

The **MONTABELLO** Voice

an independent gazette

the older the fiddler, the sweeter the tune

January 5, 2017



Consumer rating of services

The most helpful aid to smart shopping in the D.C. area I have found in the last three decades is Washington Consumers' Checkbook (www.checkbook.org). This consists of quarterly publications and an on-line rating system. I have used the latter for finding an HVAC contractor, an ophthalmologist for cataract surgery, an orthopedist for knee surgery, an auto repair shop, a dentist, an auto body shop, etc., etc., etc.

The HVAC contractor I now use is check rated for both quality and price with an overall quality rating of 89% and average price of \$79 on Checkbook's "price comparison score." A contractor we see here frequently is not check rated for either and has a quality rating of 66% and an average price of \$127 on the same scale.

Checkbook is a not-for-profit and unlike some ratings seen on line, it is pretty hard to fudge the scores. The key is that it only accepts ratings from subscribers.

The cost of a two-year subscription, which includes on-line access to their ratings, is \$34. Checkbook does ask for donations and I contribute \$40 annually (it is that good). – *John R. Powers*

Seeking home stays for Women's March

On January 21 a Women's March is planned for Washington, D.C. Thousands of women will be coming from all over the country and world. I am coordinating a Montebello effort. If anyone could offer a free night's stay to a participant, please let me know at donnysue@gmail.com. – *Sue Allen*

Voices on the 37

Let's get physical:

Personal trainers at Montebello

Starting an exercise regimen at any age or fitness level can be daunting, as well as potentially dangerous. Traditionally, January is a time of New Year's resolutions to exercise, blah-blah-blah – you know the routine. At any given time, Montebelloans are seen working out in our fitness center with personal trainers who set up individualized regimens and entertain them with friendly chatter. But who are these trainers and where can you find them?

The following is purely informational, not an endorsement, of the two personal trainers who responded to a query from *The Voice*. – *Mikhailina Karina*

Stephen King

240-460-2133

Steve@wewillworkout.com

www.WeWillWorkOut.com

www.Musicbystevee.com

Professional certification: WITS World Instructor Training Schools

Fitness philosophy/approach: I start with what my clients need the most. I start on their weakest links first, and continue on until we build a balanced and healthy body.

Specialties: My clients ages range from 10 years to 94 years. I have helped and I am helping people that are contending with various conditions: Parkinson's, arthritis, knee problems, rotator cuff, frozen shoulder, prepare for hip replacement, lower back problems, and sciatica.

My clients are athletes, novices, people new to fitness, workout partners of 2, 3, or 4. I also give group classes.

Michael Bradley (resident)

407-760-6474

brad6078@aol.com

www.fitnesstrainingwithmichael.com

Professional certification: International Sports Sciences Association with training in anatomy and sport injuries.

Fitness philosophy/approach: I am training 15 clients at Montebello and work with all ages whose goals include losing weight and increasing muscular strength. I am also planning on starting some aerobic classes such as bootcamp, step, and total body workout classes.

Other fitness services include: one-on-one fitness training, individually tailored fitness plans, fitness health assessments, support groups for dieters, professional counseling, yoga classes, home-based exercise programs, email support, and planning and designing fitness centers.

Cover: Alan Simon, the fiddler in Building 4, by Sammy Simon with photo editing by Jeanne Tift.

The MONTEBELLO Voice
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Alexandria, Virginia

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A twice-monthly gazette for the residents, by the residents
Catch up on the old editions at www.montebellovoice.com

Montebello's white, red and blue winter

By Sarah Newcomb

As the first white flakes begin to fall softly across Montebello's woodlands, stillness envelopes our home. Squirrels seek winter nests in our hollow trees, woodchucks settle deep in their dens, and turtles dig in for the winter. Meanwhile, some of Montebello's luckiest human residents head off to get-aways in warm places like Cabo San Lucas, St. Croix, Buenos Aires, and Santiago.

Many of our wild residents fly south for the winter, too. But some of our wild friends remain to keep us company all winter long, providing a pop of color and an even song or call year-round.

The most brilliant couple that Montebello residents see all year are our cardinals. They live their entire lives – up to 15 years – within a one or two kilometer radius of where they were born. Males sport bright red plumage, a black mask and a cone-shaped bill. The red color you cannot take your eyes off of is key to mating success. The brighter the better. Both genders are crowned with a regal crest. Even the brown females have crests with warm red accents. The crest lets us know how the bird is feeling. When the bird is calm, the crest lies flat. When the bird is excited, the crest lifts tall and peaked. The cardinals' sweet whistles are one

of the first sounds of morning. Symbols of the holiday season, the male cardinals' image appears on Christmas cards, door decorations and holiday ornaments. Our northern cardinal has been named the official bird of at least seven states, including Virginia.

