pile of tiny random screws, Phil Wenner can specify which specific Apple product each one belongs to. A specialty field within his current business, Wenner repairs iPhones and iPods, among other devices. The man who can find the right part in a jumble of objects without the desire to organize them is the same man who has selected his current endeavor from a pool of seemingly unrelated hobbies and educational studies.

How Wenner found his niche does not follow a straight path or lead to a “eureka” moment of discovery. But from the fog emerged Potomac Trading Company.

He now owns and operates Potomac Trading Company, on Route 45 just outside Shepherdstown. The story of how he is establishing himself as a business owner is best described by Wenner: Like rivers leading into a tributary, some streams flow by way of beekeeping and an older brother.

Wenner grew up in Shepherdstown. He attended Shepherdstown Elementary and then Shepherdstown Junior High before graduating from St. Maria Gorretti High School in Hagerstown. In 2008 Wenner graduated from West Virginia University.

When innate artistic talent precedes specialization, choosing to master one hobby for financial purposes foretold pressure to produce. To avoid public evaluation of his private outlets of creativity and personal interest, Wenner decided to study agricultural management. Going with the motions of higher education, he selected a degree and satisfactorily graduated. Ironically, try as he might, his current work derived from his hobbies. Love what you do, and the rest will figure itself out.

As for beekeeping, while at WVU, the majority of Wenner’s courses were scheduled at the Evansdale Campus, the location of the agricultural center, in addition to music and engineering. Surrounded by science and art, Wenner deviated from his major and ventured into other interests. One segue led to an independent study semester in beekeeping. Another tangent led to Hazmat Response studies. Throughout college, Wenner continued to collect items—records, movies, graphic novels, among others—adding to his childhood collections.

Following graduation, Wenner worked for a large corporation. But he felt unfulfilled within the structure of a large company and left. Back home, Wenner took stock of all his collectibles. “The gears started turning in my head.”

Researching online retailing and bidding, he pulled together the strings that formed his new business, Potomac Trading Company. The sign (though it’s not standing) reads “Buy, Sell, Trade, Repair.” (Here’s the deal with the sign: It was torn off and thrown into a recovery. But from the fog emerged Potomac Trading Company. The sign (though it’s not standing) reads “Buy, Sell, Trade, Repair.” (Here’s the deal with the sign: It was torn off and thrown into a field during a small tornado-like gust of wind this fall. Wenner is in the process of repairing it.)

While sorting through his collectibles, Wenner thought about selling some to free up storage space. He researched their value on popular bidding websites and correlated it with consumer experience and interests to make money. For the collectibles and repair services that he sells or offers, Wenner charges a market value based on comparable online pricing.

Items for sale often include instruments, electronics, vintage toys, rare media, video games, autographs, and vinyl records. Rather than trash older objects, Wenner retains them for their significance, often finding a way to salvage and repurpose them. Some things, he says, are for “nostalgia, discovery, rediscovery, or historical significance.”

Conserving the memory of an object seems to be the reason Wenner flowed into his current tributary. Wenner’s older brother would pass along (or, as younger brothers do, Wenner would acquire through various means) CDs and other used electronics. Wenner’s second-generation iPod was his first Apple product and the gem. Wenner was hooked on their software reliability and aesthetic and sought to understand the technology, inside and out.

“It was spontaneous,” is how Wenner describes his ability to reconstruct a device. Disassembling, analyzing, and repairing the iPhone 3, he repeated the process until a blueprint of the phone’s construction was drawn to memory. With each new device, methodically taking it apart piece by piece and reassembling the puzzle established his familiarity with the technology. Hence, Wenner can look at a pile of screws from various products and determine the device of their origin.

The items that Wenner is most often asked to repair are phones, with broken screens being the most common problem. Wenner can replace the screen, saving the customer from having to purchase a new phone. Other fixes are not as straightforward. Some conundrums need time to solve.

Letting his mind search for the answers, Wenner enjoys the challenge of finding a solution. “As a kid I had the shortest attention span.”

Nowadays, his wandering mind finds solutions. This job has given him independence, an outlet for his creativity, and a way to learn skills.

Freening his mind from structure, Wenner has found his happiness. Being his own boss has its challenges, one of which is frankly evaluating his work and business results. Wenner genuinely and lovingly values the administrative support that his mom has given to him and his business. He says that she helps him leap small hurdles.

Thus far, Wenner has not established a formal website or routinely engaged in social media to drive business. But he’s been surprised at how the number of steady referrals from prior customers has grown his business.

Where the current leads next is yet to be determined, but one thing is clear: All rivers lead to the ocean. And the ocean is vast, unexplored, and demands having trust in oneself to survive.

