The MONTEBELLO Voice

A tax tip for military retirees

Did you know that the Virginia State Legislature passed a law that in 2023 military retirees at any age (previously it had only been for those 55 or older) may claim a "subtraction" from federal adjusted gross income of $20,000 from their retired military retirement pay income on their Virginia Income Tax submission.

In 2022 the Virginia Form 760 had it listed it Line 6, Other Subtractions from federal adjusted gross income. Line 6b-6d (Other subtractions) Code 60 Military Benefits Subtraction. In Taxable year 2024 it will be $30,000 and in 2025 it will be $40,000. So in 2023 your Virginia adjusted gross income can be reduced by $20,000, thereby reducing your Virginia State Income taxes for 2023. Please be sure your tax preparer includes this reduction when preparing your Virginia State taxes.

FYI: in 2022 the reduction was $10,000 and only available for those 55 years or older. Virginia's 2023 Form 760 instructions have not yet been published but the law still remains as stated above. I just recently discovered this, so had not claimed the $10,000 subtraction in my 2022 taxes and I wanted to be sure to pass it on to all military retirees for their 2023 taxes. – *Joan Burg* Ⓜ

Holiday Bazaar a hit for the Music Club

Once again, the Montebello Music Club filled the Community Center with holiday shoppers who found unique gifts, mouth-watering desserts, and the iconic White House ornaments when it hosted the much anticipated Holiday Bazaar.

The Music Club wants to thank all those who volunteered time, rented vendor craft tables, found that special gift, donated holiday edibles, and enjoyed a happy community event.

Being a self-supporting organization, the MMC will use all the club's income from the bazaar to finance the monthly concerts that are so popular with our residents.

Thank you, one and all! – *Bob Shea* Ⓜ

Sasha Beresovsky performed pieces by Schumann, Scriabin, and Schubert on November 12

Photo by Angela Anderson

Appreciating first responders

On November 22, Maria Elena Graziano brought six pies and a platter of cold cuts to the fire department in Alexandria. A group of Spanish ladies of Montebello contributed to this event as an appreciation for their service to the Montebello residents. Norberto, Maria Elena's husband, helped her and took the picture. – *Puchy Ryder* Ⓜ

Cover photos by Dian McDonald

What's in a name (or a name tag)

By Rebecca Long Hayden
Montebello Writers Group

Shakespeare asked the question, but what prompted his inquiry? And what was the answer? I looked it up, and here's the story. Juliet Capulet is not allowed to associate with Romeo because his last name is Montague, enemy of the Capulets. If he had any other name, it would be fine. She's lamenting that his name is meaningless. If the rose had any other name, it would still be the same.

Maybe. But maybe there's more to it.

Would you rather be called Dot? Or Dorothea? Biddie? Or Robert? Fronktayne? Or Frank? Anyone with a goofy name can blame their parents and seize the first opportunity to change it. New job? "Hello, I'm Frank." New city? "Hello. I'm Dorothea." And by the way, Juliet's name in Italian is Giulietta Capuleti, so much more romantic.

It's the names people choose that should be given more thought.

On certain signs, the developers of Montebello saw fit to identify both the buildings and the parking garages as "B." This results in confused delivery people, visitors, and Uber drivers. The rest of the known universe calls the parking garage "P" for parking.

Here's a cell phone conversation between a delivery person and me:

Delivery Person: I'm here at B-1.

Me: I'm standing outside B-1. I don't see you.

DP: Well, I'm looking at a sign that says B-1

Me: OK, what else does it say?

DP: Uh. 5902, B-1. Also says 5 mph. And no smoking in the garages.

Me: You're at Building 2, Basement 1. Never mind the speed limit. Get back in your truck and come to 5901, B-1

DP: What? Why isn't the parking garage called P?

Me: If you ever find out, let me know.

In "The Season of Lost Packages, a.k.a. "The Holidays," although individual unit numbers appear on every door (the unit "name tag"), the numbers are so small you have to be inches away before you can read the digits. Pity the delivery person who forgot their glasses.

Here's something Shakespeare might have called a "Comedy of Errors." We wanted to replace the worn upholstery on some chairs. We stopped in to "Key's Upholstery" on Richmond

Highway. According to the proprietor, Mr. Arnold Key, "Half the people who come in want a key made. Half want their furniture re-covered. Occasionally someone wants the seats in their truck re-upholstered. Which is what I do." So how about "Arnie's Auto Upholstery." That would save time.

