

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

let's do launch

August 10, 2017



Additional opportunities for Montebello movie lovers

By Pamela Copley

Montebellans who love movies are fortunate to have three regular movie occasions. Firstly, there are the twice monthly "current movie" showings in the afternoon and evening in the Community Center. Secondly, there is the AiM Film Society that shows more artistic and foreign films each month in Party Room 2. And, thirdly, the Classic Movie Night in the Community Center shows gems, many of which are hard to find, and rarely shown on television. The Classic Movie Night enhances the movie experience by serving free popcorn, candy, and beverages.

The next Classic Movie Night on Wednesday, September 27, will feature "The Captain's Paradise" with Alec Guinness, Yvonne de Carlo, and Celia Johnson. A very funny comedy about a very naughty captain.

Now there is a brand new opportunity to see classic movies nearby on the big screen at Regal 16 Potomac Yard Theatres in Alexandria. Turner Classic Movies (TCM) has launched a club

called TCM Backlot. By joining TCM Backlot (www.TCMBacklot.com) for \$85 a year, members have special access to information on films, actors, directors, critics, and more, including film and actor themed trips, contests and prizes. As a TCM Backlot mem-



ber you can join the local branch (no charge).

I am the president of the local chapter of TCM Backlot. Each month, I receive 10 free tickets to a classic movie showing at Regal 16 Potomac Yard Theatres available on a first come, first served basis. Local members have a chance to get together and discuss their love of movies, etc. Contact me at pvongruber@aol.com for more information.

The Montebello Voice wants to hear from you: musings, travels, announcements, photos, book reviews, commentary, memoirs, essays, analysis, poems, suggestions, club news, recipes, and free ads

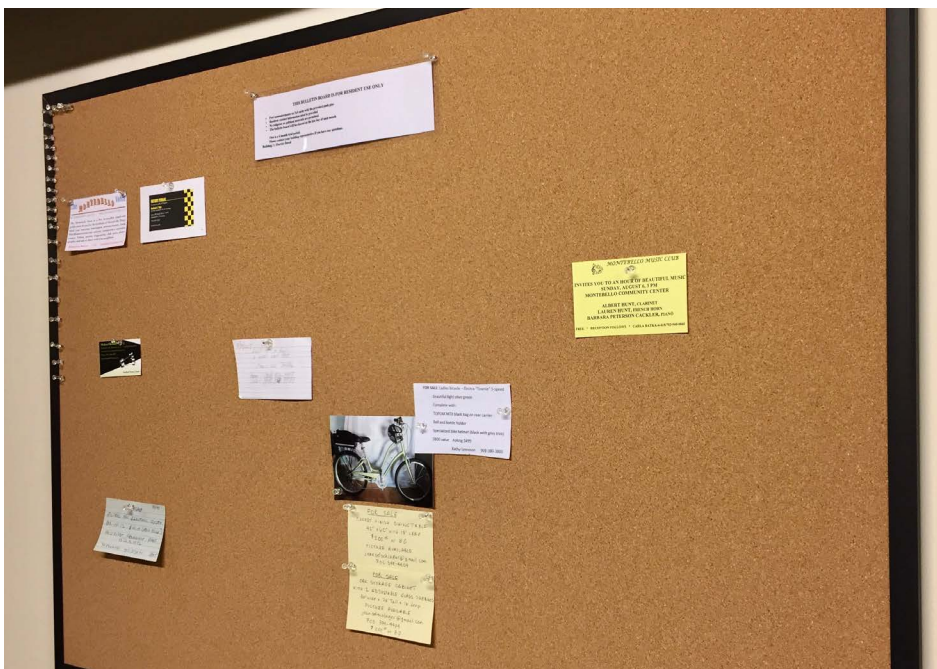
A twice-monthly publication for the residents, by the residents

Cover photo, A view from Key Bridge, by Azita Mashayekhi

The MONTEBELLO Voice
an independent gazette
Alexandria, Virginia

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Residents are beginning to post ads on the bulletin boards

Beyond glazed, jelly, and sprinkles

Text and photos by Dian McDonald

Are donuts your fantasy? Then let your sweet dreams come true at Duck Donuts, located near Rite Aid, at 3610-F King Street in the Bradlee Shopping Center in Alexandria. Duck Donuts are warm, delicious, and made to order. So whichever donut you fancy, it will be created on the spot while you watch.

