

# The **MONTABELLO** Voice

an independent gazette

quarterly

December 2024



*Huntley Meadows by Linda Brownlee*

# She Walks Our Valley

*By Judy Cox*

There is a time  
As Dawn  
Walks up our valley  
When the blue-gray  
Of the sky  
Matches  
The blue-gray  
Of the snow.

Now is this time.

Silhouettes of aspen  
Frozen as the snow.  
Branches  
Laced across the sky,  
Trunks,  
Thin lines  
Against the white.

Dawn's cape  
Trails pale pink  
Tinting Whetstone Peak.

She pauses at our stones  
Not wishing to disturb  
The circle of coyote tracks.



*Judy is a member of the Montebello Writers Group*

*Laced with snow*

**The** **MONTEBELLO** **Voice**  
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# Why I stopped doing surveys at Montebello and why you might want to as well

By Tom Ahern

I resigned as Montebello's survey guy on August 9, 2024. I did so because the ways in which survey reporting was being manipulated to support favored outcomes had become intolerable. Results for last September's smoking survey, April's Picnic Hill survey, and June's resident satisfaction were inflated substantially beyond what the actual data would support.

## The Resident Satisfaction Survey

The Resident Satisfaction Survey was conducted from June 6 to June 16. I reported the results in an MML email on June 21. These results were posted to [BuildingLink](#) in their entirety in late June.

The data I posted in June have gone down the memory hole and have been replaced by a new analysis announced by email on November 18. The new analysis reports combined percentages of Very Satisfied and Somewhat Satisfied respondents that exceed the ones I reported in June by up to 24 percentage points across the range of Montebello activities and facilities examined.

How did this remarkable inflation occur? Let's begin by looking at the following table. The first two columns use the percentages I reported in June. Column One is the percentage of the 502 participants in the survey who said they were Very Satisfied with each of the activities and facilities surveyed. Column Two is the combined percentage of participants who said they were either Very Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied. Column Three is the new combined percentage of participants who said they were either Very Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied posted in November on Building Link.

The activities and facilities are listed in descending order of their Very Satisfied rating in my original report. The original report covered 39 activities and facilities. In the interest of preventing

your eyes from glazing over, for discussion purposes I have limited the table to 15 of these features. These include the top-rated five, the bottom-rated five, and an illustrative sample of five from the 29 middle-rated activities and facilities.

## Methodological questions

Column Two and Column Three are said to be the same thing: the combined percentage of Very Satisfied and Somewhat Satisfied respondents. How did the Column Two values turn into the inflated percentages in Column Three?

This was accomplished by changing the n. The n is the number of respondents who participated in the survey, in this case 502. It is the baseline against

which the percentages representing respondents' views are calculated. For example, the Housekeeping Staff's score of 88% Very Satisfied in Column One was calculated by dividing 442 Very Satisfied responses by 502.

All the percentages presented in Columns One and Two are based on an n of 502. Both the November email summary of the new study and its full report posted on Building Link state that the n for the survey was 502. You would therefore assume that the percentages presented in the Overall Satisfaction column would be based on a n of 502.

But they aren't.

Recall that survey respondents were offered six choices in evaluating the var-

	Column 1: June % of respondents reporting <u>Very Satisfied</u>	Column 2: June % <u>Very + Somewhat Satisfied</u>	Column 3: November % <u>Very + Somewhat Satisfied</u>
Housekeeping staff	88%	98%	99%
Upkeep of hallways, lobbies, garages	82%	97%	98%
Maintenance and upkeep of grounds	79%	94%	95%
Email notification of upcoming events	78%	95%	96%
Building maintenance overall	76%	94%	95%
Game areas	58%	69%	93%
Fitness center	56%	72%	90%
Indoor pool	54%	67%	91%
Office response to emails and calls	48%	74%	81%
Financial transparency of Association	46%	69%	75%
Pedestrian safety in parking lots and roads	30%	68%	70%
Clarity regarding spending priorities	27%	53%	58%
Clarity/efficiency of BOD processes	26%	51%	60%
Responsiveness of BOD to resident input	24%	46%	56%
Dollar amount of assessments	22%	51%	57%
Party rooms	22%	38%	55%

ious features of Montebello: Very Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Undecided, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied, and No Opinion. The analyst for the new report apparently concluded that the numbers could be made more impressive if the respondents who reported “No Opinion” did not exist.

Quietly removing these people from the analysis reduced the n for the results reported in Column Three by between 3 and 131 people, boosting the June numbers from Column Two by between 1 and 24 percentage points. For example, using an n of 371 inflates the combined percentage of Very Satisfied and Somewhat Satisfied respondents for Game Areas from 69% to 93%.

Does this technique yield valid data? Let’s do a thought experiment with the Party Rooms, the least popular facility in the entire survey. Assume one respondent is somewhat satisfied with the Party Rooms, and the rest have no opinion. Subtracting the 501 No Opinion people reduces the n to 1. One respondent, divided by an n of 1, yields a Very plus Somewhat Satisfied rate of 100%. While this result makes the least popular facility at Montebello appear to be a smashing success, in terms of actionable information it is manifestly useless.

Results using this disappear-the-no-opinion people technique are termed “Overall Satisfaction” in the summary email version of the November report. They are anything but “Overall.” The 93% Overall Satisfaction rating for the Game Area represents the views of 74% of the survey participants.

The 15 scores in Column Three were generated using 13 different n base-lines. They are not “Overall” either. The full report posted on Building Link uses 22 different values for n to calculate “Overall Satisfaction.” Presenting these percentages as all calculated with a stated n of 502 and therefore accurately representing the views of all 502 of the survey respondents is methodologically questionable in the extreme.

If the November report, together with the data it claims to represent, were submitted for publication in a

peer-reviewed journal, in my opinion it would be laughed out the door.

There is another methodological aspect of this report that calls into question the statistical expertise with which it was prepared.

In the full version of the new report now available on Building Link, the methodology page states that the margin of error for the survey was plus or minus 3.8%. This means that the report is asserting that statistically there is a 95% probability that the percentages expressed by the 502 survey participants will be within 3.8% of the views held by all 2,000 residents of Montebello. The new report doubles down

*One of the most elementary principles of survey research is that the power of statistics can be used to estimate the views of a large population using the views of a sample only if the people in the sample were selected randomly. The 502 respondents for the Resident Satisfaction survey were not picked randomly. They were self-selected. You cannot statistically project the views of a self-selected sample of 502 people onto a population of 2,000.*

on this assertion by stating on several pages that the percentages represent the views of “residents” rather than “respondents.”