Hannah Cohen remembers her first generation iPod shuffle, which she purchased for listening to music while running.
Reprinted from Spring 1985

John Wesley Harris

I was watching a public television show based on the book Pursuit of Excellence. It illustrated how companies improve their profits by emphasizing quality and excellence in their products. And I thought: "I've met a man who has sought and achieved excellence in his life, every day. A man who has, by his example, inspired others to similar high standards." That man is John Wesley Harris, grandson of a free Black who fought in the Union Army. His honorable discharge hangs in a place of honor in the front room of Mr. Harris' 200-year-old home. Pictures of Mr. Harris' family line the walls and the top of the piano. Mr. Harris is rightfully proud of his family.

"I can't recall how my family got here. My grandfather lived in Kentucky when he enlisted in the Union infantry. He was discharged for a disability, but had to give up transportation. Students had to go there on their own. Later on the school board asked me if they paid a driver, could my car be used to transport students to Charles Town? It was not strictly legal but that's what we did. How were things at East Side? Did they have everything they needed to teach?" Harris: Yes indeed. We had all the manuals. We had a music teacher and an art teacher, but students bought their own books. I had an excellent staff at that school. I had James Green, Marion Reeler from Charles Town, and Iria Pendleton from Harpers Ferry. East Side was her first school. It was a good staff!

What were Mr. Harris' goals in the classroom? Harris: I'd try to get the children to see the importance of education and to set high ideals for their own progress. I liked to teach math, but I did not like geography at all.

Did he ever have trouble with discipline? Harris: Not usually. When I had my first class, I was the first man they had. There were some big boys in the group who had given the women teachers a bad time. There was one who was over one year older than my room to 'talk' to me. We stepped out onto the porch, and he just started shouting. I told him that if we were going to get tough we'd take off our coats and settle it right then.

What happened? Harris: I already knew all about him; I wasn't worried. When a man throws off his coat to fight a woman, you know there's nothing to him. I had no more trouble after that. You know, if the students develop confidence in the teacher, if they respect and like him, there are no discipline problems.

What must a teacher do to maintain excellence in teaching? Harris: A teacher must be well read.

When did he come back to Shepherdstown? Harris: Well, I started teaching in 1921. I stayed in Frederick two years. My next school was Summit Point, then Duffields. My first principalship was Shady Side School here in Shepherdstown. That was a two-room school. I taught fifth through eighth grades. East Side School was built in 1949, I was teacher and principal there until I retired in 1966. I believe that the school closed the same year because of integration.

How did he feel about integration? Harris: Oh, it was a blessing! I remarked that all these schools went to the eighth grade only. Was there no high school for Black students?

Harris: Yes, yes there was a high school in Charles Town. But there was I don't think he was wounded. I'm a Shepherdstown native. My parents lived in a one-and-a-half room log house just across the railroad tracks when I was born. I was raised in this house, and brought my wife here when I returned to teach in Jefferson County. Mr. Harris looked around his front room with a slight frown, "I'm sorry I didn't get to straighten up in here. I had a little party last night."

I asked Mr. Harris what it was like for Black seeking an education as he did:

Harris: My parents worked hard so that I would go to high school and college. My mother did housework and my father worked as a farmer for several local farmers. I had wanted to be a doctor but had to give it up because of money. Once, when I was at West Virginia State I was a dollar short of my train fare to come home. I had to borrow it from a friend.

Where did Mr. Harris go to school? Harris: I got my teacher's normal training degree from Storer College in Harpers Ferry. I also went to West Virginia State, and took course work at George Washington University, Shepherd College, Morgan State and La Salle University School of Law. I have an honorary doctorate.

I was impressed with Mr. Harris' education, and more than a little curious about his long career in teaching. I grew up with integration and wondered how things were different during segregation. I asked where he began his teaching career. Mr. Harris grinned with the recollection of his first job.

Harris: I began teaching in a one-room-school in Frederick, Maryland. I was the janitor as well. I walked one mile to the school every morning and back home every night. There were 66 students, grades one through six. I was paid $52.52 per month. Sixteen dollars went for room and board.

By Margaret Demer
Photo by Frank Herrera

John Wesley Harris at his home in East Shepherdstown.

I tried at this point to get Mr. Harris to tell me about some of his students. I mentioned the names of some I knew could have tried the patience of a Saint. Not a word would Mr. Harris say that was not complimentary. I finally asked how he managed to have such outstanding students.

Harris: One thing we had that helped was greater parent cooperation. Today, parents are going out in service and leaving their children under some one else's supervision. I see a real lack of discipline today. That disturbs me. Parents need to support and cooperate with teachers.