Which segues into another troubling trend. Too many storefronts called "Jim's" or "Ron's." Jim's what? Jim's Beef Jerky? Jim's Discount Nose Jobs? I'm not likely to pull out of traffic, find a place to park, and venture in to find myself in a dimly lit massage parlor. Has it become trendy to be deliberately nebulous when naming a business? So only the in-crowd will know the nature of your establishment?

Here's my favorite bit of naming weirdness. How about the term *Bluetooth*. Images called forth about this moniker are so colorful and toothy, it took me years to grasp the meaning. The name doesn't sound techie. It's not an acronym. So what does it mean?

Did anyone, ever, upon hearing the term for the first time, think *I'll bet that name dates back to King Harald Gormsson who united Denmark and Norway in 958. You know, the guy with one dead tooth that earned him the nickname 'Bluetooth.' Yup. Bet that's it.*

That's the origin of the name, a super fun fact, but counter-intuitive for a wireless technology used to exchange data between fixed and mobile devices over short distances.

Which brings me to the original subject: What's in a name? Or a name tag? Arrogant young me shunned name tags, believing I could remember anything I wanted to. I was right and wrong. I could remember, but I didn't want to. Now I'm wiser, and the opposite is true. I can't remember anything, and I do want to. I also know I'm unlikely to remember anyone's name without the help of a name tag, even if I've met them before.

I can't fix most of these naming problems, and I know temporary tags are ugly, don't stick, spoil the look of your outfit, and can snag delicate fabrics.

But we do what we can toward a better world, so I wrote away and had names tags made for my husband and me, the kind where the names are carved into a layered piece of plastic. I choose red with names in white. However, if you're coming to my place, suck it up and slap on the name tag. Problem solved. 🅼

Small Dog Dies

By Mary Combemale
Montebello Writers Group

Do you know how many dogs and cats
                     have died since you left?
Dartagnan
         Athos
            Hannah
Dross AND Blackberry
         Shannon

Dross, waited – for you –
      5 and 1/2 months/channeling your matter/
there in your bed

A man might say, of a dog, a dying dog, what do you mean, the damn dog couldn't go for a walk

Stunned, I would blanch, having drunk from that rhyton of company and presence, of uncompromising attention
            I would stop in my tracks

Hannibal, I would know, was wrong to have savaged Italy

To cast out the intimacy, a small dog can render
            Even when dying

The harbingers are in our hearts
                     The earth is in trouble
Scolding us with our own lives

Really, it's simple,
               It's plain
                   Take care of your dog
Curse the rulers who would kill them

Welcome the new day
            Each day

Revoke men's history of war
Be the Buddhist willing to return as the dog
            Embrace retreat

Go to the kitchen and reach into the dough
               Like drowning

With or without a Messiah

       We need to rise

The Truth

By Chester Taylor
Montebello Writers Group

There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true. – Soren Kierkegaard

Trying to keep abreast of what is happening in the world, we must sort through a myriad of communications sources that are based on incomplete facts, rumors, propaganda, gossip, assertions, allegations, TV show Dragnet, "All we want are the facts, ma'am."

Over the past several years we have heard people in our nation's capital trying to dodge the truth. Former U.S. Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway used the phrase "alternative facts" to defend White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's false statements about the attendance numbers of Donald Trump's inauguration. We heard former President Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani state on Meet 2020 election. We have heard Donald Trump use the term "fake news" over 2,000 times to describe news coverage that was unfavorable to him even when the information was accurate. *Washington Post* Fact Checker claims Trump has made 30,573 false or misleading statements in the past four years.