One of the most elementary principles of survey research is that the power of statistics can be used to estimate the views of a large population using the views of a sample only if the people in the sample were selected randomly. The 502 respondents for the Resident Satisfaction survey were not picked randomly. They were self-selected. It is not possible to statistically project the views of a self-selected sample of 502 people onto a population of 2,000.

The inclusion of a margin of error in the November report would not pass muster in a basic course in applied sta-

tistics, much less in a peer-reviewed journal.

### **Philosophical questions: defining satisfaction**

If you compare Column One, the June Very Satisfied percentages, with the November “Overall Satisfaction” percentages in Column Three, you will find that much of the heavy lift in inflating the scores was done by combining the percentages of Very Satisfied and Somewhat Satisfied respondents into a single measure. Using my June figures, combining the Very Satisfied and the Somewhat Satisfied scores yields the June version of “Overall Satisfied” percentages shown in Column Two.

I strongly oppose combining Very and Somewhat scores for conceptual and practical reasons. From a conceptual perspective, the two categories are qualitatively different. Very Satisfied people are fully pleased, gratified, and contented. Somewhat (i.e. slightly, a little) Satisfied people are not fully satisfied, and something needs to change before they will be. The two groups do not belong in the same box.

From a practical perspective, combining the Very and Somewhat percentages does not provide a useful guide for action. Consider the Very/Somewhat combined scores in Column Two for the Game Areas, Financial Transparency, and Pedestrian Safety, which are 69%, 69%, and 68% respectively. It would appear that two-thirds of the respondents are pretty much equally pleased with these three areas, and that minimal improvement is necessary.

You can recover the percentage of Somewhat Satisfied respondents by subtracting Column One, the Very Satisfied scores, from Column Two, the June version of the Very plus Somewhat combined “Overall Satisfied” scores. If you compare the percentage of Somewhat Satisfied people with the combined “Overall Satisfaction” scores in Column Two, you will find that:

- 16% of the “overall satisfied” people are not fully satisfied with the Game Areas

- 33% of the “overall satisfied” people are not fully satisfied with Financial Transparency

- and 55% of the “overall satisfied” people are not fully satisfied with Pedestrian Safety.

If you were allocating resources to make things better, where would you put them?

Very Satisfied and Somewhat Satisfied, like “Great!!!” and “OK, I guess...,” are not the same thing. Combining them into a single measure is conceptually weak and unhelpful as a guide to practical action. The measure is useful only as a public relations tool for making Montebello look more satisfied than it is. The insistence of the Board President and the General Manager on using this measure led me to resign as Montebello’s survey director.

For an upscale luxury condo association, the Very Satisfied percentages in Column One are the appropriate benchmarks to guide quality improvement efforts. These numbers show clearly where action is needed. The remaining categories, from Somewhat Satisfied on down to Very Dissatisfied and No Opinion, are useful primarily for identifying the scope of the efforts needed to convert the respondents who chose them into Very Satisfied people. To the extent these categories remain substantial, to that extent Montebello’s status as a high-end, upscale community is diminished.

## The Picnic Hill and smoking surveys

The June issue of the *Times of Montebello* featured articles that presented data from the Picnic Hill and Smoking surveys in ways I found highly questionable.

The Picnic Hill survey asked respondents to state their views on eight potential projects for Picnic Hill. Respondents were asked to choose among four responses: Very Interested, Somewhat Interested, Not Opposed/Not interested, and Opposed. The “Opposed” category was included to permit respondents in units overlooking Picnic Hill and therefore more affected by potential noise and lights to register concerns that went beyond mere lack of interest.

In the *Times’* Picnic Hill article, the “level of support” for each of the eight proposals was calculated by adding the percentage of respondents who were Very Interested, the percentage who were Somewhat Interested (see my comments above regarding combining Very and Somewhat), and the percentage who were not interested. The levels of support generated by this, shall we say unorthodox approach, ranged from 78.4% to 91.8%. These “level of support” percentages exceeded the Very Interested plus Somewhat Interested combined percentages by between 20.1 and 45.4 percentage points. They exceeded the Very Interested percentages by between 40.3 and 69.3 percentage points.

In terms of accurately informing the Montebello community regarding the results of the Picnic Hill survey, the *Times* did not cover itself with glory in publishing this article. I wrote a letter to the editor opining that combining the percentages of Very Interested, Somewhat Interested, and Not Interested responses and describing the sum as a measure of overall support constituted cruelty to data.

The June *Times* issue also included a two-page article by Board President Jon Kandel announcing extensive restriction of smoking at Montebello. He justified the new policy in part using data from the September 2023 survey on smoking. Jon stated that 31% of respondents had said smoking was a serious problem and 30% had said it was a very serious problem. He also stated that 62% of respondents had said that they would prefer to live in a totally non-smoking building.

Jon’s percentages of 30% and 31% were achieved by changing the n. The respondents who found smoke a serious or very serious problem were 31% and 30% respectively of those who had encountered smoke, roughly 50% of the survey participants. Percentages based on the total number of respondents were 16% and 15% respectively.

Jon’s article noted that nationwide figures for people who preferred to live in a place that prohibited smoking ranged up to 85%. The figure at Montebello was 62%. Having con-


ducted a 39-page content analysis of the comments offered by respondents during the survey, I concluded that there were substantial concerns among Montebello’s non-smokers regarding the fairness of pulling the rug out from under residents who had bought in the expectation that they could smoke in their homes. A number of respondents favored grandfathering residents who smoked as part of a policy to restrict smoking at Montebello. These concerns went unacknowledged in Jon’s two-page article.

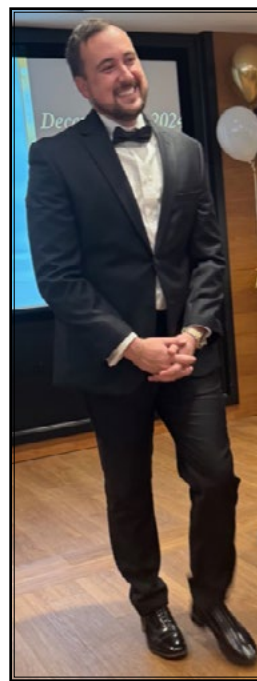
I included the problems with the smoking article in my letter to the editor regarding the *Times* June issue.

I submitted my letter in time for publication in the July issue. Jon Kandel would not permit it to be published. In late August, with the September 1 implementation date for the new smoking policy imminent and planning for the geoengineering of Picnic Hill underway, Jon offered to allow my letter to be published in the September issue of the *Times*. Expecting that the letter would have zero impact at that point, I declined his offer, resolving to revisit the issues later in a format not restricted to 225 words.