During mating season, cardinals form monogamous pairs. Male birds feed their partners as they incubate

ally 10-25 feet above the ground – an amenity they find in our woodlands. Authorities say that blue jays, with their perky crest, are actually gray or brown. Refraction causes light to bend into a blue wavelength. The bird's unique black bridle across the face, nape, and throat varies extensively. It may help blue jays recognize one another. Like cardinals, blue jays lower their crests when feeding peacefully or tending to nestlings.

Blue jays are known for their intelligence and complex social systems, and have tight family bonds. They often mate for life. While the female incubates, her mate provides all her food. Blue jays can carry off five acorns at a time to store for later feeding. Six birds with radio transmitters each cached 3,000-5,000 acorns one autumn. Tool use has never been reported for wild

blue jays, but captive blue jays used strips of newspaper to rake in food pellets from outside their cages.

Some birds winter in all parts of the blue jay's range, and some individual birds may migrate one year and not the next. Scientists have been unable to identify what factors determine whether each blue jay or family decides to migrate. The proportion of jays that migrate is estimated to be less than 20 percent. Considering blue jays' affinity for Montebello's amenities, scientists might consider the real estate motto: "location, location, location." 🏠



clutches of eggs – typically three each season. Unlike many songbirds, both male and females sing. The female often sings from the nest informing her mate when their groceries are due. Young cardinals frequently follow their parents on the ground for several days after leaving the nest, until they are able to find food on their own. It is illegal to own a cardinal as a pet or to kill one. They are a protected pursuant to the "Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918."

Montebello's other brilliant year-round resident is the blue jay. Like other occupants, blue jays select Montebello for its amenities – particularly our old-growth oak trees bearing acorns – a favorite food. Blue jays build nests in deciduous or coniferous trees, usu-

Reuniting with my violin

By Alan Simon

Fo no longer recall what it was I saw or heard that reminded me of the violin sitting on an upper closet shelf gathering dust and cobwebs. Maybe it was listening to an old Kreisler recording. Maybe I recalled the evening when we saw Yitzhak Perlman play at Wolftrap. I don't know what it was but I do recall the flood of memories I summoned up. I was walking down Fenn St. in Pittsfield, Ma., when something caught my teen-age eye.

There, sitting in the window of a barber shop, was a beautiful violin. – bright and shiny, not like the scratched-up fiddle I was playing. Even the open case was beautiful, the inside covered in red velvet. I made life miserable for my parents until my father came up with the twenty-five dollars and that elegant instrument was mine.

The sounds I was able to get from that violin could never be matched. For the first time, I looked forward to my practice session – at least 90 minutes a day, five days a week. I main-

tained this program for the next five years. My instructor refused to permit me to play anything that even remotely

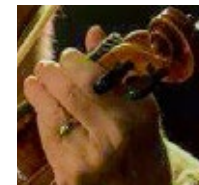


Approximately three months ago, I pulled the violin case down and opened it. The violin was a wreck, splintered wood, a loose sound post, strings in serpentine coils and a bow with very few hairs connected. I could have cried at what the seventy-five years of having turned my back on that once lovely instrument had wrought.

had a melody, something even hummable. I asked about classical music, semi-classical music, even opera. My instructor refused, claiming a good seven to ten years of concentration on techniques of fingering and bowing would provide the base needed to be-

come a superior violinist.

I complained to my parents. They assured me that my instructor had an outstanding reputation, having trained some of the finest violinists in well known orchestras. I did my best to persevere with my training but my heart was no longer in it. I had wanted to become a fine violinist in order to play some of my favorite pieces. Today, as I look back on this period of my life I announce, with chagrin, “Hell, I was only a kid. What did I know of the requirements for becoming the kind of violinist I could become?” My complaints to my parents mounted to the point where my father told me that if I no longer had the inner diligence to push myself, maybe it was time to end the (very expensive) violin lessons. And that was that.



My violin remained in its case through my remaining high school years and all my college years, all my years in the U.S. Army, all my years of active and then post-retirement years in other government service...all those years the violin reposed in its closed case, in my Montebello apartment. Approximately three months ago, I pulled the violin case down and opened it. The violin was a wreck, splintered wood, a

Continued on next page



It's never too late to play an instrument

By Deb Brudvig

Adult music students are great. They have chosen, on their own, to start or go back to an instrument. No parental arm twisting involved!

I say, no matter your age, if you want to start playing an instrument – for heaven's sake, just try it! And find a

teacher who clicks with you.

There are challenges for the adult student, of course. For one, they have an idea of what good playing sounds like. If the sound isn't there quickly or easily, it can be frustrating. “I took this up for fun and relaxation! It's hard and doesn't sound great, so where's the fun?”

Or another favorite question from a first-time adult cello student, “How

long until I can play a Bach Suite?” Uh, err, um...and I'm stuck giving encouragement about time in terms of years and how many hours they have to practice.

Another challenge is that hands and arms aren't as flexible as a child's, which can make learning a string instrument difficult. If you did play in your youth,

Continued on next page



After presenting a lecture on Jacob Lawrence's art to a capacity crowd on Dec. 28, Guin Jones (left) scored 20 free passes to see the show in its waning days at the Phillips Collection. A small group of art lovers saw the 60 masterpieces that chronicle the South to North migration of African Americans during the first half of the 20th century.