"Witch hunt" is another term we hear these days being used by politicians. Sen. Bob Menendez claims that he is the subject of a partisan "witch hunt" after being indicted a second time past
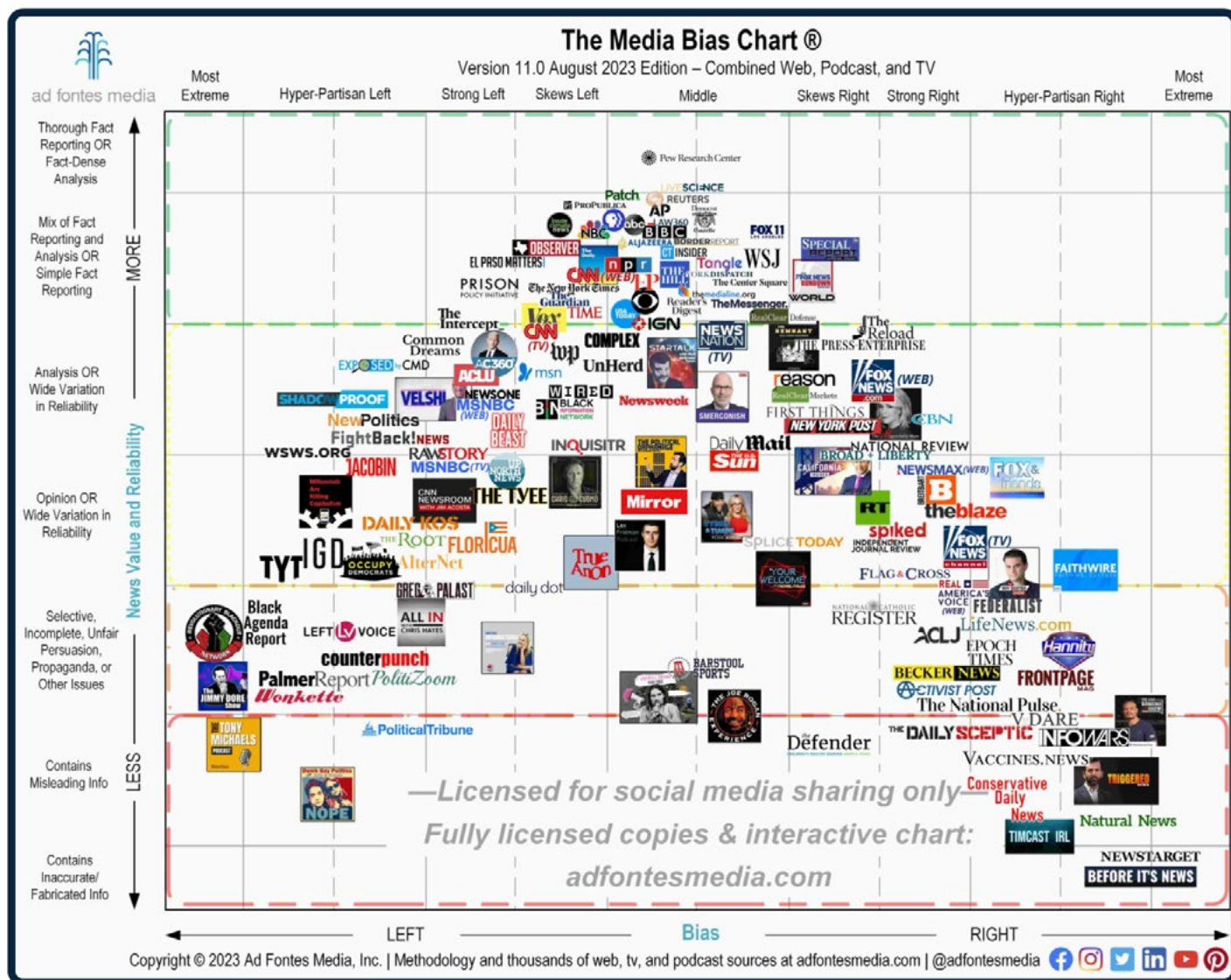
conspiracy theories, and sometimes outright fairy tales. We seek the truth, based in fact and reality. Just like Sgt. Joe Friday, played by Jack Webb, in the the Press "truth isn't truth" to explain why he was advising Trump not to talk to Special Prosecutor Jack Smith about Trump's attempt to overturn the September on bribery and corruption charges. Former Rep. George Santos, a documented liar, was expelled from Congress this December and faces 13

How to Fact-Check: evaluate information using the CRAP test

C is it CURRENT? **R** is it RELIABLE? **A** who is the AUTHORITY? **P** what is the PURPOSE?

counts of wire fraud, money laundering and theft of public funds. He claims his federal indictment is the result of "a witch hunt." Then there is former President Trump who was twice impeached and facing four indictments with 91 charges. He has tweeted it is all a "witch hunt" over 300 times and claims it almost daily as his defense.