## What is to be done?

I have concluded that participating in the Montebello survey program under our current Association leadership is a waste of time. I have resigned as survey director. I intend not to respond to further Montebello surveys until regime change arrives. If you find the information I have presented above persuasive, I advise you to do the same.

*Tom Ahern completed his master’s degree in journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, focusing on the design and analysis of survey research. His coursework included seven courses in polling and applied statistics in the departments of journalism, psychology, and sociology. Following graduation, he worked as an analyst at Opinion Research Corporation, Princeton, New Jersey, conducting surveys tracking corporate reputation among major American companies. He subsequently worked at a large federal agency, analyzing polling data as part of the agency’s legislative affairs effort and conducting polling for the director of the agency regarding the effectiveness of his workforce communications program.* 



*December 13 MoniCoco fashion show*

*Photos by Joan Ledebur*



**M**uch has been written about the Cappella Sistina (Sistine Chapel), most of which addressed the masterpieces therein. But there is more to the history of the Sistine Chapel than its magnificent frescos. When the Sistine Chapel was built, Italian City States were constantly at war with one another, as were the major powers of Europe: France, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Papal States. The Papal States, sometimes lead by warrior popes, often shifted alliances. Yet, amongst all this turmoil, Pope Sixtus IV (Pontiff from 1471-1484), managed to have the Sistine Chapel built. This chapel would eventually house some of the greatest artistic masterpieces the world has ever seen. Although the Sistine Chapel appears to be a plain, obscure building, hidden

among the structures of Vatican City, its location, design and structure constitute a crucial, though less known, part of Italian history.

The Sistine Chapel's location was not random. Rather, it was a calculated placement to enhance the power and prestige of the Catholic Church. The chapel is located on Rome's Palatine Hill, the legendary site of the founding of the city, the home of Roman Emperors, and the epicenter of the Roman Empire.

Because of the historical significance of the chapel's location, the Roman Catholic Church fully intended to maintain and enhance its perception of power and prestige by building a

larger and better chapel on the Palatine Hill to replace the crumbling Cappella Maggiore. The Sistine Chapel is actually the pope's private chapel and the main chapel of the Vatican Apostolic Palace. Wanting to enhance his legacy, Pope Sixtus IV for whom the chapel is named, decided not just to rebuild the decaying Cappella Maggiore, but also to enlarge, fortify, and beautify it.

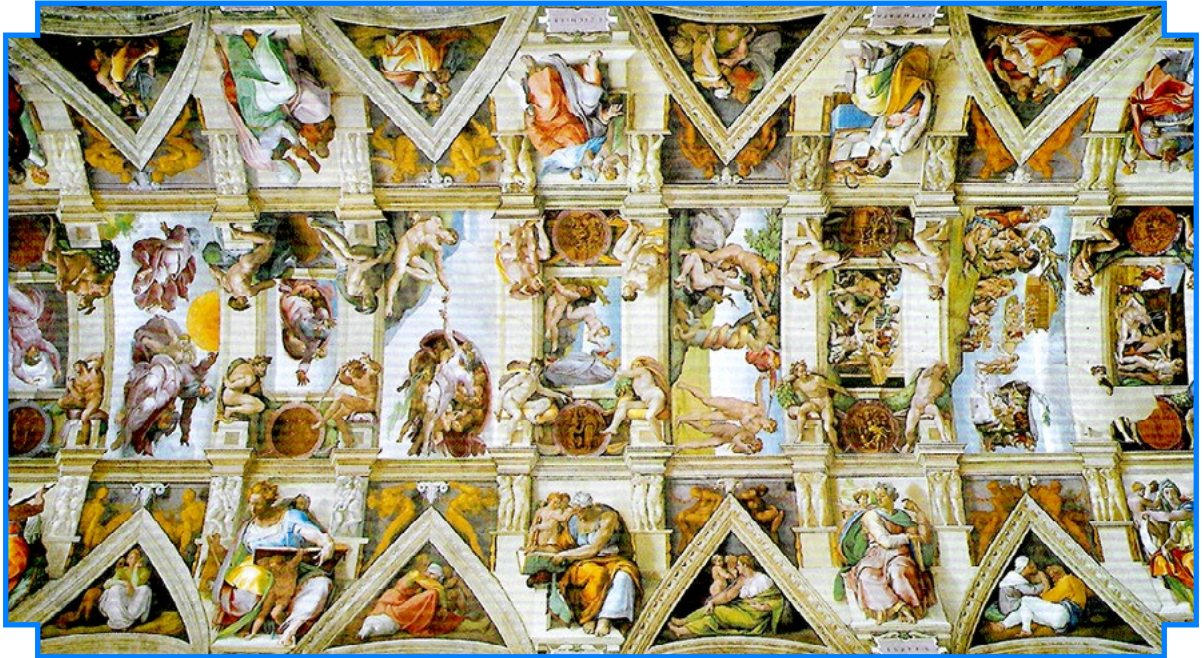
Pope Sixtus IV commissioned Bartolomeo Pontelli to design his chapel. Pontelli's specialty was the construction and reinforcement of fortresses, which was extremely important to the Pontiff, as he feared not only the Turkish Muslims, but also the mobs of Rome, as well as other forces throughout the peninsula and the continent. Pope Sixtus IV was the absolute ruler of the Papal States and because of the continuous warfare throughout the Italian

## A chapel fortress

*By Joe de Angelis*

peninsula he was seriously, and rightfully concerned for his own safety and that of the Vatican.

The interior of the chapel was designed to the exact measurements of the Temple of Solomon as described in the Hebrew Book of Kings. Specifically, the *heichal*, the long rectangular back section of the first Holy Temple built by King Solomon, in Jerusalem in 930 BC. The



proportions of the chapel are based on the length of the *heichal* (134.28 feet), as its basic unit of measurement. That is, the length of the building, divided by three, equals its width (43.90 feet), and the length divided by two, equals its height (67.91 feet).

Under the supervision of Giovanni de Dolci, the chapel was built over the deteriorating Cappella Maggiore between 1477 and 1481. Although Pope Sixtus IV commissioned the restoration of the Cappella Maggiore, it was in such a ruinous state that it had to be completely demolished. Demolition work actually started in 1473 with the removal of the crumbling walls of the Cappella Maggiore. The old chapel was completely demolished except for its foundation, upon which the new chapel was built. By way of reference, this was 25 years before the construction of St. Peter's Basilica began.