To see the menu, go to www.duckdonuts.com



Sebastian prepares my choices, while Dejah cheers him on

Sebastian shows off donuts custom-made for me

Cherry on the top

By Richard Titus

Everybody knows that the Japanese love cherry trees because the blossoms are so beautiful and so transient. But, the Japanese also love them because, minus flowers and leaves, the cherry tree is so ugly – all gnarled and twisted. The exquisite Japanese visual sensibility is not put off by ugliness. Historically, the prized cups used in the tea ceremony came from Korea, where they had been rejected as defective. What happens with the cherry tree is that the blossoms appear before the leaves, creating a heartbreaking contrast with the grotesque branches. If you can find a big old *paulownia* tree, in spring, it's even more so.

This just in

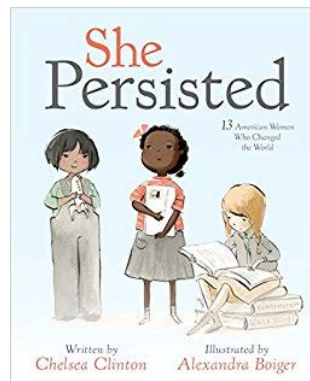
By Richard Titus

One of the Clinton ladies is running for president. We can say this with confidence because Chelsea Clinton has published a children's book. It can be used in either of two ways.

(a) The polls in 2016 found that Hillary was not liked and was not trusted. In short, she was the mother we're all glad that we didn't have. To the extent that Chelsea can appear to be warm and nurturing, people may conclude that Hillary may not be as inhuman as they previously thought, and if

the Republicans nominate Trump, Hillary might just sneak in.

(b) In 2020 Hillary will be 73. There's only so much that can be done with image-building, cosmetics, and cosmetic surgery. (E.g., on the latter, Nancy Pelosi). Chelsea may have decided (with or without mom's concurrence) that it's her turn. If so, expect to see more child-centered stuff. Also, photo ops will be arranged to portray Chelsea and Marc as a different kind of couple from Hillary and Bill. Posts will be secured for Chelsea to support claims of "experience." Look for a grooming of husband Marc to play Prince Philip to Chelsea's Elizabeth II.



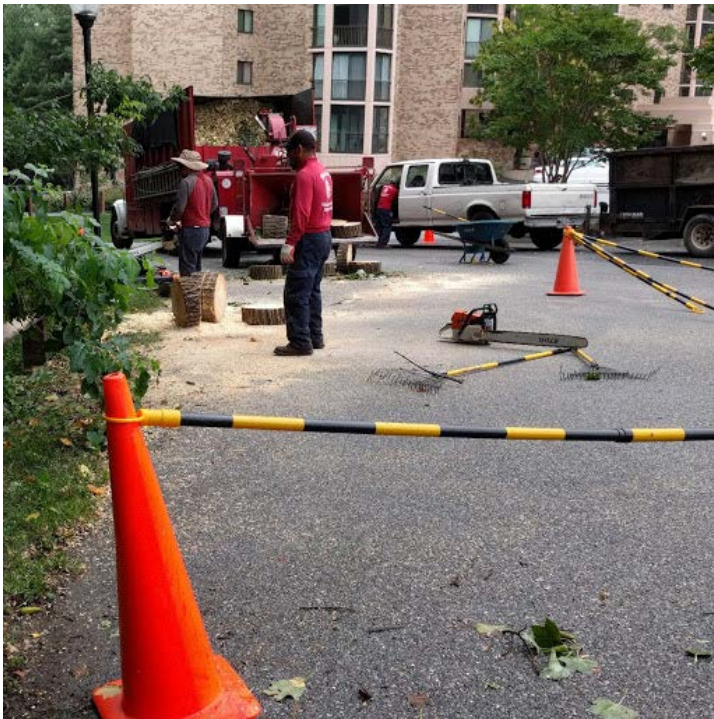
potluck



potluck



timberrr!