Deb Brudvig, *continued*

you have muscle memory already, and you're leaps and bounds ahead of the absolute beginner. Alan has that experience with the violin. He may not feel leaps and bounds ahead, but he is! He can read notes, understands counting, and has a sense of rhythm and pitch. And he has basic hand placement memory for bowing and fingering. The violin is an old friend. That's quite a nice toolkit to have in place.

I'm a cellist, although I did take a violin class in college for fun. But, as I told Alan, I can sure get him going again. And sometimes a different view can be helpful. He can't hold the violin like he did when he was young. So we invent and experiment and see what we can create together that is comfortable, satisfying and musical.

I think spending quality time in learning as an adult can give renewed meaning to life. There's a new way to spend your time and energy. There's something new to read about. There's another reason to stay in the best health you can. There's something new to take your focus inward. If you can give up

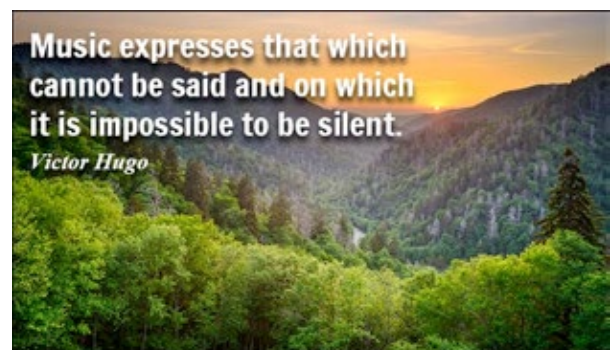
worrying about perfection and enjoy the process, the journey, you really have something of quality and meaning added to your life. Music can be that meaningful something. If I can help someone in that endeavor, I am truly happy. 🎻

Alan Simon, *continued*

loose sound post, strings in serpentine coils and a bow with very few hairs connected. I could have cried at what the seventy-five years of having turned my back on that once lovely instrument had wrought. A former colleague who, to this day plays first chair of the second violin section in a fine local orchestra, recommended Potter as the place to bring my wrecked instrument.

Potter kindly gave me a loaner so I could begin practicing during the three months it would take to resurrect my violin. Two weeks ago, I received a phone call telling me the work on my violin had been completed. I drove to Potter the following day. The technician held up

the violin for my inspection. I'm certain that, had my wife not been with me at the time, I would have broken down in tears. The instrument was even more beautiful than I remembered. Once home, I moved the bow across the four open strings, over and over again, marveling at the fine tone. If ever an instrument could be called resurrected, mine would fit the bill. I now have a teacher, Deb, who suffers my squeaks and scrapes with long-suffering grace. I welcome the exercise assignments. I don't care if it's all I play, I shall never complain again. The pleasure of tucking the violin under my chin and bowing is almost more than I can bear. I am so in love with this violin. 🎻



Russia first on Россия 1

By *Mikhailina Karina*

Uhen my sons were younger, they used to think that St. Louis was in Russia. Whenever I took them to visit my family in St. Louis, they were obviously immersed in all things Russian: food, television, music, visitors, holiday meals, décor, books, and even child-rearing. They didn't know enough about geography to realize that Russia was not two hours away by plane; likewise, they didn't pick up on the obvious clues that everyone else besides babushka and dedushka spoke perfect American English.

Many of our visits took place over winter holidays, when we were often confined to the house due to sucky Midwestern winters. Younger boys were easier to entertain because they only cared about playgrounds and other energy-expending venues where they worked up an appetite for babushka's cooking and dropped off for naps. If you've ever been to St. Louis with children, you know that most of the attractions can be visited in a matter of days. Stretching them to two weeks and over a period of years has been challenging. So as much as I hated doing it, I often parked them in front of the TV, which broadcast American cartoons, while I hung out with my family in the Russian-language universe.

Ever since my family immigrated to St. Louis, we've always been stuck between the Soviet and American cultures. My parents had spent the first four decades of their lives firmly grounded in the Soviet reality of Stalinism, World War II, and Brezhnev's stagnation. When we arrived in St. Louis in the summer of 1979, we couldn't understand who and why had shot J.R. and hoped that the smiling Reagan person on TV would be a good president.

While I tried my hardest to assimilate into my new culture and religious-

ly listened to Casey Kasem's Top 40 Countdown each weekend, my parents and all their immigrant friends still behaved as if they were back in Kiev or Minsk or Moscow or Leningrad. All meals featured familiar dishes, stere-

(Snow Maiden) who sang for the kids and handed out the presents. She was a folk-tale character with no parents and presumably melted each spring.

Another unquestionable tradition was the New Year's Tree (aka, Christ-



That's me, second from right, during the school New Year's pageant in 1974 in Kiev. I was the Little Red Riding Hood with a real pastry in by basket. Most girls dressed like snowflakes.

os played old pop tunes, and everyone was nostalgic for how it was "at home." Sure, St. Louis was home, but it was not home.