How does Mr. Harris spend his time now that he has retired?
Harris: My main hobby is secret organizations. I have all the degrees in the Knights of Pythias, all the degrees in the Masons, the Grand Lodge in the Elks, and I'm a state officer in the Shriners.

How else does Mr. Harris keep busy?
Harris: I'm a life-long member of the Aumby Methodist Church. I represented my church at the Washington Conference. I got tied up with the preachers. I like to travel. I asked if he was alone now.

Harris: My wife died in 1976, and it's been quite lonesome sometimes, but my children come visit. My son, Dean, is now retired from Fairless High School. He was a science teacher there. My daughter, Lillian M. Jones, will soon retire from Andrews Air Force Base. Did I mention my dog? His name is Snowball. He's sensitive, cooperative; he's a good guard dog.

As the interview ended, I admit I was impressed with this man who was so careful to speak well of others. I felt as though Mr. Harris was almost too good to be true. I decided to ask some of those who worked with him if he was indeed the man of excellence I saw. For Mrs. Pendleton, he was her first principal: "Mr. Harris never went in for picking out the bad ones [students]. He always concentrated on the good in them. He was always understanding."

Mrs. Reeler remembers her time with Mr. Harris: "It was the most delightful time of my teaching career. He was always able to get great parent cooperation. We had a wonderful PTA." Mrs. Reeler sighed, "We had the most wonderful closing at the end of the year. We'd have an operetta. Everyone came, even the parents from Kearneysville came." Charles Breson was a student under Mr. Harris from sixth grade to eighth: "I can recall sitting up late many a night working on some of the problems Mr. Harris made up for math homework. They were not from the book. I remember that for Mr. Harris the method of solving the problem was as important as the answer. He is a remarkable and sincere man."
St. Agnes Catholic Church

John King

It would be difficult to find two churches that differ more physically as those of St. Agnes Chapel and St. Agnes Church. The former dates from 1891; the latter was consecrated in 2008 and replaces the older church as the parish church of some 500 families. Yet each church served the spiritual needs of its parishioners, needs that have changed little, but now are served by changed liturgical requirements. They mirror changes in church teachings and emphases, particularly those emanating from the Council of Vatican II. The requirements of Vatican II have also influenced architectural design and the newer St. Agnes reflects them. These changes centered on, among others, use of the vernacular rather than Latin, a changed orientation of the altar so that the priest faces the congregation, greater participation by the congregation, and the belief that the Church is the people.

From these objectives, important architectural changes centered on creating buildings that better suited the new mandates. A building committee, headed by an able architect and liturgist, led to the church we see today. The dominant symbol guiding the shape and liturgical functions of the church is the mandorla. An age-old symbol, the word mandorla means almond in Italian and refers to the shape created by overlapping two circles. One circle represents the human, the other the divine—the temporal and the eternal. Thus the mandorla contains the human and divine attributes that define our condition as humans. It helps to shape the new church physically and visually leads us to a clearer understanding of deeper insights into the practice of the liturgy.

We are on a journey and have already entered one door, that of baptism. We face another door that can lead us into union with God. The church is where we intentionally interact with the divine as well as with each other. We hope one day to pass through the second door—death—and be united with the communion of saints. Thus the symbolic mandorla is found in several places in St. Agnes: in the pavement of the church, in the paschal fire pit, in the shape of the church interior and, most important, in the baptismal pool. A straight line can be drawn through the baptismal pool to the altar. Baptism is the beginning of the journey toward Eucharist. The pool is designed to make possible the full immersion of adults. Small children are baptized in the font abutting the pool.

The Easter Vigil Mass includes the ritual of the baptism of adults who, after extensive instruction, have asked to become Christians. Clad in a simple robe, each supplicant descends the steps and is fully immersed three times by the priest. The newly baptized slowly ascend the steps to stand in line—each a different person. To see them standing in sodden gowns, water streaming from face and hair, seeing the joy and wonder in their faces, is to witness an astonishing transformation. The organ peals forth and the congregation raises its voice in an almost thunderously joyous “Alleluia.” Within the joy and acclamation, an aura of calm and serenity surrounds the newly baptized. It is a holy moment as the Easter candle and the baptismal candles flicker and flare. The words incised into the sides of the Connemara marble that surrounds and forms the pool read, “Here is born in spirit-soaked fertility a brood destined for another city.”

Later, the newly baptized will move to the altar for Eucharist—new men and new women. However, they, like the rest of us, live in tension like the man in Kafka—feet on earth, arm raised to heaven. As one leaves St. Agnes, a tall column spikes the southern sky. On top is a crowing rooster symbolizing forgiveness. Even Peter experienced the tensions that Kafka much later described and wept after his three-time denial of Jesus. He was, of course, forgiven and found peace even as he would willingly accept crucifixion rather than deny the divinity of Christ.

