

The MONTEBELLO Voice

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September 2025



When I moved to Montebello from Colorado one year ago, I brought with me this very large painting. It was created by my grandfather, Herbert Franklin Slaughter, a commercial artist during World War II, as a template for a war poster expressing the unity of allies in protecting freedom worldwide. It is as relevant today in our current time of turmoil as it was then.

But rather than railing against this situation, I feel drawn to emphasize all the good I possibly can in my thoughts and actions. Many are doing the same. It is an eye-opening experience for me to now to live in the birthplace of our grand experience of democracy that I grew up taking for granted. – *Judy Cox* 🏠



Cover by Rachael Bright

A little bit of an emotional artwork for me. I had the concept for this painting bouncing around in my head for several years, and I even painted two smaller exploratory pieces before committing to this large canvas. This is *Cosmos Mariners*.

The image is born from an excerpt from one of my favorite novels, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. The phrase “*Cosmos Mariner Destination Unknown*” refers to an inscription on the tombstone of Conrad Aiken, a poet, in Bonaventure Cemetery in Savannah, Georgia. The inscription was inspired by a ship Aiken saw named “*Cosmos Mariner*” whose destination was listed as “*Unknown*” in the shipping news.

This quote really resonated with me because in the past, I often felt lost without answers to life’s questions or knowledge of the future. This piece is an exploration of a journey into the unknown, learning to go into the unknown without fear, and embracing it. Going with the flow and letting the beautiful mysteries of the universe unfold as they will.

Destination Unknown, and I’m here for the ride.

Cosmos Mariners

30” X 40”

Acrylic on Canvas

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Walking the circle

Our forest path

By Judy Cox

My haven, my embrace. With my first steps onto the path, my intention materializes and my absorption begins. I am enveloped by the leaves.

A destination is implied, yet I walk the circle and smile in knowing that the end of my walk is, in fact, the beginning. I haven't "gone anywhere" but I have experienced each moment of my steps.

I walk from the sun into the shade and feel relief from the summer's harshness. I tune in to the sound of my steps and to the rustling of leaves as a squirrel scampers ahead. The sounds of birds are asking and answering. We are all one.

Our human nature is reflected in our natural world. I melt into the comfort and steadfastness of the forest. I notice that my breathing synchronizes with my steps effortlessly. I am able to shed the effort of my day.

I speak to the foraging birds the best I can with a whistle to mimic their sounds. I wonder if the birds recognize me as I do them. I feel the grand and anchored life of the tree giants, their offering of shelter to creatures great and small. Their roots form a network as massive as their branches. They care for their species entwined in contact with one another, the old growth and the young seed.

My path never wavers through the four seasons. I am present and accepting from the spring buds to the fall leaves and beyond, through all stages of my life. Newness beckons each moment. ■

Judy is a member of the Montebello Writers Group

Rain

By Mary Combemale

It's June with new scary heat in the current year of our Lord.

Blessedly, now dark, in the cooled night, rain as sound, has history. I remember this deep earthy scent, this is the rain you loved. I am confident, this is your rain

Can I tell you, the rain is often, now, so fierce, unsafe, tragic.

It is flood, metastasized doubt, rupture, at a time, in my life, for cautious steps, safety, ease.

We don't sing.

The old songs don't work.

Something has robbed us of protest.

What are memories without the scents and sounds of the earth we knew?

Where are you without the world you came into?

Where are we with all this trouble?

Cutting strawberries

By Mary Combemale

Cutting strawberries,

Someone at the door. . .

In my pajamas the tears rise

As I feel perplexed about who is really here, if anyone

The sadness drips in my chest

It's true and I am sorry

It's true.

I have never been the same.

Still, I can be overtaken

In this moment

With the undulating flight

Of a local finch

And the downy feather

Drifting down my window

In its departure

I open the sash

And my heart stumbles

Over the message as a car door shuts

Then voices in the sun fade.

Every thing is going your way

Mary is a member of the Montebello Writers Group

Dissent is our last line of defense

By Chester Taylor

We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. When the loyal opposition dies, I think the soul of America dies with it

—Edward R. Murrow

 Our branches of federal government are crumbling under the authoritarian rule of President Donald Trump. He is a threat to our democracy. His unilateral and coercive tactics have created instability and strained relationships here and abroad. We must speak up, we must protest, and we must vote. Dissent is our last line of defense to preserve democracy.

Trump's sudden and unexpected reversals on our defense security strategy has caused our allies and NATO to wonder if they can depend on the United States to honor its treaties and mutual defense commitments. Trump's tariffs have raised prices, slowed growth, introduced legal and policy uncertainty, and created chaos in the world markets. Trump is supplying Israel with U.S. bombs and war materiel. He has given Netanyahu a green light to use unrestrained force against Gaza that has resulted in an estimated 84,000 deaths of Palestinian civilians. More than half were women and children. The total number of deaths includes 8,400 who have died of starvation and disease.