One of the most enduring traditions carried over from the Soviet era is celebrating New Year. Officially an atheist state, Christmas (or Hannukah, although it was never mentioned) was not allowed in the Soviet Union. It wasn't just a war on Christmas – it was legally forbidden to exhibit any sign of religious faith that was not communist. Being the ever-adaptable people, Soviets rebranded Christmas by keeping some traditions that were morphed into New Year: Saint Nicholas/Santa Claus became Ded Moroz (Grandpa Frost) with a granddaughter, Snegurochka

mas tree), which is a 16th-century German ritual that was adopted in Russia in 1817 when a tsar married a Prussian princess. We also decorated our New Year's Trees with tinsel, lights, and glass toys. During our first few years in St. Louis, my family kept the tree tradition – but with a slightly embarrassing twist. Since we didn't need the tree for December 25, but for New Year's, we went to the abandoned tree lots first thing on Christmas morning and picked up whatever decent fir was minutes from the mulch machine.

The Soviet New Year's celebration always featured a carnival – children in costumes sang about winter; adults wore masks and also sang patriotically-tinged winter songs. Christmas, Jesus, or God were never mentioned. In



Two Natashas and back-up dancers during the Envy Us, Europe, performance on Rossiya 1 last Saturday. Screen shot from YouTube.

fact, Russian Orthodox Christmas is on January 7, so December 25 was a non-issue in this predominantly (formerly) Russian Orthodox country. Following the old Julian calendar, the Old Russian New Year will be on January 14, so we pretty much had double the holidays and more reasons to celebrate and lubricate.

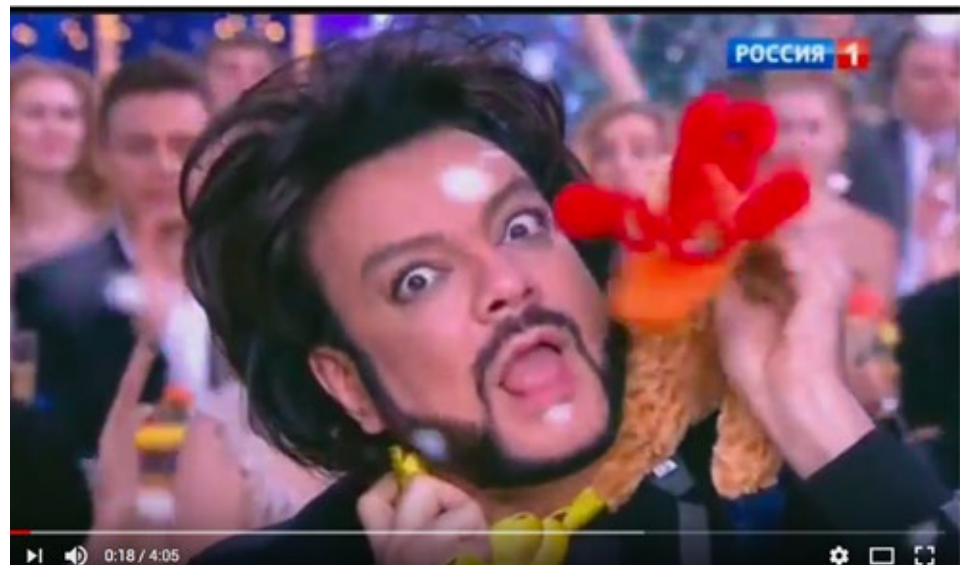
As a result, New Year's had become the Soviet Union's most beloved holiday that was free of political overtones: it was about a lot of food, parties, dancing, singing, and gifts. I had the good fortune to have been born on December 31, on the night millions of people popped champagne and ate the traditional potato salad. My parents always referred to me as a New Year's gift.

Another unbroken tradition from the Soviet era is the Goluboy Ogonoyok (Blue Light), a government-sanctioned variety show that featured all the best singers and actors herded at the Ostankino TV studio in Moscow, where they performed their hit songs and family-friendly skits. Every home had Goluboy Ogonoyok on while the parties went on.

In the post-Soviet era, the show expanded into several days of holiday concerts by the current pop stars. During our sojourns to St. Louis, the TV was always tuned to Moscow's Channel

1, where a parade of hot young songstress in short skirts alternated with aging Soviet pop stars in sensible frocks. I wasn't familiar with 85 percent of the performers and found the whole spectacle nostalgic until the senseless pop began grating on my nerves. My parents, who regularly watched Russian TV via their satellite dish, felt closer to home as they prepared holiday spreads of familiar foods.