St. Agnes also recognizes its role in the development of Shepherdstown. In the church vestibule, a long, folding glass screen is etched with scenes intermingling Old Testament prophets with aspects of Shepherdstown life and institutions. The depictions celebrate Native Americans, African Americans, Irish laborers at the C&O Canal, students in front of McMurran Hall, Civil War soldiers, and biblical figures as well as Father Mat’s dog! Our Mission Statement confirms the openness of St. Agnes: “St. Agnes is an inclusive community dedicated to the love of God and service to others. We rejoice in the Gospel, the celebration of the Liturgy, and the Sacraments. We welcome the opportunity to share God’s message and to bring all into the life of Christ.”

We remember that we worship in a river town. A pair of large bronze fish forms the handles of the main door. It may also be a reminder that fish images appeared frequently in the early church when it was still literally an underground movement in the catacombs. The Greek word for fish is ichthus and became a code word for christus for the early Christians. We may be reminded, too, that the earliest churches were homes, mostly owned by wealthy people (often women), who had come to be Christian believers and where the activities of those early Christians were less visible.

It should be noted that several of the most significant churches built in the fifth century were, like our St. Agnes, circular in shape.

Today, St. Agnes has become for many of us a beloved spiritual home.

And so, together with people of good faith, we move with the grace of God toward our destiny in another city to join those who already share in the Communion of Saints.

John King, a native of Ireland, has been a member of St. Agnes for more than 40 years.
Religious Worship and Education Schedules

Asbury Church
4257 Kearneysville Pike
Rev. Rudolph Monsio Bropleh, Pastor
Telephone: (304) 876-3112
Sunday Worship: 8 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.
Mid-Week Mingle: Wednesday, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Real Recognize Real Teen: Sunday, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
E-mail: info@4pillarchurch.org
www.4pillarchurch.org

Christ Reformed,
United Church of Christ
304 East German Street
Br. Ronald C. Grubb, OCC, Minister
Telephone: (304) 876-3354
Bronsion Staley, Minister Emeritus
Telephone: (301) 241-3972
Sunday Worship: 11:00 a.m.
www.christreformedshepherdstown.org

Christian Science Society
Entler Hotel—German & Princess Streets
Sunday Worship & Sunday School: 10 a.m.
Thanksgiving Day service: 10:00 a.m.
Reading Room is in Entler Rm. 210, open before and after the service and by appointment. Call to confirm Sunday school and child care: (304) 261-9024
All are welcome.

Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers)
Shepherdstown Monthly Meeting for Worship and First Day School
Sundays at 10:00 a.m.
Shepherdstown Railroad Station, Audrey Egle Drive
Contact Clerk, Elizabeth Hostler, (304) 582-8090, elizhostler@gmail.com
http://shepherdstownfriends.org

New Street United Methodist
Church & New Streets
Dee-Ann Dixon, Pastor
Telephone: (304) 876-2362
Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.
Sunday School: 10:00 a.m.
Youth Farth Class: 10:00 a.m.
nsumc@frontiernet.net
www.newstreetumc.com

St. Agnes Catholic Parish
106 South Duke Street
Father Mathew Rowgh
Telephone: (304) 876-6436
Sunday Eucharist: 8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
Saturday Eucharist: 5:30 p.m.
Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.
www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org

St. John’s Baptist
West German Street
Rev. Cornell Herbert, Pastor-Elect
Telephone: (304) 876-3856
Sunday Worship: 11:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.
Sunday School: 9:30 a.m.

St. Peter’s Lutheran
King & High Streets
Karen Erskine-Valentine, Vacancy Pastor
Telephone: (304) 876-6771
Sunday Worship: 11:00 a.m.
Children/Adult Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.
(located in grey house adjacent church)
www.Shepherdstownlutheranparish.org

St. James’ Lutheran Church, Uvilla
Rt. 230 Uvilla
Karen Erskine-Valentine, Vacancy Pastor
Telephone: (304) 876-6771
Sunday Worship: 9:00 a.m.
Children’s Sunday School 1st Sunday of month
GOOD NEWS PAPER RADIO HOUR!

Second Saturdays at 11:00 a.m. | Shepherd University Radio
Co-Hosts: Michael Zagarella and Murray Deutchman | WSHC 89.7 FM
www.897wshc.org/listen-live

The basic format of the show is to have a conversation with interesting people in this area who do good things. If you know someone who you think fits this description, send the suggestion to: mzaudiology@yahoo.com.

March 14  Terry Lindsay, Yoga
March 28  Dana Knowles, Good Stuff

For more guests and topics, go to
WWW.SHEPHERDSTOWNGOODNEWSPAPER.ORG