

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

shall we dance?

July 14, 2021





Jam session

I'm looking to get together with musicians who live in Montebello. I generally play blues and classic rock, but interested in just about any type of acoustic or electric music. I would be interested in putting some set lists out and maybe writing and recording some music.

I play guitar and harmonica and sing. Get in touch with me at coreywalters@yahoo.com.— Corey Walters 🎸



Cover photo of Stormy the Great and Frank Sprague by Dian McDonald



Bambis in the woodlands by Linda Brownlee

The **MONTEBELLO** **Voice**
 an independent gazette
 Alexandria, Virginia

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Frank and Stormy



I have lived with a Norwegian Elkhound, black Lab, and multiple Great Danes. I had been looking for a dog for a few years and tried to rescue a greyhound, but didn't get through the waitlist before the tracks closed. I also tried multiple local rescues – to no avail. Then my neighbor's grandson was being deployed on a ship and needed to rehome Stormy, a 3-year-old, 125-pound Great Dane. Two weeks later I had a roommate who ate more food than I do.

Stormy can rest her chin on the kitchen counter, pull pots off the stove, and never misses a chance to get a snack, even if it comes from my dinner plate. I have lost 13 pounds in a month, some from the exercise and more from forced calorie restriction as Stormy sees all food as hers.

We take two or three walks a day, circling the complex and trails at least twice each time. She sleeps on the sofa on my balcony and enjoys the sun for most of the day. She's quiet, well-behaved, and wants to be friends with everyone.

She doesn't have the zoomies in the house, so that's good. All she needs is the sofa, some bones to chew on, and 90 percent of my bed at night.

I work from home and have my office on the balcony. I spend a large part of the day on video calls, so when Stormy needs to "reposition" herself on the sofa, she can show up in the background of the video. I know when that happens because of the shocked looks I get on their faces. – *Frank Sprague* 🐾



*Outdoor photos by Dian McDonald
Too-small couch photo by Frank Sprague*

Greta Thunberg

Is she right or wrong about climate change?

By Chester Taylor

Greta has clearly pointed out that our climate is changing due to global warming. She is as clear and

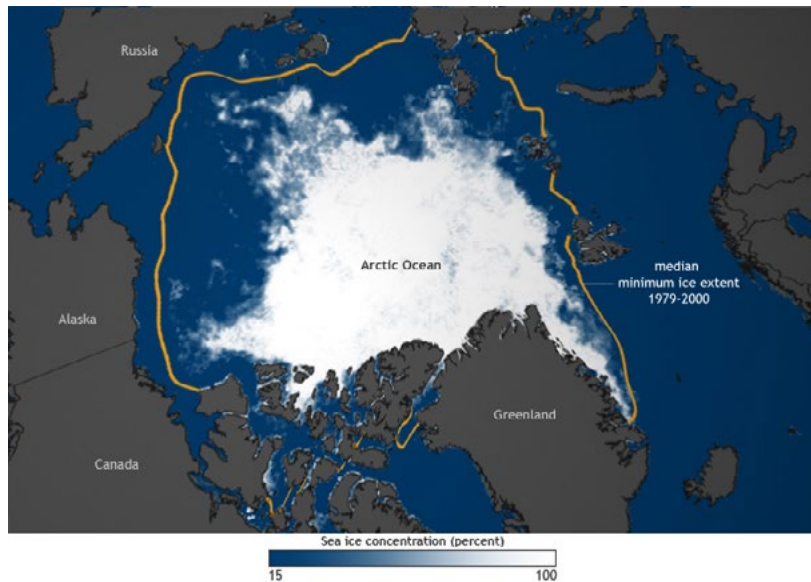
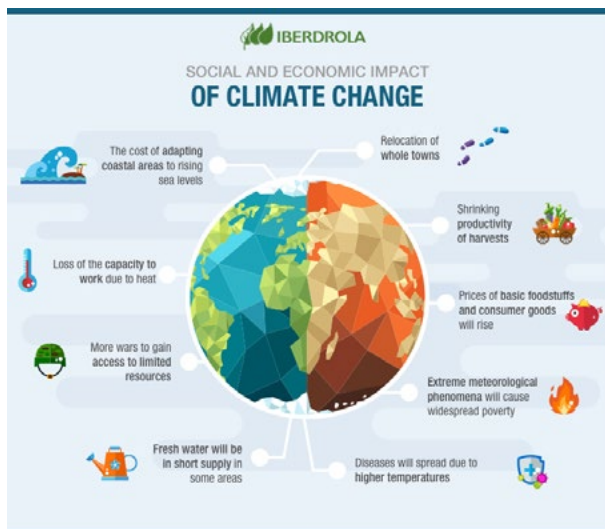
distinct as when the young boy who pointed out that the emperor had no clothes in Hans Christian Andersen's folktale. The fact that Greta is a teenager, has Asperger's syndrome, has been trained or dresses in one way or another is not the point. Is Greta right about climate change, right about global warming?