Last weekend, after ringing in 2017 at the community center, I was clicking around on the iPad. I missed the past celebrations with my family and wondered what Goluboy Ogonoyok was like



Russia's King of Pop, Philipp Kirkorov, with a rubber fowl during the performance of Envy Us, Europe.

this year. A few clicks later, YouTube took me to the five-hour long show on the Rossiya 1 network that was filled with attractive young women in sparkling gowns, unfamiliar celebrities, and oddly entertaining musical numbers. Normally, when I watch popular music shows (both Russian and American), I fast-forward after the first 30 seconds in search of a better song. But as I sat with my iPad, I was riveted for an entire hour without moving the red dot along.

I am not a political commentator and don't have erudite opinions on current events. But after a string of satirical songs set to Western tunes, such as Money Makes the World Go Round, ABBA, and some well-known Russian songs, one song caught my ear. In fact, as the singers were bouncing around, I was translating the lyrics to my husband.

Dve Natashi (Two Natashas) is a comedy team of Natalya Medvedeva and Natasha Korolyova (I Googled all that because I'd never heard of them or this song). Their song, Envy Us, Europe, was a parody of Dance, Russia by the squeaky-voiced pop singer Gluk'Oza, which has the following chorus, "Dance, Russia, while Europe weeps. And I have the absolute prettiest

ass.” As an heir to Russia’s great literary tradition, Pushkin she ain’t.

Before I share my translation of the lyrics, let me provide a little context. The concert took place on December 31, while President-elect Trump and President Putin were trading love tweets about hacking (not!), expelling/inviting diplomats, Syria/UN/NATO disses, and generally engaging in geopolitical Fatal Erection bromance. Told you I wasn’t an expert, just an irreverent news junkie.

So this song comes on and I start listening to the lyrics and telling my husband that Putin is sticking it to the West via a catchy tune. Then I went back to transcribe and translate them for the non-Russian speakers. The song sounds much better in Russian with rhymes and lots of play on words. To

see it, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qEwJMM7nAs>. Now that you know what they’re saying, watch the body language and expressions.

Oh, for some reason, Russians are crazy about astrology, both Western and Eastern. (Russian superstitions is a whole other story). 2017 will be Year of the Rooster, although it won’t start until sometime in February. But no matter, because Russia is ahead of the rest of the world and you’ll see people swinging around rubber roosters.

Envy Us, Europe

Two Natashas and the people
are ringing in the New Year
Of the Rooster!

He’s not a chicken, but he’s bringing
us something: new take-offs and turn-
arounds.

Dance, Russia, and wait, Europe
We have more experience and are
ringing in the New Year ahead of you
We’re all in the new year and you’re
still stuck in the old

All the people, you and I, are like one
family

And each family has its star – the two
of us make your head spin, can’t tell
who’s who

Dance, Russia, watch us, Europe
Watch and applaud us, but be careful
not to miss your chance

Europe, don’t drink Americano
But gulp our strong, sweet, fresh Rus-
siano

We have a lot of everything and not
everything that belongs to us

What’s ours and mine?

Our Ogonyok is great and fires up
the young people to sing and sing

Watch us, Europe, dance, Russia
In the end you will thank us and we
will answer, “da, no problem”
Don’t even think about messing
with us

Dance, Natashas

This night is ours, some are left
behind, but we’re ahead

Russia is always ready before anyone.

Perhaps I was just imagining all
the double-entendres and references
in this innocuous little number, but
in the context of the New World
Order that will take place on Jan-
uary 20, I thought I’d heard some-
thing that went beyond happy win-
ter songs and pops of champagne. I
saw something chillingly sinister be-
neath the gliterattis’ dazzling smiles
and playful gestures.

Happy Year of the Rooster, from
Russia with love from comrade
Vlad! 🍷



*Chyp and Andrea’s tunes kept the party going and people dancing on
New Year’s Eve in the community center.*

Survey says:

Majority of residents want the return of the bulletin boards

By *Mikhailina Karina*

Perhaps the third time is the charm. After two previously dismissed petitions to the Board of Directors, 155 Montebello residents signed yet another petition last September asking for the return of garage level bulletin boards. This time, the board's Quality Improvement Committee responded with a 30-second survey to gauge community interest. A whopping 332 responses – more than on previous 30-second surveys in the past five months – were received on this multi-question query.

Years ago, before the refurbishment of building lobbies, three locked glass bulletin boards graced the now white walls of the three levels of elevator lobbies. One board featured personal ads from the residents: pet/cleaning/repair/professional services, for sale items, and other ephemera; another board was maintained by the Realtors with their information (great resource for comps); and the third board was association information.

In an effort to move Montebello to an electronic mode of communication with Neighbor-to-Neighbor on the association website and the touch-screen monitors in the lobbies, the boards were removed in spite of residents' protests. One of the reasons was the high cost of using office staff to maintain the boards – although personal ads should have been maintained by volunteers and Realtor ads were done by Realtors.

After several years of the high-tech approach, many residents feel the old way of index cards and push pins worked best. Hence the new push to return this time-honored low-tech means of sharing information.