On July 28, another tree was removed from the woodlands. Photos by Karen Barnes

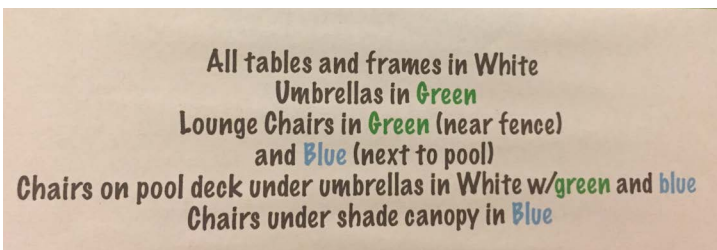
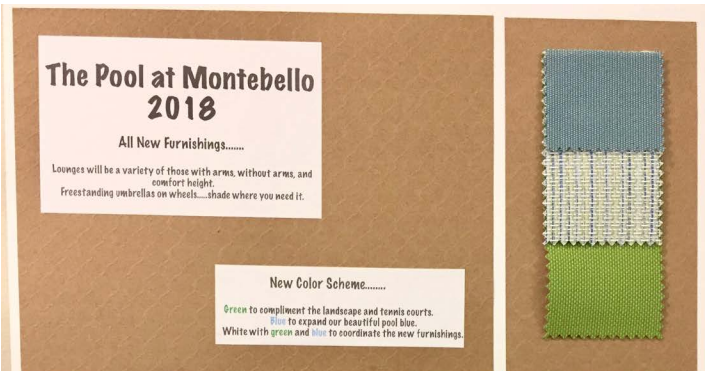
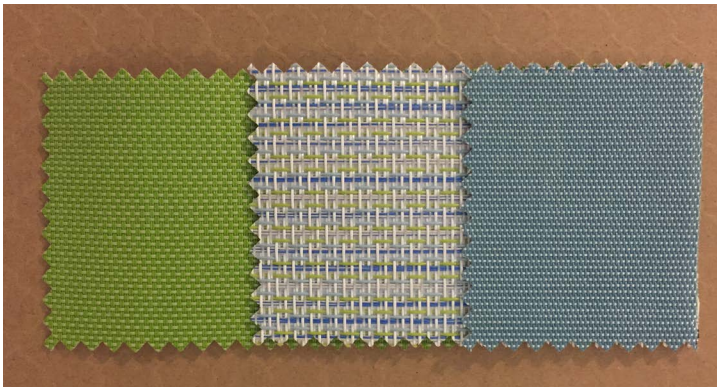
duly noted



Photo by Chris Chapman

Oh, deer

Please be aware of an adult deer and her baby on the property. Keep your dogs tightly leashed and under your control while walking. Although a baby deer is extremely cute, it is a wild animal. Do not feed the deer and do not attempt to approach them. The mother may fear for the safety of the baby and become aggressive if you approach the baby. Adult deer are powerful and can injure you and your pets. As tempting as it sounds, please don't try to take a selfie with the deer. Let them have their space and keep your dogs and children away from them. – from a Pet Club email



The display is on view in the Community Center next to the front desk

Many years ago, when my mother left my father for the seventh and final time, we had to hide out for a while. That's how we ended up in Brindel's Mill, a Texas town that's blessed with nothing, not far from Odessa. It seemed ideal.

On my first day at Brindel's Mill High, the registrar told me with a disapproving shake of his head that the principal insisted on meeting all new students. "Just go on in. Her office is right down there."

I stood outside the slightly open door. A stenciled sign said: Mrs. Leah Nieberger (Spencer), Principal. In Texas in 1959, I had never heard of a female high school principal, and I couldn't imagine what she would be like.

She sat tapping her pencil against her desk when I entered, a worried expression on her face. She resembled a ripe pineapple. Her round torso bulged inside a brown knit sweater, and from the top of her head sprouted a short pineapple-leaf ponytail caught with a green rubber band. I knocked timidly on the door frame.

When she saw me, her face sprang into a grin. "Ah! A new student! And handsome, too! This week of struggle and bureaucracy is redeemed! Come in and delight me, young man!"

I had attended sixteen schools all over Texas, and I had never received such a welcome. The pain of being the new kid would be there, but this rotund woman with the funny hair gave me hope. As in Wonderland, things got curiouser and curiouser.

She asked me questions and actually listened to the answers, leaving me completely nonplussed. When she had extracted more from me than my own father had ever done, she gave me some

The only school in Texas that teaches the tango

by Rebecca Long Hayden



information of her own.

"I take pride in Brindel's Mill," she said. "Oh, I know it's just a wet spot in the road, but it's our wet spot, and in its own way, it reflects the vagaries of humankind. For instance, there's never been a mill here, nor anyone named Brindel. There's no such family, railroad, cattle breed, or river."