Greta points to science, land and sea temperatures have risen 0.9 degrees Celsius since the turn of the century (most in the last 35 years); sea creatures are moving toward the poles at a speed of 32 miles per decade, and glaciers melt billions of tons each year. You do not have to be a scientist to know that this is true. We all have noticed that the weather has been more extreme, more heat waves and derechos. We see that the number of birds in the parks is decreasing (a third less in North

America than ten years ago). I used to snorkel in the beautiful waters off Guam. Now a third of the once lively, colorful coral reefs look like white skeletons – extinct over the past ten years due to rising sea temperatures. Ten

years ago, American military divers asked for cooling systems for their wet-suits because some seas were too hot for them to work in for normal periods.

Greta may have trusted the researchers a little too much about the pace of climate change. Researchers are already revising their timetables upwards for climate change. The melting of the ice sheets does not proceed on a linear scale (evenly distributed, at the same rate) but at an exponential one increasing in speed over time. It is like when you defrost a freezer, the ice melts slowly at first, then it suddenly starts flowing like a river. We are in a crisis now. Even if we could reduce CO2 emissions worldwide sharply today, the only thing we could accomplish is reduce the killing of life on the planet by a few hundred years – that's like nano seconds in geological time. Greta is right about the effect climate change will have on her generation: lack of clean air, lack of fresh water, rising sea water, less food, deteriorating health and enormous costs. 🙏



The master of illusion

By Bob Shea

I showed up with a tool belt and a battery-operated drill. I was ready to become a volunteer set builder at a small Tidewater-area community theater after reading countless pleas in the playbill asking for volunteers. I knew nothing about community theater except that I enjoyed being in the audience. The show was *Mr. Roberts*. It was April 1996.

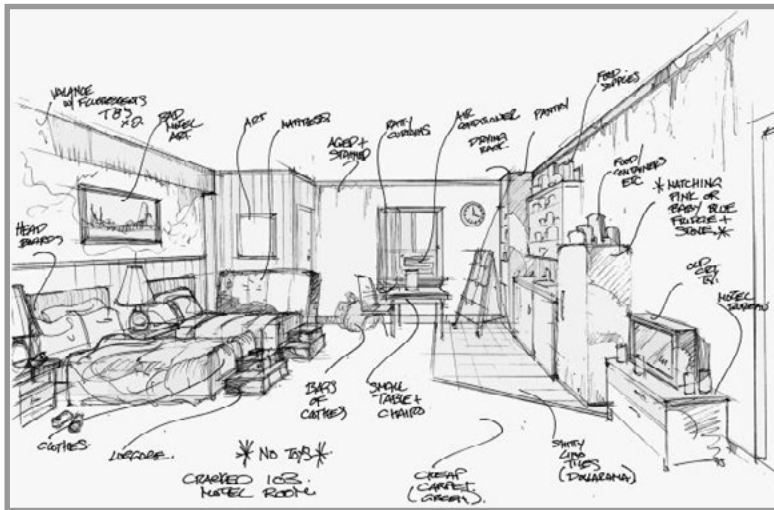
I enjoyed building sets and worked on a number of shows, progressing from volunteer builder to chief of construction. There was certain magic in creating a set where talented actors told stories on the make-believe world of a theater stage.

I was then asked to become a set designer, combining the words on the script and the director's vision. The easiest set was one where all the action took place in one room. Shows such as *Steel Magnolias*, *A Curious Savage*, and *The Odd Couple* fit this category. A much bigger challenge were shows, especially musicals, with multiple scenes that had to be changed during black outs. For example, *Guys and Dolls* had scenes in a NYC street, inside a street mission (twice), a NYC nightclub (twice), a Havana nightclub, a Havana street scene, Adelaide's dressing room, and a craps game under the street in a sewer tunnel. *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, the musical, had 21 different scenes.

The space in the wings of the theater limited what could be stored and moved by a volunteer stage crew that was as finely choreographed as any group of dancers. My rule of thumb was 45 seconds to make any scene change as otherwise the audience would get bored in the dark and become critical.

The show *Born Yesterday* was set in a high-end hotel suite in Washington, DC just after WW II. It had a winding staircase to two upper-level bedrooms, French doors opening onto a balcony with the US Capital in the background, and posh living room furnishings. After one show, a well-dressed couple complimented us on the set and asked if they could see the interiors of the two bedrooms at the top of the winding staircase. At the top of the stairs they were dumbfounded when they opened the doors and found two walls with wallpaper, a painting, chair rails, and crown molding built on a small platform with

battery-operated drill and drywall screws are a set builder's best friends. The set has a shelf-life of about 6 weeks – you are not building the Great Pyramids, but “almost good enough” has no place on the stage. Recycle everything as there is always another set to be built on a limited budget. If it is not visible from the front row, do not worry about painting what will never be seen. Sight lines are critical; think about the folks in the far left and right end seats in the front row. They should never be able to see backstage. Walls cannot shake no matter how hard an actor slams a door. The lighting must eliminate all shadows on the stage. Volunteer builders may be dedicated but they arrive with skills ranging from master carpenter to “what is a 2x4?” Tasks must be found for all; never fire a volunteer. Always have “practicals,” lamps that work, light switches to turn off and on other lights, telephones that ring, electrical outlets on walls with appliances plugged into them, but all are controlled from the light booth, not by the



a rough escape ladder leading down to stage level. “Where is the bedroom?” they asked. I smiled.