Most journalists and news organizations feel strongly that they should seek truth and hold government publicly accountable. They feel, like most of us citizens, that government officials are public servants and should not be in government to line their own pockets. However, a few media giants like Fox News, Newsmax, and One America News have failed to abide by these journalistic standards. They think of themselves not so much as news sources, but as profit machines. To them it is good business to lie because much of their audiences do not want the actual truth. In April, Dominion Voting Systems sued Fox for spreading conspiracy theories about Dominion. Fox, also, allowed its guests to make false statements. Fox settled the defamation lawsuit brought by Dominion for $787.5 million. Fox News, Newsmax, and One America News are facing similar defamation lawsuits by Smartmatic, who also builds and implements electronic voting systems. In the Fox News and Newsmax cases, Michael Flynn and Steve Bannon have been subpoenaed over their promotion of 2020 election lies. Smartmatic is seeking $2.7 billion

from Fox and an unspecified amount from Newsmax for disseminating a "continuous stream of falsehoods that harmed Smartmatic and negatively impacted the company's business."

The consequences of misinformation, propaganda, and false or misleading statements polarize our nation. It undermines our elections and democratic processes. It creates social unrest. And it diverts money away from enhancing security, improving the environment, protecting public health, and other needed programs. A RAND report stated that this "truth decay" in America affects our credibility on the world stage and jeopardizes our national security interests. Currently most nations in the world, particularly our European allies, have low confidence in what we say. Our adversaries also know that our nation is vulnerable to the lack of facts and analysis in our public life and continue to use misinformation to further polarize us. According to a declassified report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Russia and Iran were found trying to influence the outcome of the November 2020 presidential election. An unclassified U.S. Intelligence advisory reported that China is using intensive lobbying, control of foreign media outlets, and sophisticated disinformation campaigns to sway midterm races to "hinder candidates perceived to be particularly adversarial to Beijing."

One journalist I listen to and respect for telling the truth is Christiane

Amanpour. This past May she talked with Neil Brown about her 40-year career and the importance of truth in journalism. Neil is the president of The Poynter Institute that also owns the International Fact-Checking Network. Christiane said, "I do believe that, when we seek the truth, we are being objective." However, she points out that objectivity is not about drawing false equivalencies, either factual or moral. She stresses that while journalists can and should tell all sides of the story, this doesn't mean all sides are morally equivalent, especially in the face of severe violations of international law such as genocide. Her motto for journalism: "be truthful, but not neutral."

To make good decisions we need reliable facts in a meaningful context. We need to be careful of our news sources and hold those that lie accountable. There are media bias charts online we can use to help us. We should refrain from clinging to views endorsed by our political party that are contrary to facts. As we participate on the internet, we too have a responsibility to tell the truth. If we know what's right, we should say it. It's called veracity. We should demand that the media and journalists, like us, "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." 📖

Food on the table and history

By Bob Shea

When we think about history, we often focus on (1) a one-of-a-kind accomplishment, like the moon landing on July 20, 1969, (2) a notable period of time, such as the Great Depression during the 1930s, or (3) a special person who had impact over the years, such as Dwight D. Eisenhower as a general and as a president.

We usually do not think about long-term trends that impact us all, but which do not have OMG moments to capture our attention. They just happen over a long period of time, one baby step at a time. We may note each innovation, but never step back to examine how we reached from "there" to what we today accept as "normal."

How we purchase food for personal consumption is one of these areas.

Let us disregard the hunters and gathers, and instead focus on how the consumer purchases food for our tables.

Let us look back to a time when national or regional grocery stores did not exist – before the days of Safeway, Piggly Wiggly, Publix, Wegmans, or Trader Joe's.

As soon as the sale of food became a commercial enterprise, we had specialty stores: the bakery, the green grocer, the butcher, the cheese shop, the fishmonger, home delivery of milk, etc. Each shop sold one narrow class of items, requiring the buyer to go to multiple shops to stock the family lar-der. With very little refrigeration and often minimal storage space at home, grocery shopping required almost daily shopping trips for the average household, meaning Mom went to the neighborhood shop while Dad was working.

The first significant change was the appearance of shops that sold multiple classes of items (canned or packaged), albeit mostly non-fresh items that did not require refrigeration. Some items were still sold in bulk, such as crackers from the cracker barrel, sugar from a

tin container, or oats from a burlap bag. These were individually packed as requested in small bags by the merchant. For others, the customer went to the counter and requested what was needed item by item. It was slow as each item had to be located by the merchant, brought to the counter, packaged, priced, noted on a tablet, and added up to determine what the customer owed. Usually the customer provided their own bags to carry home. Hey, we are doing that again, but that is another story.