According to the November 30-second survey, 90 percent of the respondents regularly use garage levels; 57 percent would like to see the return of the association activities board (cur-

rently in the main lobbies by the mail boxes); 63 percent support the personal ads board; and 53 percent want to see real estate listings. As far as volunteering to maintain and update the boards, 81 respondents, nearly 27 percent, said they would be willing to do it.

The complete survey with all 115 comments is available on the association website at http://www.montebello.org/picture/602january_2017_times_of_montebello.pdf. The comments illustrate the spectrum of opinions on this issue. All spelling and grammar appear without changes.

Some of the 43 “against” respondents preferred improving the association website and lobby monitors.

“All this info belongs online, that's where we should be headed. Those too old to use computers probably don't drive either,” wrote one person, slightly mean-spiritedly. “No need. We have a neighbor to Neighbor and we are an on line nation and on line condominium,” said another commenter. “we spent mucho \$ on the screens in the lobby-why are we going back to the boards? They are a thing of the past,” agreed another.

“I use the internet and hope folks get on board with it! This is 2016 almost 2017! I'd rather see some interesting Graffiti type art...” wrote another.

Several respondents thought the bulletin boards were unattractive. “the personal ads BB is worthless because of the repeat ads filling the board. The activities board is irrelevant because of MML. The real estate board has some marginal value but is duplicated by the sales and rentals on our website and that is not enough to offset the schlocky look of the BB's.”

“I don't like looking at the ads when I'm going to and from my car, especially when everything is sent electronically these days. Montebello needs to keep up to date with current technology, not go backward at all,” suggested another.

One resident took the time to make the following suggestion: “This could be handled more effectively by an improved Montebello Community Website that would allow for collaboration among residents. The current online site is not maintained well (if at all), nor is it publicized effectively. Cork bulletin boards with paper announcements, phone number tear-offs and index cards are outdated in the year 2016, and the projected annual cost seems to be quite high. I would rather see that money put into website development and a collaboration tool that could be used more effectively by residents and perhaps link into the lobby TV monitors and display the ads or announcements that residents have posted online at the proposed new site. If a resident doesn't have access to a computer to post an ad, a dedicated terminal or laptop could be provided in the Community Center for their use. Expiration dates could help an “online bulletin board” remain current. This also allows one single source rather than maintaining three boards in each building.”

Several responders bashed the lobby monitors for lack of information. “These have to cost less than those useless electronic displays in the lobbies. Simple is best!”

One was particularly pithy: “Absolutely HATE the tv monitors in the lobbies; they scream: “Shuffleboard on the Lido Deck at 3 pm” – might as well be on a geriatric cruise!”

“I greatly appreciated the efforts of the volunteers to keep the boards up to date. The digital boards in the lobby are of no use to me. It takes time and effort to engage it to find what might be of interest. The physical boards made it very easy to scan all the offerings w/o having to engage the machinery. And, things that you did not know you were interested in all appeared at once. One could scan the offerings in the time it took for the elevator to arrive. I, for

one, would be very happy to see the boards return.”

Bulletin board supporters, 72 of whom wrote comments, said the website did not replace the variety of information on the boards and wish they hadn't been removed.

“Resident input should have been sought before boards were removed. It would have avoided a lot of later acrimony and mistrust of MCOOA Board” wrote one person. “Removal is #1 complaint I here from residents,” concurred another.

“Two petitions have been presented to the Board requesting the return of personal bulletin boards. One reason for the garage boards is that not all owners/residents are willing to use personal computers. Some have no access or ability; on the other hand, others wish to relax at home because of long

hours of professional use of computers and never use Montebello's technology. Everyone glanced at the old bulletin boards. We want them back but an electronic survey is not a fair survey. The electronic survey misses are one of the reasons we need bulletin boards,” wrote a respondent.

Several commented on the lost sense of community. “We almost never use the website. Life is too busy to have to check website for timely information and personal ads. We always read the paper bulletin boards when we had them. They were helpful, useful, entertaining, and pleasant to have as “company” while waiting for the elevators. We never-ever read personal ads or activities information on the website.”

“The Bulletin Boards will assist the residents of Montebello tremendously.....the sense of “community” will be

returned. Those folks who wish to advertise “services” as drivers to the airports, folks who can walk dogs, etc. Sale of furniture to assist those folks moving in, etc. Benefit of the bulletin boards to be reinstated are too numerous to list here! Just know ALL the residents will benefit and outweigh the cost.”

One person summarized the sentiment of many: “The boards gave a wonderful sense of community to Montebello. With one quick perusal, you could find out all of the happenings, find something for sale, or see what units were available for sale or rent. It was a fantastic way to pass the time while waiting for the elevators. And it added a very personal touch to life here, that has been under attack lately. Please bring back the bulletin boards!” 📖

Following a prickly discussion, bulletin boards to be on the next work session agenda

In the year of divisiveness and acrimony, returning the bulletin boards was a polarizing issue for the Board of Directors' lively discourse about the 30-second survey on bulletin boards.