At that moment I realized that as a set designer, I was an illusionist. From the audience, they had seen one wall and had created in their minds a complete bedroom with a bed, furniture, a window, and all the things we expect to see in a hotel room. I had succeeded in making them see things that were not there. In a movie the camera crew can go to any location and film anything they need for a scene. In theater, the stage is the only real estate available. The set design has to capture the audience member's imagination and make them see things that do not exist.

The potpourri of set building: The

actors. Make the audience see the next room, the grass outside the door, the driveway when a newly arrived car is heard, the rain that soaked an actor who arrives at the door with an umbrella – all part of the illusion.

Whether it be an imaginary bedroom created by a wallpapered and painted 4x8 foot sheet of plywood or a below street-level craps game accessed by a lifted manhole cover, it is all illusion. In the theater we do not go to a location. We have to create the location, even if you do not actually see it.

Think about that the next time you go to a live theater. Did you really see it or did you imagine it? 🎭

It's always summer with a Popsicle!

By Raymond Houck

Like chocolate chip cookies, potato chips, and corn flakes, the story of the Popsicle starts with a happy accident.

In 1905, 11-year-old Frank Epperson of San Francisco, California caught a lucky break when overnight temperatures in the Bay Area took a rare dip below 32 degrees, freezing the syrupy drink he had left outside – and most importantly, solidifying it on the stick he had been using to mix it up. There

the treats home to his children, they begged “Pop for a sicle,” and the name stuck. In 1924, he applied for and received a patent for his process, officially branding it as Popsicle, and that is how the word we use for ice pops came to be.

Frank kept experimenting with his concoction, adding new flavors, and sales of his treats continued to grow. He



Popsicle’s two-stick version came out during the Great Depression. For just a nickel, kids could buy one treat and split it to share with their friends. Popsicle discontinued the twin treat in 1986, but thanks to pop star Justin Bieber’s public plea for the return of the double-stick, it returned in 2019.

Eventually, the Joe Lowe Co. sold Popsicle to Consolidated Foods, with one of its subsidiaries being the Good Humor division. You can find Popsicles in the freezer case of your favorite supermarket, and they come in various flavors, including cherry, root beer, lemon, banana, orange grape, and watermelon. Today cherry is the best seller.

More than two billion Popsicles are sold every year — not bad for a kid with a “cool” idea! 🍷



were other ice pops on the market, but no one had thought of patenting the process until Epperson finally did it himself. What we once called ice pops, Epperson named his treat Popsicle. The story goes that when he brought

began selling his frozen refreshments at fairs and amusement parks like Alameda’s Neptune Beach. After finding that people in the neighborhood could not get enough of them, he sold his Popsicle rights entirely to the Joe Lowe Co. of New York.



The Colosseum

By Joe de Angelis

The ancient Romans

were prolific builders, as evidenced by their roads, aqueducts, baths, and amphitheaters that still exist to this day. Amphitheatrum (theatre all around) were ubiquitous throughout the Roman Empire with 230 amphitheaters in 27 countries in existence today, 109 of which are in Italy. The amphitheater of Pompeii, known as the Spectacula, built circa 75 B.C., is the earliest known Roman amphitheater. However, the largest and best known amphitheater is the Colosseum in Rome. There are many interesting facts about the Colosseum, some well known, others, more obscure. For example, the name of Rome's ancient amphitheater is the Colosseum, which is different from coliseum, and it is always spelled with the capital letter C. This name applies only to the amphitheater in Rome, and not to any other Roman amphitheater.

Rome's Colosseum is the most magnificent and enduring structures of the Roman Empire. It was host to events involving magnificent processions, exotic animals, gladiator battles, chariot races, executions, and even mock naval battles on water. Although the largest amphitheater ever built, the Colosseum that exists in Rome today has been severely degraded and deconstructed over the centuries: it has experienced at least three major fires and suffered damage from four earthquakes over the centuries. Of particular note is the fact that Pope Nicholas V (A.D. 1447–1455), who commissioned work on Saint Pe-

ter's Basilica, ordered the demolition of the Colosseum and had some 2,522 cartloads of stone removed from the Colosseum and transported to the site of the new basilica before his death.