She leaned back in her chair and placed her tiny feet on the desk. I tried not to stare, but they were about the size of two piano keys. How could she walk on them, I wondered?

"A drifter named Tom Sams founded the town, and two days later he left. In eighteen-something, I forget, the mayor and the town council got into it over buggy traffic on Main Street. The council wanted to put up a sign saying 'Stop Before Continuing,' but the mayor thought the sign should just say 'Stop.' He reckoned people would know it didn't mean forever. They exchanged insults until the mayor ended the debate by drawing a pistol and shooting himself in the foot."

She paused, clearly expecting some comment from me. I had been half listening, distracted by the sight of a female principal with her feet on the desk who listened to students and didn't even

care about exact dates. "Uh," I said. "Uh, hmmm, well..., by golly! If that sign had gone up, it might have been the first stop sign in Texas!"

This pleased her. "Indeed it might have! But it never did, owing to events. Namely, the mayor declared the town and the council defunct, and except for the people, the stores, and so on, Brindel's Mill didn't exist for years. When folks wanted electricity and paved roads, the school teacher, a Mr. Spring, sent ballots home with his stu-

dents, asking for re-establishment of the township and the election of himself as mayor."

I nodded as though I understood the politics of this maneuver, which I did not.

She returned my sagacious nod, rose from the desk, and started toward the door. I followed.

"When Brindel's Mill needed a bigger school with separate grades," she continued, "Mayor Spring appointed his sister, Iris Spring Nieberger, principal of the high school, and a Nieberger's been principal ever since! And we're always called 'Nieberger,' even if we're married."

By this time she was rolling down the hall at my side, escorting me to my new homeroom. I studied the way her solid stoutness tapered to the tiny but functional feet, and I decided that she was more like an ice cream cone than a pineapple.

As we entered the classroom, she said, "Sometimes nepotism means stagnation, boy, but it can work the other way. Sometimes a family lock is so cemented by tradition that a remarkable person gets the job, and there's nothing the school board can do about it! I am such a person!"

She laughed, and so did I, so that my appearance to my new classmates must have been one of relaxed good humor.

With the excruciating self-awareness of a fifteen-year-old, I realized that this would be a good first impression.

Introducing me to the class, Mrs. Nieberger included my middle name, Roy Clephane Harrington. I was pimply, embarrassed by my very existence, and inclined to get an erection at anything from a meatloaf to a trophy case. I blushed but didn't get an erection (it could have gone either way).

When the snickers came, Mrs. Nieberger poised on her miniature feet (I thought she might pitch forward) and silenced the class by threatening to remove her shoes. I learned later that she had a chronic and pungent foot fungus.

By the end of my first week, I also learned that she had two requirements for those who wished to teach at Brindel's Mill High.

The first was a sense of humor; the second, intelligence. If the candidate couldn't make her laugh, they didn't get the job. She had her own intelligence tests, too.

The biology teacher, Mr. Chandler, got his job because of his arm. It had a severed nerve or a pinched something. Rumor said it happened in the war, or maybe a motorcycle accident in Spain or Alabama. Without warning, his left arm would slither away from his side and jerk like a worried snake. The arm had its own private fit while Mr. Chandler watched. The only way he got it under control was to slam his hand against a flat surface, like a wall or a table, locking the elbow and leaning his weight on the arm. This occurred regularly in class, and although it was startling the first time you saw it, especially if he slammed his hand down on your desk, it was just part of old man Chandler.

In his interview with Mrs. Nieberger, it was said, the arm snapped out and smacked her on the chin. She laughed like the devil. Then she pulled a rubber chicken out of her bottom desk drawer and made him teach her the mus-

cle groups from stem to stern. He did, using a combination of first initials to help her remember.

She asked potential band directors to compose eight bars of a march and disqualified them if she couldn't play it on her cornet, reasoning that it was too hard for high school musicians. For days the halting sounds of her horn filtered into lab and classroom, but on the day we heard a pithy but simple march, well-played by Mrs. Nieberger, we knew we had a new band director.

She made the math candidate balance her checkbook, a task that defeated ten in a row and resulted in the hiring of Mr. McIntyre, whose approach to algebra included histrionics and prayer. He pulled at his hair, made us work problems at the board while everyone watched, and screamed about keeping "your equals under your equals" (though no one ever quite figured out what that meant). When so moved, Mr. McIntyre dropped to his knees to beseech the Almighty for assistance. Every second we were in his class he had our uncompromised attention.