Board member and chair of the Quality Improvement Committee Guido Zanni presented the survey's results at the Jan. 3 work session. Seven residents were in the audience.

“From the QI perspective, people would like to see the bulletin boards return,” Zanni summarized the survey's findings. But the results, as well as the board's attitudes, reveal the conflict between the old-fashioned (index cards and push pins) and high-tech (website and lobby monitors). Shall the twain ever meet?

Director Bruce Shaw said the respondents represented “the outspoken minority.” “I don't think the numbers are truly representational,” he said. Even though 90 percent of the respondents said they regularly used garage entrances, “100 percent go get the mail,” thus having access to lobby monitors, he said.

“The 30 percent response rate is excellent,” countered board member Jerry Stedje. If board members will dismiss survey results they don't like, then let's not do any more surveys, he said. Instead of seeing the 26 percent of respondents willing to maintain bulletin boards as lack of interest, he said the percentage translated to 81 people. “Even if half of them show up, it's more than show up to volunteer on committees,” Stedje said.

Activities Committee board member liaison Lauren Pierce said from her committee experience, “the call for bulletin boards hasn't lessened” over the years and people still wish to see them return.

Zanni explained the \$4,700 annual cost for bulletin boards maintenance in a PowerPoint slide. For a staff member who earns \$51,000 a year (including benefits), it works out to \$981 per week and \$196 per day. Since it takes one full day to update the boards, including sorting the cards, 24 times a year, it comes out to \$4,707 in staff salary and time. He did not have any prices for the cost and installation of the boards.

Another cost mentioned at the meeting was \$125 staff salary for each batch of under-the-door notices. In a separate conversation, board member John Powers said he and general manager Liz Foltin had calculated all under-the-door communication had amounted to \$27,658 last year, plus \$5,900 for printing cost. The total cost was included in the 0.5 percent increase of the 4 percent condo fees.

Board member Lynn Tjeerdsma, who works on the Hill, said he could see both sides of the issue and suggested a compromise that seems to work for the House of Representatives: install a cork board and let people put up their own ads. With open postings and no staff involvement, boards can be cleared off every couple of months.

Likewise, board member Doug Kleine said the community is split along the lines of those nostalgic for the old boards and others frustrated with why the electronic version is not working.

“It's a value judgement,” concluded Zanni. “Where would the money be better spent?” – *Mikhailina Karina* 📖

Marriage is like a watermelon

By Jackie Bralove

Although the following recounts an event that occurred almost 20 years ago and therefore possibly may not represent the present reality of life in Iran, I share this because I remember these young people with great affection.

When The Islamic Republic of Iran invited me to speak on Navajo symbology at the first Conference of Religious Art in the late nineties, I accepted with both curiosity and the apprehension one might expect, but I couldn't resist the adventure. I love Iran. I love the ancient culture, the poetry, the philosophy and the land. I love the intelligence and courage of the people which still persists under the regime of the Mullahs' *hijab* of arrogant and dangerous density. During my few weeks there on this trip, I saw many conflicting principles in action, particularly in the relationship between my female and male guides.

From the airport in Tehran I was whisked away to the "former Hilton" hotel in a car made *pardah* by curtains around every window but the driver's. There I met my two guides, Leila and Hasan. Leila was a beautiful young woman, always covered in the typical female Iranian uniform of the time (which I also wore) of a dark long raincoat and a large headscarf which covered every strand of hair, as well as the neck up to the chin. Hasan, my male guide and guard, who seemed to be perpetually whispering into his cell phone, was dressed in the gray suit and banded shirt typical for men in his position.

Besides being available to help me in the hotel, Leila stayed with me wherever I went in Tehran. Her good En-

glish and careful concern were crucial in navigating the stringent laws governing women's conduct. We shared whispered conversations and covert laughter, and both blanched under the sudden glare of some offended male. She was, of course, even more aware than I of how perilous it was to violate the absurd and ridiculous rules of social *adab* or correct behavior. In public Hasan was always nearby, jumping out of cars and buses ahead of me to stop traffic, a few paces behind me as I was brought with the other speakers to visit various points of interest in Tehran and later as we traveled by plane to Isfahan, Shiraz and Persepolis.

For some reason, Leila was not allowed to accompany us outside Tehran. If I had a problem with my camera, Hasan fixed it, if I wanted to buy something in particular to bring back to the U.S., Hasan found it. He was a helpful and gentle guide, but he was also my guard, not only protecting me, but especially regulating my activities, preventing conversation with people deemed unsuitable, and making absolutely certain that I did not try to go

out alone, anywhere. At one time he had been President Rafsanjani's personal bodyguard, one of the "most noble of all the guides," I was informed. Although I came to care about him, I did not doubt that he would shoot me between the eyes if so ordered. I'm very conscious of my behavior around people with guns (and especially mystics with guns) in countries without diplomatic relations with the U.S., so our bond continued to develop without being put to the test, thank God.