Originally named the Amphitheatrum Flavium (Flavian Amphitheater), the Colosseum derives its present name from its proximity to a 100-foot tall, gilded bronze statue of the Emperor Nero. The gigantic statue originally stood in the vestibule of the Domus Aurea (Golden House), Nero's vast landscaped palace complex with an artificial



lake. Following Nero's death in A.D. 68, and three contenders to the imperial throne, Vespasian became Emperor in A.D. 69, whereupon he immediately had Nero's Domus Aurea stripped of all of its precious marble and metals and then completely destroyed the palace. But rather than destroying the gigantic statue, Vespasian had it transformed it into a statue of Colossus Solis (Sun God). Vespasian then ordered an amphitheater to be built on the site of the Domus Aurea as a gift to the Roman people, a place where they could enjoy gladiatorial combats as well as other forms of entertainment. But Vespasian died before its construction was finished, and his son, Emperor Titus,

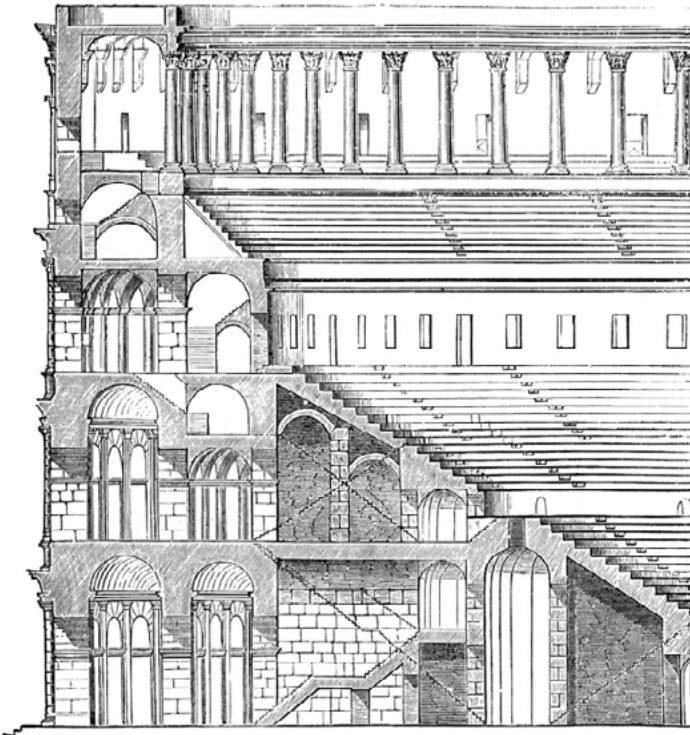
saw the Colosseum to completion in A.D. 80. Titus named it the Amphitheatrum Flavium after his father who was of the Flavian dynasty.

Many historians believe that the building of the Colosseum was subsidized with the treasures taken from Jerusalem after Rome's victory in the first Jewish-Roman war of A.D. 66. As many as 60,000 to 100,000 Jews were taken as slaves and transported to Rome by Titus, who had accompanied his father, Vespasian, to Judah to help quell the Jewish revolt. These Jewish slaves are believed to have also been employed in the construction of the Colosseum. The Arch of Titus, located at the foot of the Palatine hill on the Via Sacra in the Forum Romanum (Roman Forum), depicts a menorah and Jewish slaves being taken from Jerusalem to Rome by Roman Soldiers. The Talmud still prohibits Jews from walking beneath the Arch of Titus because of this imagery. There was a

carved inscription on the exterior of the Colosseum that reads "Built for the glory of Rome and the Flavian Family with the proceeds of the Jewish War."

In the year A.D. 128, Emperor Hadrian had the Colossus Solis moved from its original location to just northwest of the Colosseum where it remained until it was completely destroyed. The only thing remaining today is the volcanic rock (tuff) base on which it stood. The Colossus Solis may have been destroyed during the Sack of Rome in A.D. 410, or perhaps it collapsed during the earthquakes of A.D. 443; in any event, Pope Gregory the Great (A.D. 590-604) used the remaining bronze from the statue to make cannons for Castel St. Angelo.

when in Rome



The Roman Colosseum derived its name because of its proximity to the Colossus Solis. The Colossus Solis that once stood next to the Amphitheatrum Flavianum was generally referred to as the “Colosso,” meaning huge or gigantic. For whatever reason, the people of Rome transposed the nickname of the giant statue to refer to the amphitheater, and eventually they began referring to the amphitheater simply as Colosso or Colosseum. The evolution of the name of the amphitheater, from Amphitheatrum Flavianum to Colosseum, was simply a matter of general usage by the local population most likely because it was much easier to say Colosso or Colosseum than it was to say Amphitheatrum Flavianum.

Constructed in only eight years, the Roman Colosseum is without a doubt the engineering marvel of the ancient Roman world. Oval in shape, the Colosseum measures 620 feet in length, 512 feet in width, and is 158 feet high. On the outside, the first three levels display Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns, respectively. The entire four-story structure is supported by hundreds of arched vaults, the design of which was perfected by the Romans.