The north and south walls of the chapel, which are 30 feet thick, are supported by solid brick buttresses. The exterior of the building is plain and stark, with no architectural or decorative details. The only means of entrance or exit was through the *granda porta* (great door), the large wooden double doors, which are the entire height of the first level of the chapel. This design was common practice at the time be-

cause cities and towns were frequently stormed by enemy troops, most cathedrals and standalone chapels, places of refuge were basically designed to withstand such assaults having as few entrances as possible.

In order to accommodate the Pope's Choir, which is the world's oldest choir dating back to the seventh century, it was decided to incorporate a Cantoria (choir loft) within the chapel. Sometime after 1473, after the walls had been built, it was decided to make an 8x12 foot recessed alcove for the Cantoria, which was carved out of the 30-foot thick stone west wall. The Cantoria has a protruding balcony and an ornate railing that appears to be divided by a marble *transenna*.

As a side note, the 1,500-year-old Coro della Cappella Musicale Pontificia Sistina (Pontifical Musical Choir of the Sistine Chapel), is known today simply as the Pope's Choir. It is responsible for all musical accompaniment when the Supreme Pontiff performs religious functions in the Sistine Chapel, or in any other church in Rome where the Pope is officiating.

Although his private chapel, Sixtus also wanted it to serve as an impenetrable fortress in case of an attack. The chapel was a stark and sizable crenelated, stand-alone building that was a virtual fortress. Outwardly it was, and

still is, a drab and unadorned rectangular brick building with a barrel-vaulted ceiling arching above the chapel floor. The north and south walls have six arched windows each and the east and west walls each have two windows. All of the windows are at the third and highest level. It should be noted, that today, the Sistine Chapel is located on the north side of St. Peter's Basilica, adjacent to, but separate from the basilica. Over the years, the Vatican complex grew, building by building and eventually a building, which is now part of the Vatican Museum, was built connected to the chapel, and today that building provides the only access point to the chapel.

In accordance with the Book of Kings, the chapel floor was built on two levels, with one half slightly higher than the other. The two sections are separated by a marble *transenna* (screen) which represents the *porochet*, the curtain that separated the Sancta Sanctorum (Holy of Holies), from the rest of the room. On top of the *transenna* there were seven ornate candlesticks representative of the menorah that was in Solomon's Temple. There was also an ornate door of gilded wrought iron in the center of the *transenna*, but it was replaced with a wooden door, which has since also been removed. The western half of the Holy of Holies, with the altar, makes up the



private area for the pope and his court. The floor of this area is about six inches higher than the eastern half, which is reserved for the lay faithful. The elevated section corresponds to the farthest recess of the original Holy of Holies, which only the High Priest could enter, and then only once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. However, Pope Paul IV (Pontiff 1555-1559) ordered the *transenna* to be uprooted and moved several feet to the east. Moving the *transenna* voided the chapel's perfect correspondence with the Jewish Holy Temple, and at the same time reduced the area intended for parishioners.

Because Pope Sixtus IV had initially intended his chapel to be used for the defense of the Vatican in the event of war, the top of this fort-like structure had open battlements from which soldiers could fire cannons and drop oil or stones on attackers below. Above the vaulted dome were quarters for the soldiers, which were connected to a gangway that encircled the building and allowed soldiers quick and easy access to the battlements.

Internally, the chapel walls are divided vertically into three levels, from the floor to the barrel vault ceiling. The lowest area at floor level was left blank, but would be covered with drapes. The second or middle level was to be decorated with frescoes. Above the second level is a cornice or horizontal molding, projecting a couple of feet out from the wall, above which, in the upper portion of the third area, were to be portraits of previous Popes situated between the windows. The original ceiling, reflecting the night sky, was painted dark blue and studded with gilt stars.

The floor of the Sistine Chapel is a work of art in and of itself, and adds to

the overall beautification of the interior of the chapel. In juxtaposition to the frescoes to be embedded in the walls and eventually, the ceiling, the floor is a kaleidoscope of geometric shapes and swirls, made of pieces of cut glass and marble that is dazzling to the eye. This Cosmatesque style of mosaic was made famous in the 12th century by the Cosmati family, after whom it is named. The Cosmati family was renowned for their amazing inlaid stonework and geometrical designs.

The floor also helps expand the re-



strictive space of the chapel by stretching it out and giving it the appearance of kinetic flow. These intricate designs also aid in the movement and placement of the clergy during a papal mass indicating where the pope should stand or kneel, and where the procession should pause during certain parts of the Mass, just like marks on a stage floor for actors.

The iconography of Cosmati pavement designs are also links to ancient Judaism, functioning as a Kabbalistic meditational device containing a wide array of mystical symbols, with the circles representing divinity, while the squares represent humanity. Also integrated within the design are references to the Tree of Life, the pathways of the soul, the four layers of the universe, and

the triangles of Philo of Alexandria.

After the chapel's completion in 1481, and in stark contrast to the exterior, the interior walls were adorned with frescoes executed by several Italian Renaissance masters. The first mass in the Sistine Chapel was celebrated on 15 August 1483, at which ceremony the chapel was consecrated and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although the Sistine Chapel is the pope's private, chapel, it is also the site of major papal ceremonies which often times included participation of many city officials.

Upon learning that the pope was building a replica of Solomon's Temple, the Jewish citizenry of Rome was outraged. They considered it a religious offense, and more specifically, a sacrilege, to build the Pope's Chapel to the exact measurements of the Holy of Holies of the Temple of Solomon. The Talmud, the collection and explication of the rabbinic traditions, clearly legislated that "No one could build a functioning copy of

the Holy Temple of Solomon in any location other than the Holy Temple Mount in Jerusalem." Whether this was known to Sixtus is unclear, however he was not deterred by the Jewish community's objections, and continued the process of making his chapel a fortress and a showcase of Catholic power and beauty.

Beyond the construction of his chapel, Sixtus was deeply entrenched in Italian politics. He was involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the Medici family and instill his nephew Girolamo Riario as the Lord of Florence. This conspiracy, and attempted assassination of Lorenzo d'Medici, resulted in the War of the Pazzi (1478-1480).

In March 1480, two years after the attempted assassination of Lorenzo

d'Medici, an armistice was signed and peace was finally agreed upon. The peace agreement, at Sixtus's insistence, called for Florence to send two of its most talented artists, Sandro Botticelli and Domenico Ghirlandaio, to Rome to paint frescoes in the pope's personal chapel. The frescoes were to depict the life stories of both Moses and Jesus. Beside these panel frescoes, they were also required to add an upper strip of frescoes portraying the first 30 popes, as well as a large fresco depicting the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on the front altar wall, with Pope Sixtus IV himself depicted kneeling before her.