Mrs. Nieberger looked favorably on me for several reasons. Number one, she considered me that object demanding of much tenderness, "a fatherless boy." She also thought I had an original mind, the supreme accolade. Once Mrs. Nieberger pronounced that a student had an original mind, their academic reputation was established.

I ran track and warmed the bench at basketball games, which demonstrated



school spirit to Mrs. Nieberger. In the case of basketball, it was for a superior view of the enchanting flip of Ginnie Neiberger Spencer's long, honey-colored page boy, not to mention the mad-dening flip of her short, maroon cheer-leading skirt.

Ginnie was Mrs. Nieberger's daughter, the baby, last of four children.

Mrs. Nieberger's favor allowed me the privilege of working in the office one hour per week, removing me from study hall. I performed my duties with one ear cocked toward the open door of her office, which was the heart of the school, not to mention the home of her legendary bottom desk drawer. It contained not only the rubber chicken, but such known treasures as the pea shooter that got Butch Roberts suspended and the beret once worn by Trish Olaganski, the school-slut-who-really-wasn't-but-every-school-has-to-have-one. The beret, being French, was automatically decadent and immoral, and Trish's teacher snatched the offending chapeau and deposited it on Mrs. Nieberger's desk, where it found its way into the bottom drawer.

Later reflection makes me believe that Mrs. Nieberger chose her battles carefully, and there were many. She didn't take up the lance for hats, but I remember once I passed her office after basketball practice. She sat alone, working late, and on her head was the jaunty red beret.

What eventually led to trouble for me was Eddie Redmond's tennis shoe. Eddie was a football star, big, obnoxious, smelly, the town banker's son. Once Mr. Chandler hit him "accidentally" with his wild arm, right after Eddie dipped Little Andy's lunch into formaldehyde. Although Eddie's dad pitched a fit over it, Mrs. Nieberger prevailed, and Mr. Chandler kept his job.

Eddie's tennis shoe came to rest in Mrs. Nieberger's bottom drawer because of Ginnie Nieberger Spencer. Eddie sat behind her in Mr. Jay's history class. (Mr. Jay, known as the Cyclops, had a glass eye, but that was small potatoes at Brindel's Mill High.) I saw Eddie

put his feet on the back of Ginnie's seat, and thus onto her crisp starched skirts. I longed to defend her, but I weighed 150 pounds, Eddie weighed 210, and I didn't want to die. Soon enough, Ginnie proved herself a true daughter of the family Nieberger.

Opportunity came Ginnie's way one spring day when Eddie, overcome by balmy weather, fell asleep with his massive feet on either side of her chair. With her black ballpoint pen she printed "SCREW MRS. NIEBERGER" in letters an inch high on the side of Eddie's Moby Dick tennis shoe.

She had to lean away from her desk to get at the outside length of the sneaker, but she managed. After I got over my shock at sweet Ginnie's cunning, I realized with gathering glee that Eddie was done for. Sure enough, Mrs. Nieberger saw the epithet before Eddie did, and even though he probably realized how it got there, he couldn't tell Mrs. Nieberger, who confiscated the shoe and made Eddie walk around in one sneaker for a whole month.

She told him he was free to complain to his father, but she would then be forced to show Banker Redmond the missing shoe. Eddie became known as "One Shoe," and he never put his feet on Ginnie's chair again.

Desire to possess The Shoe became an obsession with every boy in school, especially me. It was like wanting to own a chunk of the torpedo that sank the Bismarck, and this quest accounted for why I hung around Mrs. Nieberger's door more than ever, looking for my opportunity. It didn't come until my junior year, but in the meantime lingering there had other rewards.

It enabled me, for instance, to bring the news of the tango lessons. For six weeks every spring, the boys' and girls' gym classes were combined for dancing lessons. In this age of non-dancing, it's difficult to imagine the delicate touching and gliding that went on then, and the way males and females alike anticipated this golden six weeks, when we were not only allowed but required to hug each other to music.

Catastrophe struck with the resignation of Mrs. Tooley, who from year to year clapped her freckled hands and began the dancing in the gym. The day came when she moved wraithlike around the school, pale and circle-eyed. I swept the floor near Mrs. Nieberger's door and heard Mrs. Tooley ask for an hour off to see a doctor. She knew her time on earth was short, for she had been ill of late.