The Colosseum has 80 arched en-

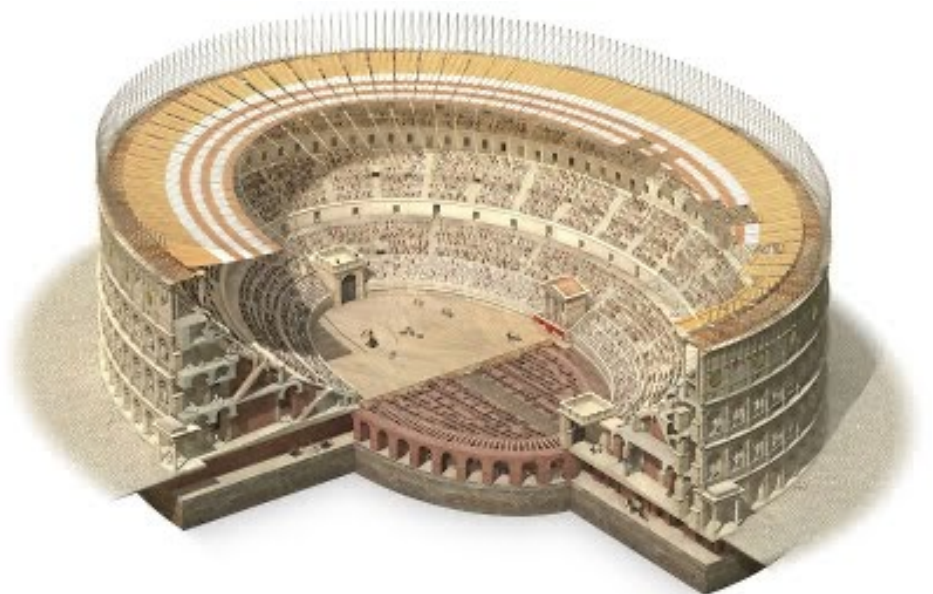
trances, four of which are unnumbered and designated as Grand Entrances: the Plaga Septentrionalis (North Gate), which was reserved for emperors and their families, wealthy patricians, senators, and visiting dignitaries, while the Portam Meridianam (South Gate) was reserved for the entrance of the Vestal Virgins. Then there were the Porta Sanavivaria (Gate of Life) and the Porta Libitinarian (Gate of Death).

There were 80 rows of bleachers that could accommodate some 50,000 people. Each section of bleachers was numbered with a designated Vomitorium (exit) leading to vaulted corridors that were specifically designed to allow large crowds to exit the Colosseum in a matter of minutes. The English word “vomit” is derived from the Latin vomitoria, which translates as “a rapid discharge.” The vaulted corridors were also popular meeting places for couples who wanted to have sex, and for pros-

titutes, both male and female, looking for business. The Latin word for arch or vaulted space is fornix which quickly became a slang word for brothel and remains with us today as the English word fornication.

Admission to the Colosseum was free, but spectators had to have a tessera (ticket) which were distributed by various government sanctioned groups throughout the city. The tessera were small disks of clay or bone, about the size of a penny, and had a seat, tier, and sector number indicating which entrance gate to use. Spectators were seated according to their social status. Just inside each entrance there was a large diagram, etched in marble, depicting the seating arrangements. Because of the popularity of the games, a barrier of iron chains strung between 160 bollards was erected around the Colosseum and the entrances were controlled by armed soldiers.

Each section had four tiers of seating: the podium, the maenianum primum, the maenianum secundum imum, the maenianum secundum summum, and the maenianum summum in ligneis, all of which were clearly marked, and seating strictly enforced. The podium (place of honor), a flat marble platform, approximately 15 feet wide, ran around the entire first tier of the arena. Special boxes were placed at the north and



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south ends of the amphitheater for the emperor and royal family, and the Vestal Virgins, respectively. The remainder of the podium was reserved for important priests, government officials, and Roman Senators. The second tier, the *maenianum primum* was reserved for the Equites (knights), the non-senatorial noble class. The third tier, originally reserved for the plebeians (ordinary Roman citizens), was divided into two sections with the lower and better seats for wealthy plebeians, while the upper seats were for the less affluent plebeians. The fourth tier, the *maenianum summum in ligneis*, was reserved for common women and consisted of steep wooden seats that ringed the very top wall of the amphitheater. The fourth tier was added by emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Actors, gravediggers, and former gladiators, however, were banned from the Colosseum, and slaves were strictly forbidden as spectators.

The movie *Gladiator* did an impressive job computer-generating a realistic presentation of the Colosseum. It even provided a brief glimpse of the *Colosus Solis*, when Antonius Proximo, the old, gruff gladiator trainer, returned to Rome with his stable of gladiators. The movie did not, however, do as good a job of portraying Rome's social stratification vis-à-vis the seating arrangement in the amphitheater.

Protecting all of the spectators from the weather was the *velarium* (canvas awnings) that provided shade from the brutal *mezzogiorno* (the midday sun) while at the same time generating an updraft resulting in a cool breeze. The *velarium* was an ingenious system of sail-like awnings rigged on vertical

poles with pulleys and ropes. The poles, similar to today's telephone poles, were inserted in sockets and rested on support stones that were built into the top part of the outer wall of the Colosseum. The awnings were built, maintained, and operated by sailors from Rome's imperial fleet who had extensive exper-



ience rigging sails. The *velarium* was unfurled and furled by these expert sailors as the weather dictated.