All of the frescoes painted by the Florentine artists were completed by the year 1482, however, Pope Sixtus IV died two years later in 1484, not having made any further embellishment to his chapel.

Upon ascending the Papal Throne eight years later in 1492, Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia) commissioned Antonio Giamberti da Sangallo to make major fortification improvements to Castle Sant' Angelo, which was approximately one half mile from the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel. Da Sangallo transformed the castle into a formidable military stronghold for the defense of Rome, which obviated the need for a fortified chapel.

Most importantly, Castle Sant' Angelo could be reached by the Passetto di Borgo, an elevated, covered passageway built upon the old Vatican wall, which extended from the Papal Palace to the castle itself. Since the Passetto di Borgo led directly from the Vatican to the castle, the Sistine Chapel was no longer needed for the personal safety of any pope. No longer needed as a fortified enclave, the chapel's roof was extended to cover the crenelated parapet, soldiers were removed and assigned to other duties, and their quarters above the vaulted ceiling fell vacant.

When Giuliano della Rovere became Pope Julius II in 1503 he employed, or more accurately, forced Michelangelo to fresco the entire ceiling, which resulted in his magnificent and master-

ful fresco of creation, which adorns the entire ceiling. Michelangelo's Last Judgment, which adorns the Altar Wall, was done some 26 years after he painted the ceiling. It should be noted that the treasures contained within the Sistine Chapel are all permanently embedded in the walls, floor and ceiling.

Aside from housing these treasures, the Sistine Chapel, since 1870, has also been the venue for the Holy Conclave, which is the meeting of the College of Cardinals to elect the Bishop of Rome: the Pope.

The rendering of the interior of the Sistine Chapel from the 1480s depicts the interior after the completion of the wall frescoes, and features a nondescript ceiling, painted blue with gold stars, the way it was prior to Michelangelo's painting it. The floor, part of the original construction, is a collage of geometric shapes and swirls made of pieces of cut glass and marble. The north wall also depicts the Cantoria just below the frescoes that adorn the second tier of the north and south walls which were painted by six individual fresco masters between 1480 and 1482. The lunettes and webs above the popes are void of the ancestors of Christ that would be added later by Michelangelo. There are also nondescript drapes at the lower level. Also depicted are seven candelabras atop the *transenna*, repre-

sented the seven candles of the Jewish Menorah of Solomon's temple. Today there are eight candles instead of seven. It is believed that the eighth candle was added in commemoration of Hanukkah, however some believe that it was added to sever the connection with the temple. The *transenna* has also been moved and it no longer bisects the balcony of the Cantoria. The windows on the west wall (door) have been closed off.

Maintaining the allure of universal power and prestige, the Catholic Church has managed to transform a crumbling chapel on the Palatine Hill into, first, a military fortification replicating Solomon's Temple, and eventually into a Papal Chapel with the world's greatest Renaissance art embedded in its walls. Today, the Sistine Chapel is among the most recognized religious buildings in the world, having survived wars and the ravages of time; it is not only a World Heritage Site, but also the venue for one of the Church's most important and critical functions, that of selecting a new Pope through the Holy Conclave. 🏛️



# Aging 101

By Rebecca Long Hayden

Enrollment in the Adult Education program at Fairalextington Community college offers many enrichment courses for senior citizens. We're particularly proud of the following addition to the curriculum. The course is expected to fill quickly.

## Aging 101 – Learning to be Old

Lecturers: Former U. S. President Jimmy Carter and Still-A-Rolling-Stone Keith Richards

Included in the syllabus:

1. Why your hearing aids are useless at home in the charger.
2. Why you can no longer run five miles, shower, paint the living room, wash the car, and finish the afternoon alive.
3. When, how, why to consult a professional, often known as a Medical Doctor or MD. Not known as Google.
4. How to become an expert at saying "No" without apology.
5. The diet industrial complex, and why it ruins everyone. It may not be too late to eat foods you enjoy.
6. How to use a scarf as a bib when dining out.
7. Napping – a vocation.

Ha ha! *Never!* you say. Not for me! *Never!* I said, when I turned 50. I threw myself a party. The party was fabulous. I was fabulous. I was 50, and never going to get older. I was shocked when I turned 51.

So what say other notable persons "of a certain age," as the French put it. Einstein said, "I have reached an age when, if someone tells me to wear socks, I don't have to." Keith Richards might say something simple, such as "Yeah, baby. Old!" President Carter might say, "Do good works and live forever." Frank Sinatra didn't say it; he sang it. "I Did It My Way."

Amid my own confusion and resistance to the idea of aging, I've come up with an answer. Figure it out. Do the



best you can. That's it. Not profound, but it works for me.

And keep your sense of humor. Maybe the most consequential thing in dark times or any kind of times. For instance, Item 7, "Napping." My well-preserved husband has always been a napper, but now he's reached mastery of the snooze. He used to go to sleep while I was talking to him. Now he goes to sleep while *he's* talking to *me*. My laughter wakes him up in time to wonder what I'm chuckling about.

On the other hand, I've always felt naps were for sissies. A step class is energizing! Yoga is the answer! Now I *step* to the lobby for my mail, and then I think, *I need a nap*.

Life is one long learning curve. From the moment you're thrust from the dark comfort and steady heartbeat of Mom into the bright light and weird faces of other human beings, you have to start figuring it out. First thing, I would guess, is: *What's up and what's down? Oh. The sloshing in my brain stops when I put my head this way. This must be up.*

So the newborn figures it out. Only a few months old and a baby will laugh as though they're watching the best of Saturday Night Live, or Tim Conway on the Carol Burnett show screaming at politicians: FIX IT! How does an

infant know that's funny? What's the frame of reference?

We learn an astonishing amount in the first hours, days, and months of life. It tapers off, but all along the way we think we have it figured out. Wow! I can walk/run/get away from Mom. Wow! I can read – the world is mine! But wait. What did you say will happen when I'm 12 or 13 years old?

Girl: "*Hmmm. Not sure I like that.*"

Boy: "*Can't wait!*"

But we figure it out. How to be a young adult. How to approach the future. How to pick a mate, make a living, raise a family, find satisfying work, and finally, how to say goodbye.

Superimposed on all those things is one persistent, down-right *pestering* question: How do I stay young? The answer: So Sorry. You can't. Not unless you die young. Because only youth looks young. There's something inimitable about youth – a sparkle, a hope, a luminescence, a twinkle, something ephemeral unmatched with makeup, exercise, plastic surgery, or even attitude.