Hasan and I spoke of many things during those trips, very discreetly within the bounds of Shi'ite propriety. These conversations were possible because of my age, because of his respect for anyone who teaches Religious Studies, including Islam, and most important, because of my status as a mother. The emphasis upon the value of motherhood in the Shi'ite worldview cannot be overstated. Even the Ayatollah Khomeini, still the supreme model in Iran, mentioned it toward the end of his last Will and Testament, written to his son. "My most important advice to you, my dear son, is to take care of your most

loyal mother...in accordance with the Hadith, "Paradise lies beneath the feet of the mothers." He also quoted the great Persian Sufi poet, Hafiz, who said, "You are your own *hijab*, Ya Hafiz. Do away with *nafs* (the passional ego)."

The theme of removing the layers or veils (*hijab*) which cover the inner reality of all manifestation is intrinsic to Shi'ite philosophy and theology. Along with the idea that a woman's value and sanctity derive mostly from her role as mother, it enters into every aspect of life and thought from the most exalted to the most commonplace. Break the shell of a walnut to find the inner kernel, dissolve the ego which obscures the light of the soul, remove the chador

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to expose a woman's body, cut through the rind of the watermelon so you can enjoy the fruit inside. Whether or not they consciously agree, every *bazaari*, every cabdriver, every student, every Mullah and every woman breathes these principles with the scent of rosewater and pomegranates and dust and blood. *Hijab* is a concept which covers as many meanings as it reveals, and today many young women do not accept motherhood as the only road to perfection.

During one conversation in the gardens of Isfahan, Hasan confided that he loved Leila and wished to marry her. She would be a wonderful mother, he knew, and further she was educated, refined and beautiful. Because of his position as the dearest and "most noble of all the guides," which by then I realized actually meant guards as in Revolutionary Guards, he knew that all he had to do was formally request her hand. It would be difficult for even her parents to refuse and impossible for her to say no if they agreed. But he loved her. He respected her. He did not want her unless she wanted him too. He could not speak outwardly without trapping her. Some friend could intervene, perhaps, but that might backfire. What about me? I was leaving anyway. Could I please help him?

Listening to Hasan among the roses and golden domes of Isfahan, surrounded by intricate lapis and turquoise tiles, many layers of *hijab* evaporated for both of us. There, the request did not seem strange. There was no economic boycott, no tension between countries or cultures, no militant fundamentalist Islam distorting and disguising the beauty of the religion like the cover of a moldy black chador. There were only the three of us standing beside a fountain in a courtyard, and the one who was not visible was the most present. Hasan gave me careful instructions on how to proceed after we returned to

Leila was waiting for me in the lobby. Although it was late at night, I sat with her there as if to describe my trip. At one point I said, "Mr. Hasan is a wonderful man. I'm surprised he is not married yet." That is all I said. I saw her eyes widen in surprise and then something like terror swept her face. As I rose to go to my room, she said a stiff goodnight, without the usual kiss on each cheek. I wondered what in the world I thought I was doing.

Tehran.

"Please, Mrs. Jackie. Just mention my name to her. She will understand. But be careful, don't say too many words or the choice will leave us."

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Later that night there was a scratching on my door. Leila stood in the hall, looking like a frightened little girl. She had sneaked alone through the corridors so we could talk.

"It's all right," I said. "Let me tell you how it happened." I explained that he asked me to speak to her specifically so she would not be compelled to answer formally. Even though she still looked dubious, her lovely young face began to relax. I told her everything in detail, watching her soften as she understood his actions, and the depth of the regard revealed by his approach. In her relief, she looked so happy I thought she

might want him after all. For the first time in my presence she removed the outer cover of her dark clothing. Underneath she was dressed as casually as any young girl in the West, but her long black hair framed a face still pale with anxiety and her eyes and voice were fervent as she tried to convey the importance of her words.

"Listen, Mrs. Jackie. I don't want to get married to anyone now. My parents said I could wait. I know he is a good man. I have noticed him. But, please God, I do not want him, or any one else."

"Of course, all right. I understand. I will find a way to let him know. But am I wrong? Isn't he exceptional? Wasn't this

a loving way for him to inquire?"

"Yes, he may be exceptional now, but I don't believe it will last. He doesn't really see me. As soon as we have children, everything will change. He'll forget I'm a real person, and everything I want will be forgotten."

"What do you want, Leila?"

"I love Iran, but I want to leave until things here change. I want to travel, I want to write, and I want to be free."

"What if someone else requests you before you can get out, someone not as unusual as Mr. Hasan?"

"I'm always afraid of that, but I'm going to take the chance. No one really knows what will happen. Next to being born, marriage is the worst risk for a woman anyway. Life is like marriage, and marriage is like a watermelon. You never know what's inside until you open it up."

The next morning Hasan was waiting in the lobby. I barely shook my head once. No. He closed his eyes and looked away.

Later I learned they both married someone else.

Leila stays at home in Tehran to raise her three children. 📖

final glance



*The medium is the message
Bumper stickers at Montebello*