The floor of the Colosseum where the games were held was oval in shape measuring 287 feet in length and 180 feet in width, approximately the size of a football field. It was made of wood and covered with *harena* (sand), hence the word arena. The arena also had two gates: the *Porta Sanavivaria* (Gate of Life) and the *Porta Libitinarian* (Gate of Death). The *Porta Sanavivaria*, located at the eastern end of the arena was where the gladiators entered the arena and the survivors exited. The *Libitinarian*, named after *Libitina*, the goddess of funerals, was located on the opposite side of the arena and was used to remove the bodies of fallen gladiators, as well as dead animals. The bodies of criminals were thrown into the river or dumped unburied, while ordinary citizens, slaves and freedmen were usually buried, but outside of the city

limits. Professional gladiators had their own separate cemeteries.

Located directly beneath the arena floor is the *hypogeum* (underground). The *hypogeum* was not part of the Colosseum's original design, but was added by Emperor Domitian approximately ten years after the Colosseum was built.

The *hypogeum* was partly excavated in the early 19th century but was fully exposed under Benito Mussolini's direction in the 1930s. Since then, archaeologists have discovered that the Colosseum also had public drinking fountains, food stands, and public toilets. The excavation brought to light the extraordinary building skills of the Roman engineers who planned and constructed the underground maze.

Pipes were laid in the walls to facilitate a water supply and numerous aqueducts were constructed for storing and moving water. There was also a sewer and drainage system that moved waste from the public toilets, as well as from the arena, and carried it to the main sewer system adjacent to the Colosseum.

The Colosseum's food stands sold a variety of wines, which was actually watered down wine, as the Romans never drank wine straight. Then there was *calda*, warm water and wine laced with spices and honey and for the very poor, and there was also *posca*, vinegar mixed with enough water to make it barely drinkable. There were also shops that sold various types of breads, including *focaccia*; meats and vegetables were also available, but not in large quantities. The most popular vegetable was the cucumber, as it not only filled the stomach, but also quenched thirst.

Beneath the arena floor was a vast,

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two-level network of corridors, cells, machinery and 32 cages for animals. There were 80 vertical *hegmata* (shafts) connecting the hypogeum to the arena above, as well as an extensive network of trap doors for gladiators and animals to enter the arena. Some of the *hegmata* were large enough to move elephants and other large beasts to the arena floor. These trap doors were also used to hoist theatrical scenery and props to be used in various spectacles. The hypogeum was connected to the outside through a network of underground tunnels that included a private access tunnel for the emperors. There were separate tunnels for gladiators to enter, and tunnels that lead to the stables and pens where the animals were kept.

Because the Colosseum was built over the *Domus Aurea*, which had an artificial lake with its own water supply, it was possible to flood the arena and conduct *naumachia* (mock naval battles). However, with the construction of the hypogeum, this was no longer possible. There were only two *naumachia* events ever held in the Colosseum prior to the construction of the hypogeum, and none thereafter.

Who can think of the Colosseum and not think of gladiators and their fights to the death? It is widely believed that gladiator fights began as part of ancient funeral rites where wealthy nobles held graveside combats to the death between slaves, the first such gladiatorial games are believed to have been held in 264 B.C. These funeral games were later increased in scope by Julius Caesar who staged bouts between hundreds of gladiators in honor of his deceased father and daughter. Because of their popularity, government officials soon

began hosting state-funded games as a way of currying favor with the masses.

By the time the Colosseum was built, however, gladiator matches were very well controlled with referees monitoring the matches and doctors on standby. Gladiators and the games had evolved into a well-organized blood sport with gladiators viewing themselves as a kind of brotherhood, and some even organized into *collegia*, (unions). When a gladiator died in the arena, the *collegia*



would ensure that he received a proper funeral to include a grave inscription honoring his achievements. If the deceased had a wife and children, they would also see that the family received monetary compensation for their loss. Though they were regularly forced to come to blows in life-or-death combat, gladiator fights did not always end in death. Some successful gladiators became famous celebrities, and some even had long careers, even though they lost many fights, but were not killed. However, this does not mean that gladiators did not die, on the contrary, a very large number of gladiators did perish in the arena over the years.

Flamma, a Syrian slave, was a secular gladiator who was a legend in his own time, with a 13-year career during the reign of emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138). Flamma refused the *rudis* (a wooden sword symbolising freedom), four times, electing to continue fight-

ing. He had a record 34 combats: 21 victories, 3 *missus* (a loss, but where the gladiator's life was spared), and 9 *stans missus* (where both fighters were declared the winner). At his 34th fight he died in the arena at age 30.

The first gladiatorial school was founded in Rome in 105 B.C. and by the time the Colosseum was built there were numerous such schools in the city. Gladiators were classified in accordance with certain criteria, such as skill level,

experience, fighting style, weapons, and their success rate. The Romans liked to equip and name gladiators after their ancient enemies. For example, Thraeces fought with shield and short sword, the traditional weapons of vanquished people of Thrace (Thrace was once comprised of parts

of modern day Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey). *Murmillones* fought with helmet, shield, and short sword, as did the defeated warriors of Gaul. Other types of gladiators were the *Equites*, who fought on horseback, the *Essedarii*, who fought from chariots, the *Dimachaerus*, who fought with two swords and the *Retiarius*, who fought with a net and a trident.