Facebook loves to feature *old* celebrities looking *young*. They don't, though, because only *young* looks young. Allow me to pick on Madonna and Cher, celebrity icons known for *being* old but

looking young. My opinion? They could be called tight, smooth, weirdly wide-eyed, frozen, good, or awful. The word “youthful” may fit, but like *childish* and *childlike*, *young* and *youthful* are not the same.

I admire both these women for different reasons, but young left them long, long ago. Many – perhaps most – would prefer their look to the look of old age. I blush to confess, I’m glad the means to look like that are beyond me, because in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, with so much pressure to look, feel, act, BE young – especially on women – I might be tempted.

Instead, I’m trying to be the best Old Person I can be. I must repeat my mantra: Figure it out. Do the best you can.

Therefore, to sum up the imaginary lectures of Distinguished Rolling Stone Richards and Former President Carter:

1. Regarding hearing aids. Saying “Huh” to the barista five times is why the barista thinks you’re stupid as well as old. Wear your hearing aids.

2. You can no longer run five miles, shower, paint the living room, wash the car, and finish the afternoon alive. You can take a brisk daily walk.

3. It’s fun to Google all manner of medical issues, but Google isn’t a doctor. Get check-ups, and when you’re sick, see a doctor. Unless you love deep sighs and eye-rolls, do not arrive at the office with a hard-wired diagnosis. Let the doc do that. That’s the point!

4. Say “no.” Not always, but often. The time you have left be longs to you. Join The Committee for the Betterment of Dung Beetles? No. The Society for Preventing Planters Warts? No! Join Women Protecting the Right of All Children to be Fed? Yes! If you have trouble saying NO, try several languages. Speaking in “non-American” will dissuade certain groups from asking you again. It’s ei in Finnish, нет (nyet) in Russian, 不 (bù) in Mandarin, and hapana in Swahili. (FYI: There’s a website for how to say “no” in 60 languages.)

5. Stop dieting. Watch what you eat, particularly portion size, but if you don’t eat what you enjoy, you won’t be satisfied, and that leads to over-eating later.

6. Enthusiasm for food can result in minor mishaps of the dribble variety. Assemble a collection of washable scarves. They look nice, and salsa won’t be ruining your silk blouses or cashmere sweaters. Yes, men, too. It beats tucking a napkin into your collar.

7. Napping. Think of it as productive time or recovery time, not wasted time. In fact, napping is a vocation, a vacation, and almost an art form!

And one last thing, I can’t help it. It’s a common human delusion. I don’t iden-

tify with my peer group, though they are, in fact, my peer group. If you’re among the many neighbors in your 50s to whom I’ve remarked, “We’re about the same age,” it’s not that I think you look as old as me.

It’s that I happily, mistakenly, somewhat joyfully, imagine I look as young as you! 📷

*Rebecca is a member of the Montebello Writers Group*



*Photo by Rodney Fisher*

## Cameron 5th grade Girl Scouts go for Bronze Award

*Several Montebello children attend Cameron Elementary School. The 5th grade Girl Scout Troop at Cameron is co-led by Montebello resident Delphia Ridley, whose granddaughter, Ziya (center in the photo), attends Cameron and is a member of the troop.*

*For the past two years, Ziya has been the highest seller of cookies for her troop, selling over 400 boxes, thanks to the support of many Montebello residents.*

*This year, the Troop voted to earn their Girl Scout Bronze Award and will use a portion of their earnings from selling cookies to support two service projects: Boredom Buster Bags for kids at Children's National Hospital and Monarch Kids, children who have experienced trauma. Girl Scout cookie sales will begin in January 2025.*

*– Delphia Ridley*



*On Tuesday, November 26, a group from Montebello brought pies and some other goodies to the fire station of Alexandria, to show our appreciation for the continuous service they do in Montebello. The firefighters were very happy to receive the food. That night all the firefighters were going to get together to have their Thanksgiving Dinner, so we were right on time.*

*– Puchy Ryder*



# Plan B is not optional

By Bob Shea

**T**oday, wherever you are as you read this, please know that this location will probably not be your final residence. Health, age, family issues, finances, or simply a change of heart will undoubtedly cause you to move one more time.

Do you have a well thought-out Plan B? If you don't have one, you should. Start thinking about it now. Maybe I can help by describing my method.

Until recently, I was in that situation with plans to make Montebello my "forever home." Then I lost my wife, had an "ahhh haa" moment at about midnight as I sat vigil in a hospital room, when I knew I should move and realized that I had not thought out what was required to move, where to move to, or when. When the need arises, it can be overwhelming to develop Plan B unless you have thought about options long before another very real crisis is upon you. Do you want to be making many other significant and personal decisions while you first try to think about moving?

Once you decide that moving is in your best interest, you must ask "where" and "when."

My answer to these questions was easy: to be close to multiple family members and as soon as possible.

However, you must have "buy in"-from the family members into whose lives you are about to move. Family dynamics are different, and just announcing your arrival can be at best stressful and at worse, a family crisis. Do you plan to live with them? Do you plan to be independent, but close by? Some families are scattered around the nation with competing sibling concepts

about who "gets" grandpa or grandma, a very real and very valid question. Not all families adhere to the Ozzie and Harriet model. This can be both positive and negative. Maybe living next door or in a mother-in-law suite will adversely impact everyone's independence, while living a few miles away provides family support when needed and freedom. I am 20 minutes away from my Maine family with very real benefits for all.

Also, can you afford the cost of a long-distance move and the associated expenses? Moving can be costly.

Assuming you have family consensus, or at least no serious push back, you can

ent costs, hidden fees, amenities, availability, and types of accommodations available under one roof – independent living, assisted living, and memory care. The latter is a huge consideration as we never know what negative event lurks around the next medical corner. The gamut of care available makes future moves more doable. I selected one such facility.

I then visited the community, talked to the staff, chatted with residents, walked the 34-acre campus, and made a decision. That was the place for me. But, the work had just begun.

You will probably need to downsize again. I have a beautiful one-bedroom apartment with a complete kitchen, lots of storage space, and an outside door as well as one that opens onto the corridor of the main building. What will fit? What is needed? Do you really want to pay for unnecessary items to be transported hundreds of miles away? The choices



consider the next step. What will your lifestyle be? Another condo? An apartment? A retirement community? Independent living? Assisted living? A facility that combines both? The choices are numerous, and each one has merit. However, while one such choice having merit is good, it is not necessarily the best. Think, think, think. Remember, you must live with your decision, possibly for the rest of your life.