I saw her a week later, and radiant is the word that comes to mind. She was not sick; she was pregnant and overcome with joy. At thirty-five, she had given up hope, I suppose. She requested immediate retirement from her position so as not to endanger this miracle. An equally jubilant Mrs. Nieberger granted the request, leaving the spring dancing classes in doubt.

The floor outside Mrs. Nieberger's office had become the only spotless place in the school, due to the dedication of all the students who worked in the office, but I was the lucky one on duty the day Mr. Tomaso applied for the job officially called Gym Teacher Number Two. Gym Teacher Number One taught the real stuff, like sports and games. Number Two taught health and dancing.

I had never seen anything like Mr. Tomaso. He wore an ascot which to me looked like a piece of rag tied around his neck. I knew I ought to think it was queer, but I liked it, it had a certain panache.

"And what can you bring to the study of health or dance," I heard Mrs. Nieberger ask, "that is unique?"

The office remained quiet. I found myself roofing for Mr. Tomaso. Say something daring, I silently advised.

"I could teach the boys about the use of condoms, and I could teach the girls about their fertile cycle," he said.

I almost dropped my broom! Not that daring, I thought! I heard the sharp tap of Mrs. Nieberger's pencil against the desk. "I imagine that would be some of the most practical information they could ever possess, Mr. Tomaso, but I don't think even I could wade through what would hit the fan if you ever so much as suggested it privately to any parent whatsoever. It's an idea ahead of its time, and I appreciate that. However, you'd better think of something else if you want this job."

Mrs. Nieberger waited. I waited. Mr. Tomaso said, "I won the Grand Champion Tango Contest at the Biltmore Ballroom in New York City. I could teach them to tango!"

My God, I thought!

"My God!" Mrs. Nieberger uttered. "It's brilliant! Practically about sex, but subtle. And defensible. A bit of daring from the outside world, yet not too daring. I hope the tango didn't originate in France. Did it originate in France, do you know?"

"It might have. I don't know."

"Well, never mind. We'll say it was invented in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They won't find fault with it then. When can you start?"

By the time she said the word start my broom was propped against the wall, and I was halfway to the lunchroom. I would bear the news! Tango lessons! By mid-afternoon the school was awash in speculation. What exactly was the tango? How was it done? Had anyone ever seen it? What kind of music did you do it to? The girls tittered, and the boys nodded with a wisdom they didn't possess. Something big was coming to Brindel's Mill High. The tango!

On the first day of the dancing classes, Mr. Tomaso said we would alternate

partners for five weeks, but during the last week we could form pairs of our own choosing. There was some muttering. The boys who drove tractors for their dads on weekends and rode humpbacked Brahma bulls at rodeos weren't sure about tango lessons, but Mr. Tomaso's enthusiasm was so genuine, so rhapsodic, that the snickers turned to guarded interest.

Mr. Tomaso paced in his skinny stove-pipe pants. He had a spectacular Roman nose. I can still picture him snapping his chin to his shoulder, showing the class his beautiful profile, lifting his shoulder to set the nose at the precise angle.

In his pre-dance lecture, he said, "Knowledge is a most unusual thing! The more of it you use, the more of it you have! And all knowledge has potential, young people, potential! No doubt, some of you are skeptical, especially those of you in lizard-skin boots." The class laughed, and Mr. Tomaso won a few points.

"However, I venture to say that someday you'll be glad you learned to tango, just as glad as you'll be that the Lord and Mr. McIntyre taught you algebra." Another chuckle.

"Now!" He snapped the Roman profile. "A demonstration!" At his nod, Little Andy put on a scratchy record, and Mrs. Tomaso rose from the chair where she had been waiting. She slunk to his side, her black hair swinging down her back, and stood there, rigid, waiting. Mr. Tomaso slipped his arm around her waist and crushed her to him, causing an audible gasp from the students. The music dipped and swirled, as did the Tomasos, around the gym like trout in a stream, birds on the wing, anything and everything graceful and exotic. They had us then, he and Mrs. Tomaso and Mrs. Nieberger, who stood at the side of the gym, her pony tail bobbing to the music. We stared, agog, enthralled.

Even the skeptics could not deny the allure, the pulse of the dance.