Believe it or not, there were also female gladiators and they have been documented by several Roman historians such as Tacitus, Martial, and Suetonius. They have also been depicted in Roman mosaics fighting bare breasted, wearing only a loincloth. Female gladiators first appeared around A.D. 60. Contrary to popular belief, female gladiators were not called *gladiatrix*, in fact, there is no specific Latin word for a female gladiator. *Gladiatrix* first appeared in an 1802 translation by William G. Gifford of *Satire VI*, by the

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Roman poet Juvenal. In A.D. 11 the Roman Senate passed a law forbidding freeborn women under the age of 20 from participating in the games but did not address female slaves. It was not until A.D. 200 when Emperor Septimius Severus banned female gladiators that they were eliminated from the games in the Colosseum.

Initially, public events and games, such as chariot races, horse races, and gladiatorial combat were held in a circus (circle), a large open-air venue, circular or elliptical in shape. However, once the Colosseum was built in Rome, all of the city's games quickly moved to the new venue. The inaugural *Ludi Romani* (Roman games) held at the new Amphitheatrum Flavium lasted an unprecedented 100 days and the spectacles enacted lasted all day long. The inaugural *Ludi Romani* saw more than 9,000 animals slaughtered, including bears, panthers, lions, ostriches, wild asses, and bison. Additionally, approximately 2,000 criminals and gladiators were killed during those 100 days.

The *Ludi Romani* typically included gladiatorial combats, wild animal hunts, public executions, chariot races and recreations of historical battles. Although there are no known records of the sequence of events, for a day's entertainment, there most likely was some form of a standard format: the morning may have started with animal hunts or animal fights, followed by, for example, the executions of criminals at midday, and to close out the afternoon there could have been the most awaited event – combat of the gladiators. The day's festivities, on occasion, may also have ended with the recreation of a famous historical battle. The Colosseum was in constant use for four centuries, from the time of its construction and until the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476, after which it was totally neglected and fell into disrepair.

The Colosseum was the venue, but

what was it that kept the games going? The answer is “*panem et circenses*” (Bread and Circus). *Panem et circenses* refers to the superficial appeasement of the Roman people by the Roman government, which in A.D. 140 passed laws introducing a grain dole that give out free bread, as well as free entertainment to the city's poor. These laws also enabled the Senate to secure the votes of the poor by offering them distractions from their daily lives, problems, and grievances. The government kept the citizens of Rome happy by distributing free food and staging huge specta-



cles in the Colosseum, thereby avoiding riots and their own possible overthrow.

Even before these laws were passed, the notion of “*panem et circenses*” was very well established, but not everyone was supportive of the policy. The Roman poet, Juvenal (circa A.D. 100), described how Roman emperors controlled the masses by keeping them ignorant and obsessed with self-indulgence, so that they would be distracted and not throw them out of office, which they might have done if they realized the true condition of the Empire. Even Cicero (106-43 B.C.) was not pleased with the government's policy of *panem et circenses* because he believed that it eroded the freedom of the Roman citizen, stating, “The evil was not in bread and circus, per se, but in the willingness of the people to sell their rights as free men for full bellies and the excitement

of the games which would serve to distract them from other human hungers which bread and circus can never appease.”

The Romans were so enthralled with the games that even the emperors wanted to get in on the action. Several emperors, such as Caligula, Titus, Hadrian, and Lucius Verus, have performed in the arena, usually killing animals from the safety of the imperial box, with no risk of harm to themselves. The one known emperor who actually entered the arena and engaged in combat was Commodus (A.D. 180-192). Commodus thought of himself as the reincarnation of Hercules, frequently emulating the legendary hero's feats. Being a skilled archer, he fought a variety of wild animals, but he especially liked shooting ostriches while they ran at full gallop. According to Cassius Dio and other writers of the *Historia Augusta* (Augustan History), Commodus fought as a gladiator in 735 contests in the Colosseum. Never a fair

fight, though, because the unfortunate gladiators were forced to use extremely heavy weapons and shields made of lead, or they may have only had wooden swords, or in some cases, they may have been handicapped. There was very little, if any, danger to the emperor, who always won. (Remember the scene in the movie *Gladiator* where the emperor plunges a dagger into the side of Maximus just prior to their fight.)

Thumbs up or thumbs down, a matter of life or death. These two gestures, however, were not used to determine a gladiator's fate and evolved from the misinterpretation of the Latin words *pollice verso*, meaning with a turned thumb or the thumb sideways. The precise meaning is still debated today by historians and scholars, but there is agreement that it definitely does

when in Rome

not mean “thumbs down.” A major contributor to this misunderstanding is Jean-Léon Gérôme’s 1872 painting titled, you guessed it, “Pollice Verso,” wherein the thumbs down gesture is ubiquitously exhibited by the crowd.

The thumbs down gesture is believed to mean “swords down,” which meant the losing gladiator was to be speared while the gesture for death was *munerarius* (a thumb drawn across the throat). The sign for sparing a gladiator’s life was not a “thumbs up,” but a closed fist with a compressed thumb (*pollice compresso*). This gesture has been interpreted as signifying the sword to be sheathed. Juvenalis, (circa A.D. 57-130) a Roman poet refers to the thumbs up gesture as being a sign for death.