I chose a retirement community in Kennebunk, Maine, about 15 miles from a married daughter and three married grandchildren. It was a logical choice for me. My daughter, bless her, did extensive local research about what was available in the area, inher-

are never obvious.

In my new home, I decided on a plan that provides one meal a day in the dining room (usually dinner) with multiple menu choices to include wine served by a gracious wait staff. That being the case, I did not need every dish, cup, glass, pot, pan, and kitchen gadget that I owned. All I needed was enough to make a simple breakfast, and maybe a sandwich for lunch. I downsized again but remembered to include a few wine glasses, Irish coffee mugs, and items I might need when new, but yet unknown friends gather to socialize.

Furniture choices were limited by the size of my new apartment. I received a scale drawing of the apartment, mea-

sured furniture, cut out small squares of paper, and was therefore able to move “stuff” around until I knew what to move and what to leave in Virginia. It sounds obsessive, but I ended up with just one small table that could not find a home in Maine. Good planning!

We all have emotional baggage, things that have no value to others, but which have special meaning for us. Be sure to include them in your move so that your new home still represents YOU. You are moving to a new home, not being sent into exile. Be comfortable but judicious. Unlike some of the other Plan B decisions, this one is yours, and yours alone.

How do you now get that which you decide to move from Point A to Point B? Rent a U-Haul truck? Probably not, at our ages, since the truck still has to be loaded, driven to its destination, and unloaded. If you can afford it, find a professional mover. You have enough on your plate without having to deal with chronic back issues or willing friends who know nothing about moving your valuables and furniture. I am reminded of the tagline on some TV shows: “They are professionals. Do not try this at home.”

If not everything is to be moved, you have to develop a simple system for the movers and others to correctly and easily identify the “move” items from everything else. I used a small piece of green painters tape on each item to make the mover’s job easier. I also bought many boxes and tape from the local U-Haul dealer (just past Giant on Route 1) to pack the items that did not require professional expertise. I could pack books, clothing, selected household items, and small pictures, but left TVs, computers, framed paintings, and mirrors to the guys with the proper material and expertise. It worked.

I found a moving company in Portland, Maine which specializes in East Coast moves from Maine to Miami. It is a privately owned company, not affiliated with the national chains such as Atlas or Mayflower. Thus, I was not dealing with multiple local franchises

and independent truckers. We easily negotiated the details, set dates, and they did the heavy lifting. They arrived at Montebello with an empty truck, having delivered a load to Atlanta. As promised, they arrived on a Tuesday, loaded the truck, and delivered my belongings to my new home in Kennebunk on Thursday. By doing that, I avoided my belongings going from a truck to a warehouse to another truck

*We all have emotional baggage, things that have no value to others, but which have special meaning for us. Be sure to include them in your move so that your new home still represents YOU. You are moving to a new home, not being sent into exile. Be comfortable but judicious.*

for later delivery. In many moves over a career in the Army, I had experienced the saying that three moves equals a house fire. I had no damage, no lost items. It was a good move!

So far we have covered the major items such as to where, what to move, and how to move it. However, there are a myriad of other items that must be part of your Plan B. Administrative details. Changes of address to the countless folks who need to know where you are: banks, the post office, insurance companies, AAA, retirement accounts, credit card companies, Amazon for email shoppers, investment accounts, and magazines, are just a few. They all have to be notified in what is sometimes a cumbersome process, depending on the firm or agency.

You will have to stop or turn off services like cable TV, landline phones, newspapers, local personal property tax, and electricity. Only you know how many such services you have to terminate or transfer.

You will also need to find a new primary care physician and supporting

medical specialists. This can be a challenge, as not all medical professionals will quickly accept new patients and their specific insurance coverage. Your car will have to be licensed in a new state as well as obtaining your new driver’s license, new car title, new vehicle inspection procedures, and new insurance coverage. In many states you can also combine all of this at the DMV with new voter registration. Also, your household insurance must be changed from homeowner to renter. You must soul search to make sure everyone who needs to know about the move in fact does know.

One last item for your Plan B. Reserve your building’s freight elevator on the appointed moving day (and pay the Montebello fee) so that the movers can do their job without being in competition with dog walkers, UPS drivers, and grocery deliveries.

I did not include in discussing Plan B the process of divesting yourself of your condo. This is different for renters, owners, and occupants of trust-owned units. Your individual circumstances will demand a different approach for each type of occupancy. Your Plan B must include the details and process for the real estate transfer. Be sure to include it; otherwise, you will find the devil is in the details, making a tough task even more difficult. An expired lease is very different from a condominium sale in terms of time, effort, and decisions. There is no “one plan fits all,” but it has to be a well thought out part of your Plan B.

Moving is never easy, but it is much more difficult unless you plan ahead. Are you always going to live at Montebello? Probably not! Therefore start thinking about Plan B NOW!

Drive out the gate for the last time with a “job well done” feeling as opposed to “OMG, what I have I forgotten to do?” Good luck! 🍀

*Bob Shea is formerly of Building 3, Unit 118*

# Argentina's tango with inflation

By Chester Taylor

The United States and much of the rest of the world depend on trade with Argentina. Argentina is the second-largest country in South America with vast natural resources. It also has the second-largest economy in South America after Brazil. Argentina supplies the world with its abundant agricultural products. It has robust manufacturing capabilities of which two-fifths are medium-high and high technology industries. While unemployment is low at around 6.7%, poverty is high at over 50%. It has one of the highest inflation rates of any country in the world at 236% as of August 2024. Around 50,000 Argentine professionals each year are fleeing to Europe because of this hyperinflation. We need to help its newly elected President Javier Milei to succeed in getting Argentina's inflation under control.

To understand how Argentina arrived at this point, we begin in 1946 when Juan Perón was elected president. He nationalized industries and services, improved wages and working conditions, paid the full external debt, and achieved near full employment. He pushed Congress to enact woman suffrage in 1947 and developed a system of social assistance for the most vulnerable sectors of society. There is no doubt that his wife, Eva Perón, played a critical role in these efforts as brought out in the movie [Evita](#) played by Madonna. Despite his wife's powerful legacy and his own skill as a leader, there were aspects of Perón's presidency that were troubling. He and most of the country were antisemitic. He allowed infamous Nazis and other WWII

war criminals to relocate in Argentina to include Adolf Eichmann and Josef Mengele.