The bold next step was to array open shelves with the most common items available for the customer themselves to gather (canned foods and some card-board boxes). While juggling arm loads of items, the customer then went to the counter where the merchant totaled the amount owed. An improvement but still slow.

Eventually, some merchants provided boxes with ropes to be dragged around the store by the customer, being filled with the needed items. It was awkward, and many iterations of this happened until someone thought of a cart or wagon of some fashion on wheels to facilitate shopping. From this the grocery cart as we know it today evolved. Gathering of items was easier, but the shopper still had to go to a cash register where each item was rung manually into a cash register to obtain a total for the sale. A side benefit for the merchant was that people tended to buy more if they were not limited by what they could carry or pull around in a box. Nevertheless, check out was slow as each item's price had to be punched into the cash register by a fast-fingered clerk.

A minor innovation was the introduction of checkout counter belts by which the items moved sequentially from the shopping cart to the clerk's location at the cash register. At this point, innovation and efficiency stopped for many years. For many of us, this was what grocery shopping was all about. It was about as good as it could get.

The next industry-altering step in progress happened (and this was a WOW moment) when someone invented bar codes: a unique collection of lines that defined what the product was and how much it cost. Technology had

arrived at the grocery store with benefits for both the customer and the merchant. A scanner could read the bar codes that noted the price, giving the computerized cash register a running total of what was being purchased. All the clerk had to do was run the item's bar code over the scanner, announce the total purchase, and complete the purchase with cash or credit card while another store employee bagged the items for the customer.

The bar codes were the most signif-icant innovation of the grocery and all retail shopping in decades. It sped up the check out process. It allowed price changes to be recorded without individual labels or price tags. It provided the merchant with an inventory of what had been sold, allowing timely re-order of needed items. And, it dramatically sped up the checkout process. Today some systems additionally group the items by purchase category on the register receipt such as meat, health and beauty aids, dairy, bakery, or deli regardless of the order in which the items are scanned.

We now even have the self-checkout by which we have also eliminated the person at the cash register – assuming we can figure out the process of scanning, weighing produce, inserting paper bills or a credit card, and getting our change.

shopping

Driven by the pandemic, the latest innovation is ordering groceries from home for either customer on-site curbside pickup or home delivery to your door. It is about as efficient as the process can be – or will it too change? What might be next?

Some of us watched the grocery evolution happen without thinking about it as history. It was just a series of events that improved the grocery store experience. For others, it is literally almost ancient history, for they cannot imagine a non-bar code world. They never ordered two pounds of graham crackers from the cracker barrel, waited while a bag was filled, weighed, priced, and handed to the customer. Maybe they missed something, but I think not.

History is all around us, even at the Trader Joe's check out. History evolves slowly if we are paying attention. Watch for it. 📖

Evolution Home
By Rebecca Long Hayden
Montebello Writers Group

In the age of dripless candles
and scentless roses,
a place nearby with
silver
china
crystal
on dusty shelves,
I tarry to smell the past
and look at always
but nevermore.

Discarded now for gimcracks,
Bed Bath and Beyond
in turquoise
pop culture clutter.

Young guns see pretense
in breakable things,
expensive
just for show.

Silver too much
trouble to polish.
China not
dishwasher safe.

Now they ask for cash
for honeymoons forgotten
after weddings break.

No interest in lovely things,
shaped by patient hands
for generations to enjoy,
evolution home,
more treasured every year.

The cash and shiny-things not
to live past Tuesday Morning.

Devolution home.