Then there is the Russia-Ukraine War that Trump promised he would end within 24 hours of taking office. It didn't happen. Trump has favored Putin, the leader of an authoritarian regime over Zelensky, the leader of a democratic country. Trump had the United States vote against the United Nations resolution that condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and demanded a full withdrawal. Instead, Trump offered his plan to give Russia the Ukrainian territory it had seized

and not assign any blame to Putin, essentially calling for Ukraine to surrender.

His domestic policies are just as reprehensible. Trump has destroyed our environmental protections for the future by rolling back regulations limiting emissions from power plants and vehicles, weakening the Endangered Species Act, and allowing oil and gas drilling on wildlife refuges. He has cut or withheld over \$6 billion in federal education grants. While issuing an executive order to close the Department of Education, he still wants to control what schools and universities can teach and what books they can use. He tells liberal arts universities like Harvard, Princeton and the University of Virginia, how to run their campuses – no dissent. He has mishandled immigra-



tion compliance by ignoring the right of *habeas corpus*; disobeyed court orders; and touted the maltreatment of those detained. He tarnishes the image of the United States by sending detainees to *Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo* (CECOT), Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, and soon to Alligator Alcatraz.

There is no real check on Trump's power by the Congress or the Supreme Court. The GOP Congress is like an amen choir proclaiming that no matter what Trump says or does, we should all agree. They allow him to make his own laws by issuing executive orders. Congress has yielded to him by failing to assert their constitutional authority over

war powers, allowing Trump's administration to restrict intelligence sharing with Congress, and passing Trump's "big, beautiful bill" despite the bill's impact on the national debt and Medicaid cuts. The Supreme Court has become a rubber stamp for Trump by allowing controversial policies to proceed while litigation continues, curtailing nationwide injunctions, and upholding anti-trans legislation. The Supreme Court, in *Trump v. United States* (2024), ruled that a sitting president has absolute immunity, a "get out of jail card free," from criminal prosecutions for so-called official acts. Recently, the Supreme Court issued another significant ruling by limiting the power of lower federal courts to block presidential executive actions nationwide.

Democracy is withering away under Trump. He has tried on multiple instances to circumvent our Constitution and still plans to do so by hinting in the future he will run for a third term. He is undermining the independence of the Department of Justice, pressuring officials to investigate political opponents. He calls the press the "enemy of the people." His hit list includes CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, NBC News, MSNBC, ABC and CBS. He proclaims any unfavorable reports of him as "fake news." He sent in combat-trained Marines against U.S. citizen protesting in Los Angeles. He used National Guard troops and fencing to keep protesters away from the Army's and his \$40 million birthday parade. His expansion of executive power beyond its traditional limits, his intimidation of journalists, and his crackdown on peaceful protests are indicators of an authoritarian president and the erosion of democratic values. We must speak up, write, protest, and vote. Dissent is our last line of defense.



Chester is a member of the Montebello Writers Group

Oh, Columbia!

By Allan Abramson
Class of 1963

Columbia was founded in 1754 as King's College, under King George II. It was renamed Columbia College in 1784, after the Revolution, and renamed Columbia University in 1896.

It is worth remembering that the Constitution states that Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech. NO law. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court broke this wall of protection in 1919, in case decisions authored by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

The two most important decisions stated that (1) "The First Amendment, while prohibiting legislation against free speech as such, was not intended to give immunity to every possible use of language", and (2) "Words that, ordinarily and in many places, would be within the freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment may become subject to prohibition when of such a nature and used in such circumstances as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent."

In the first case, the Supreme Court meant that the Constitution's "no law" provision was not absolute, thus changing the meaning of "no" from never to "hardly ever."

In the second case, the Supreme Court created a "clear and present danger" standard for breaching the protection of free speech. One example given was that shouting "fire" in a crowded room was not protected speech.

For most of my life, I have been a free speech absolutist. More recently, I have been thinking of the case of incitement to riot. Perhaps freedom of speech

should not extend this far...

Be that as it may, in March 2025, after last year's pro-Palestinian protests, Columbia agreed to the Administration demands to "overhaul disciplinary processes, ban masks at protests, add 36 officers with the authority to make arrests and appoint a new senior vice provost to oversee academic programs focused on the Middle East" among other demands.

Then, in July 2025, the university disciplined over 70 students who took part in campus protests, with punishments including probation, suspensions, degree revocations, and expulsions. They punished students for their speech. In

*A private university
must be able to protect
the free speech of its faculty
and students.*



my opinion, this violated the Constitution.

Columbia also agreed to pay the federal government \$220 million in exchange for a resumption of federal funding, a settlement of investigations into the school by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and

a resolution of claims that the school discriminated against Jewish students. And, Columbia agreed to provide the federal government with the private information of applicants to the university—those admitted as well as those not admitted—including their race, GPA, and standardized test scores.