The economy began to decline in 1950 due in part to excessive government expenditures and protectionist economic policies. By 1951, despite this repression of his political opponents, Perón was re-elected. Eva died of cancer in 1952. Perón then married María Estela Martínez Cartas, whose name became Isabel Perón. Following his death in 1974, Isabel, then vice president, became president. She was overthrown in 1976. A military junta followed called the Dirty War. It was part of a larger series of political coups called Operation Condor, a campaign sponsored and supported by the United States. An estimated 30,000 political critics, activists, and leftists, labeled *desaparecidos*, were persecuted and murdered. Five hundred babies were seized from their *desaparecidos* mothers before their mothers were executed. The babies are thought to have been given to other families. A period of state terrorism and civil unrest lasted until the election of Raúl Alfonsín as president in 1983. In more recent years Argentina has been a relatively peaceful and stable country, the war with the United Kingdom over the Falkland Islands being the exception.

Argentina was a founding member of the United Nations, World Bank, and World Trade Organization. It is a member of G15 and G20. The United States imports about \$6.4 billion of goods each year from Argentina. Argentina imports about \$23.4 billion of goods from the United States. Manufactured goods Argentina imports consist of vehicles, delivery trucks, machinery, computer equipment, electronics, textiles, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and petrochemicals. Delivery trucks made in Argentina are a niche business – see photo of Volkswagen's all electric delivery truck. Argentina's chief agricultural exports are corn, soybeans, wheat, sugarcane, milk, bar-



ley, sunflower seeds, beef, sorghum, and chickens. Argentina is the tenth largest exporter of wine in the world, around \$828 million yearly. Malbec grapes, now widely planted in Argentina, were introduced there in 1868 by French agricultural engineer Michel Pouget. The Malbec grapes from the Mendoza region produce softer, less tannic wines than those from France.

Argentina, once one of the richest countries in the world, is now a financial disaster with an inflation rate at times exceeding 270% yearly. There are several reasons for this budgetary death spiral. The main reason was that its central banks kept printing out more pesos in the face of stubborn deficit spending. Added to this was constant devaluation of the peso and global price shocks caused by COVID-19 and the lack of low-priced nitrates fertilizer from Russia needed by Argentine agricultural production. Argentina sanctioned trade with Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, putting supporting basic human rights over economics. Finally,





one of the worst droughts on record in 2023 cost its farmers \$14 billion. Argentina's huge amount of government debt caused real wages to plummet and food prices to increase as much as 289%.

Now, all hopes for Argentina to come out of its inflationary death spiral rest with their newly elected President Javier Milei. He was an economics professor for over 20 years. Most of us remember him with a chainsaw as a symbol of what he would do to the government while he was campaigning. He became president on December 10, 2023. His plan to sharply cut spending to allow the central banks to rebuild reserves and tamp down inflation has



been a painful process, but the inflation rate has come down significantly. On an annual basis, consumer prices rose by 236.7% in August 2024, down from 263.4% in July.

With 30% cuts to all public spending, 40% cuts to education, denied increases to pensions, and 27,000 public employees laid off, Milei is not without his critics. Milei, a right-wing libertarian, has not hidden his alignment with President-elect Donald Trump and Elon Musk. While Trump has set his tariff sights on Mexico, Argentina is so far off his target list. Milei's left-wing critics claim Milei will copy the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 policies. Milei met with Trump on November 15, 2024. Milei stated "the winds of freedom [were] blowing much stronger" since Trump's victory. He added that it was an unfair tax system that caused "the redistribution of wealth at gunpoint." This runs counter to solving

the extreme poverty rate (50%) that Argentina is experiencing.

Argentina's total sovereign debt exceeds \$400 billion, \$110 billion of which is owed to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and to holders of restructured, privately held Eurobonds. The country has \$16 billion in debt payments coming due next year. Argentina will have to ask the IMF and others to restructure the loans, to borrow more money, or a combination of both. A concern for the United States is that Argentina may borrow money from China. China has already loaned Argentina \$19 billion. As the proverb goes, "he who pays the piper calls the tune."

Argentina, along with Brazil and Chile, have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This year, Argentine authorities issued a warrant for the arrest of Venezuelan leader Nicholas Maduro and his close associate, the head of the Venezuelan Ministry of Internal Affairs Diosdado Cabello, for systematic actions involving kidnapping, torture, and murder. More than 15,800 Venezuelans have been subjected to politically motivated arrests since 2014, and about 270 remained in detention according to the legal aid organization Foro Penal.

Argentina is an important ally to the United States. We are economic trading partners and share interests in democracy and human rights. We are the largest foreign investor in Argentina, with approximately \$12.6 billion (stock) foreign direct investment made yearly. In 2024, the United States, through its participation in the IMF, supported Argentina in getting a \$4.7 billion disbursement. In an era of climate change, food scarcity, pandemics, and war, the United States and most nations of the world need Argentina to be an enduring state. 🇲🇦

*Chester is a member of the Montebello Writers Group*

## Ciudades fronteriza

*Por Chester Taylor*

El Paso, Texas y su vecina, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, se encuentran en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos. El clima es seco y cálido las noches pueden ser ventosas y frías. Esta región es bilingüe, español e inglés. Se podría decir que la comida también es bilingüe: Tex-Mex.

Yo viví en el lado de El Paso. Normalmente compraba comida en el mercado central de Juárez. Solía escribir una lista en español de las cosas que necesitaba: arroz, tomates, aguacates, tortillas, cactus en escabeche, filetes mexicanos de carne (sin hormonas o antibióticos), limas, tequila y flores. Cuando terminé, volví a cruzar el puente de la frontera en mi vieja camioneta.

La cena se sirvió en la terraza después del atardecer. Primero bebimos bebidas y comimos verduras. Luego quizás algunas tortillas, arroz y filetes asados con cebolla y jalapeño. El flan era mi postre favorito. Después de cenar hablamos y mi amigo tocaba la guitarra.

Practice your Spanish, join the Montebello Spanish Club! Contact Christine Winter at [christine.mcwinter@gmail.com](mailto:christine.mcwinter@gmail.com)





*I traveled with two nieces and their spouses on the Scarlet Lady, owned and operated by Virgin Voyages.*

*The embarkation port was Barcelona, Spain, with stops in Toulon, France; Marina di Carrara, Italy; Ajaccio, Corsica, France; and Ibiza, Spain.*

*Photos by Dian McDonald*



*Entertainers on the Scarlet Lady*



*The balconies of Barcelona*



*High up in Corsica*





*Young women in Royal Square, Barcelona*



*A child in Ibiza*

*Top: Carrara, Italy, where you can see the famous white marble*