“These men once were horn-blowers and attendants.

At every municipal arena, known as trumpeters in every village.

Now they present their own spectacles, and, to win applause,

Kill whoever the mob gives the “thumbs up.”

The posture of the thumbs of those wishing to spare the life of a gladiator has also been described as *pollice compresso* (compressed thumbs) meaning the thumb is encircled by the fingers, representing the sheathing of the sword. Some historians think the sign for death may have actually been the “thumbs up” gesture, while a “closed fist with two fingers extended,” meant life. It is also possible that a simple wave of a handkerchief might have signaled mercy. In any event, the emperor had the final word at the Colosseum.

Gladiatorial combats were outlawed by the Christian emperor Honorius in A.D. 407, but fights with wild beasts were not banned until A.D. 523, after which the Colosseum was no longer used and fell into disrepair. The days of Bread and Circus were definitely over.

Then in A.D. 526, Totila, an Ostrogoth king, sacked Rome and his forces destroyed a large part of the Colosseum in order to take the valuable bronze clamps that held the stones together, which was an estimated 300 tons. Following the sack of Rome in A.D. 526 the Romans began helping themselves to the stones of the Colosseum to be used in the building of their houses and other buildings. Eventually, it was regularly used as a quarry to extract building materials for the construction



of new buildings or monuments to include St. Peter’s Basilica. Pope Nicholas V (1447–55) ordered the demolition of the Colosseum and by the time of his death, 2,522 cartloads of stone had been transported from the Colosseum to the site of St. Peter’s Basilica for use in the new building. This practice is known as *spolia*: this practice was in great part due to the rise of Christianity when so many of Rome’s so-called pagan buildings and monuments, including the Colosseum, were partially or completely destroyed

The looting of stones from the Colosseum did not stop until Pope Benedict XIV (1740-58) declared the Colosseum “sanctified by the blood of early Christian martyrs” and added Stations of the Cross to the arena. However, by the 20th century, nearly two-thirds of the original Colosseum had been destroyed, including the arena’s marble seats and decorative elements. Ongoing

restoration efforts of the Colosseum began in the 1990s and continue to this day.

The city of Rome announced plans to rebuild a key element of its ancient Colosseum, specifically the arena floor which will be enclosed and conceal the underground network of tunnels and cages. In December 2014, Italian Cultural Minister, Dario Franceschini, said that he hoped to rebuild the floor of the 2,000-year-old Colosseum and the Italian government has pledged €10 million toward the installation of

a new, retractable floor that will revive the arena’s ancient glory. In a statement to BBC news Franceschini said, “The renovation will be a major technological intervention that will offer visitors the opportunity to not only see the underground rooms, but also appreciate the beauty of the Colosseum while standing in the center of the arena, adding that a new floor would allow the public to fully understand the use and function

of the iconic and ancient ruin.” Franceschini added, “Cultural events, such as concerts and theatres, could potentially be held in the Colosseum once the floor is installed.” The project is expected to be completed by 2023.

Over the centuries, the Colosseum has undergone a metamorphosis from a premier amphitheater to a quasi-stone quarry, to a world famous icon of a bygone age to a hopefully modern day entertainment venue. If the current enthusiasm for renovation and conservation of the Colosseum continues unabated, the world may be able to enjoy a functional Colosseum, open to the public, minus the bloodshed, for many, years to come. Sorry, no football or soccer games allowed. 🏏

walks 'n wags



walks 'n wags



Photos by Dian McDonald



coming attractions

The Montebello Grounds Committee Presents:

Montebello's Butterflies and Other Pollinators

Our presenter is **Dave Furth**, entomologist, Research Associate at Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, former manager of the National Insect Collection, and Montebello resident.

Learn about the natural history of butterflies, moths, bees, and other pollinators.

Peak season is coming soon to our Butterfly Gardens and Woodlands.

Insects make up about 80% of all life on earth, and these are some of the most beautiful!



Wednesday, July 28, 7:30 pm

Live video webinar, check email for how to join

Montebello

Sponsored by the Activities Committee

Join the community on
Saturday, July 31st from
6:30pm to 9:30pm on Picnic Hill



Come join the next Music On The Hill Night. This evening will feature classis Soul/Funk music. Bring your tablecloths and citronella candles.

****No traffic, tolls, or admission fee****



IRREVERENT FILMS SERIES

Picnic Hill 7:30 p.m.

July 23

Blazing Saddles

July 30

Monty Python's Life of Brian

August 6

Cat Ballou

August 13

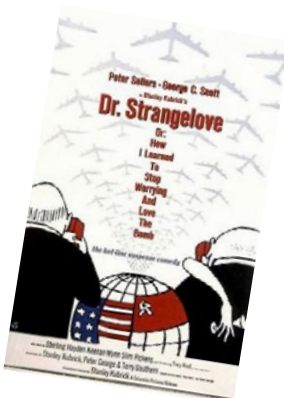
Dr. Strangelove

August 27

Monty Python and the Holy Grail

September 3

Best in Show



final glance



Photo by Linda Brownlee