Photos by Dian McDonald

Cash or Checks Please

Miriam Rosenthal

Photos by Dian McDonald

Photos by Dian McDonald
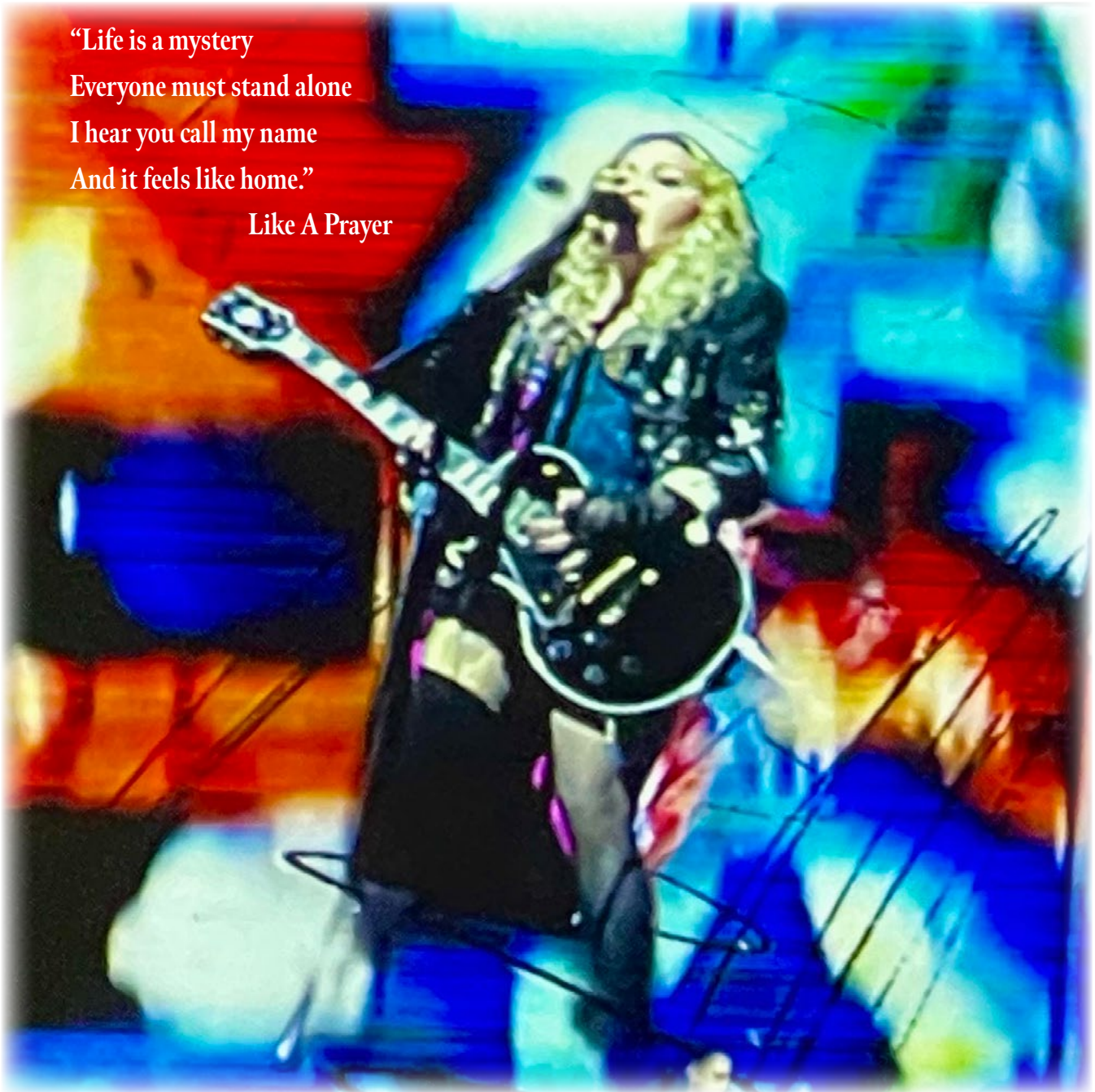
final glance

“Life is a mystery
Everyone must stand alone
I hear you call my name
And it feels like home.”
Like A Prayer

Madonna in concert on December 19 at Capital One Arena
Photo by Linda Brownlee

Attending Madonna's Celebration Tour with family and several of my LGBTQ friends (with better seats) was our celebration of her history and ours.

Madonna's story telling started with her arrival in NY on her first airplane ride and $35 in her pocket and a vision of being a star. She asked the cab driver to take her to the center of it all and he dropped her off at Times Square.

While Madonna sang 90s pop hits, screens dropped from the ceiling with stunning black-and-white photos of the beautiful young men who died of AIDS. My granddaughter felt the sadness in the Druid-like songs.

Madonna's daughters accompanied her on the piano and another one danced. Madonna celebrated all of us with a bright and shining performance. – Linda Brownlee