By the end of that six weeks, straw-haired girls had danced their way



into the hearts of bull-riding cowboys whose lizard skin boots lined the gymnasium wall. The athletes, the scholars, the hoods, all dipped and swayed, titillated by Mr. Tomaso's instructions to "always lead with your chest, young swains." And we did, right into the soft young bosoms of the girls who would be our friends and wives someday. It was grand and amazing!

My life was complete when Ginnie consented to be my partner for the final week. When the week ended, I asked her for a date, a thing I hadn't dared do before. She said "Yes," and her answer made music! In a hormone-driven euphoria, I released her and tangoed alone, out of the gym, down the hall, and into Mrs. Nieberger's office, the famous tennis shoe on my mind. I had asked Ginnie for a date, and she had said yes. Surely, I could do anything now!

Mrs. Nieberger caught me with my hand in the cookie jar, or, in this case, with my hand in the desk drawer.

"Stop!" Her voice froze me where I stood. "Withdraw whatever is in your malfessant fingers."

I lifted my hand clear of the desk, and it hung there, the side that said SCREW MRS. NIEBERGER showing, naturally.

"Aha! Just as I thought!" She walked around the desk to stand in front of me. She was the only person I ever knew

who could look down on anybody, even though they were a head taller than her. She looked down at me. Abruptly, she turned on her birdlike heel and strolled across the room, hands behind her back.

She faced me. "Roy, I know a lot about that shoe. I know Eddie Redmond isn't responsible for the graffiti. For one thing, my name's spelled right. I know it was put there to do him in. I imagine it worked. What I don't know, and I confess I'm curious, is how it was done, who did it, and why. If you tell me, I'll forget I ever saw you tonight. No, I'll do better. I'll let you walk out of here with that shoe. All you have to do is tell me the story." My high school past and future flashed before my eyes. The teasing about "Clephane," lovely Ginnie, Mr. Chandler's arm, the whole lot, including the fame that would be mine if I possessed The Shoe. All I had to do was deliver Ginnie to her mother, probably with minimal consequences. What would Mrs. Nieberger do after all this time, anyway? Tell the story and the trophy would be mine.

I slowly put the shoe back in the drawer. "You keep it, Mrs. Nieberger," I said, not defiantly, but sadly. "I, uh, uh, I wanted to say that I didn't know the true story, but it wasn't possible to lie to Mrs. Nieberger. "I can't tell it."

She shook her head. "Go on home, Roy. We'll talk tomorrow about your violation of my privacy."

I turned toward the always-open door. I had no more to say, and I thought she didn't.

"Roy?"

"Yes, ma'am?" I didn't turn around.

"Ginnie might like to know that you wouldn't betray a friend for a moronic idea of glory. I'll tell her."

I took two more steps away from the wonder that was Mrs. Nieberger, but she hadn't finished.

"Life will test you, boy," she said. "I think you'll pass."

*This story originally appeared in the **Concho River Review** in spring 1992.*



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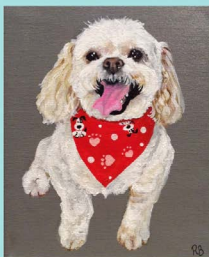
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Bring your own Chess Set if you like! – And, if you're brand new to Chess, but you'd like to check out our Chess Club while playing a relatively "quiet" or "cerebral" game that *doesn't* "compete" with the ancient game of Chess from a *noise* perspective, you may bring such a game and hang out with us! (Examples of Games that partner well with Chess: Scrabble, Checkers, Othello, etc.)

Contact Lisa J. Stedje at lisa@stedje.com and/or Nick Nickerson at fxnixson@gmail.com for more information.

Azita Mashayekhi
Wheel of Life
Photography
Exhibit

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Pranzo di Ferragosto
Written, directed & starring Gianni Di Gregorio

In mid-August the citizens of Rome usually leave the heat of the city and seek the cooling breezes of the seaside or mountains. Those who remain in the city usually have good reason. So opens this story about middle-aged Gianni who, residing with his 93-year old mother in a very old condo, finds himself responding to some unusual opportunities to offset mounting debts. What unravels is a story about the lifelong appetite for friendship and the restoring, convivial power of sharing a meal together. The film is in Italian with subtitles.

See the trailer here: <https://tinyurl.com/yaqyppxw>

Marsha Weiner will introduce the film and lead the post-movie discussion

final glance



Caught in the act

Photo by Azita Mashayekhi