Thus, Columbia succumbed to Federal extortion. This was most likely unconstitutional federal action. Note that Columbia's endowment is about \$15 billion. Rather than pay the \$220 million, Columbia just could have given up the \$400 million in federal funds, remaining independent of federal pressure. Private fund raising could have replaced much of that federal funding, going forward.

Columbia's leadership chose to cave, rather than to fight in court, with a likely winnable case. Indeed, while Congress may withhold funds for reasonable and relevant conditions, it is not at all clear that the President has any power to withhold Congressionally appropriated funds.

A private university must be able to protect the free speech of its faculty and students. Free speech protections are not just for opinions we like. It is most important for speech we don't like.

We used to speak of a free market of ideas, with each one of us free to choose which ideas to support. What happened to this free market? Do we want to revert to the monarchical dictatorship of what speech is acceptable?

What has happened to resisting government oppression? Do we really want to go down this path?

No! Shame on you, Columbia. 🙄

At the café

By Allan Abramson

Another asylum offer this morning
That makes half a dozen since we came last month
We agreed that civilization was thin
Skin stretched over blood and guts hidden away
The rules of behavior are so small a shield
Mutual agreement respecting others
Protecting each other from the wolves out there
The playground bullies' fingers on the triggers
The howling pack searching for the next victim
Clubs in the air sniffing around for weakness
The asylum somewhere else not our backyard
Madness not our problem, watching from afar
But it is a window not a screen outside
Our own out there our own the problem our own
Asylum or asylum does it matter
What should we do what can we do the question
Another coffee my dear?



Jean-Loup Combemale:

A long life, well lived

By Donna Fowler

Born in Paris in 1935, Jean-Loup Combemale began his travels early, but not by choice. The World War II pictures are familiar: endless lines of refugees, old and young, streaming along country roads to escape Paris. By the age of six, Jean-Loup had been in those lines with his grandmother, Yvonne Combemale, not once but three times.

I met Jean-Loup in far less dramatic circumstances. New to Montebello, I was hovering at the edge of the outdoor pool, trying to discern the unspoken protocol for joining the water aerobics class. He saw this and kindly explained what to do. I was intrigued.

He's a striking looking man, a bit intimidating, and I thought, "Hmmm, probably an interesting backstory there." Some months later, after I promised dirty martinis ("very dirty," as he likes them), he agreed to share some of his backstory with me. This article draws on a series of interviews with him.

Jean-Loup's third evacuation from Paris was final. As they walked away from the city, his grandmother worried that he would tire before they reached their destination, a family home in the country. She flagged down a retreating army ambulance speeding by. Despite regulations forbidding this, she persuaded the crew to take the boy on board and drop him off at the family home. But the ambulance whizzed right past the place. Jean-Loup had to convince them to turn around. As they dropped him at the gate, he saw his relieved family

members waving wildly to welcome him.

After traveling through Vichy France and then North Africa, he and Yvonne boarded a Portuguese ship, the *SS Guinea*, from Casablanca to the United States. They were meeting his mother, Colette, who had gone to London with a delegation from the French air ministry. Their mission was to seek planes for the war in France; Churchill re-

form Lady Liberty's crown – a place, he says, "no 11-year-old kid would be allowed today." The picture was taken by helicopter.

From ages 7-16, he says he was "an American kid in a French environment – I had to constantly work the two together." Home was a "French bubble," where two formidable women devoted themselves to his advancement.

Believing all things French superior to all things American ("They had no faith in anything that wasn't French"), the women sent him first to a French private school and then to Collegiate School, the oldest school in the United States. Their ambitions led to his skipping two grades, making him always youngest in his class. He saw those decisions as "academically right, but developmentally they couldn't have been have been more wrong....I got thrown out of class a lot and pushed around by the other kids."

He graduated from high school at age 16, with the clear understanding that he was to become an engineer. "Not my idea," he notes, "My mother and grandmother were trying to reconstruct my grandfather," a larger-than-life engineer and adventurer who had worked all over the



fused. She stayed on, working there for the French resistance under General Charles De Gaulle, until he told her, "I don't need you here. I need you in the United States."

In 1942, Jean-Loup and Yvonne reunited with Colette in Manhattan. In 1946, the *New York Daily News* captured his enthusiasm for his new home: an astonishing photograph of Jean-Loup waving an American flag at the top of the Statue of Liberty. Grinning, he's leaning out one of the windows that

world, including in the Oklahoma oil fields. He had died in World War I at Verdun. Enrolled in a joint Amherst College-MIT program, Jean-Loup lasted one semester at Amherst. "I didn't do anything. I slept late. Played a lot of poker. I wasn't interested." His mother then persuaded MIT to admit him, but he "couldn't have cared less" and fared no better there. One road not taken at this point could have led to the American Academy of Dramatic Art. He was offered a full scholarship, but his moth-

er was opposed.

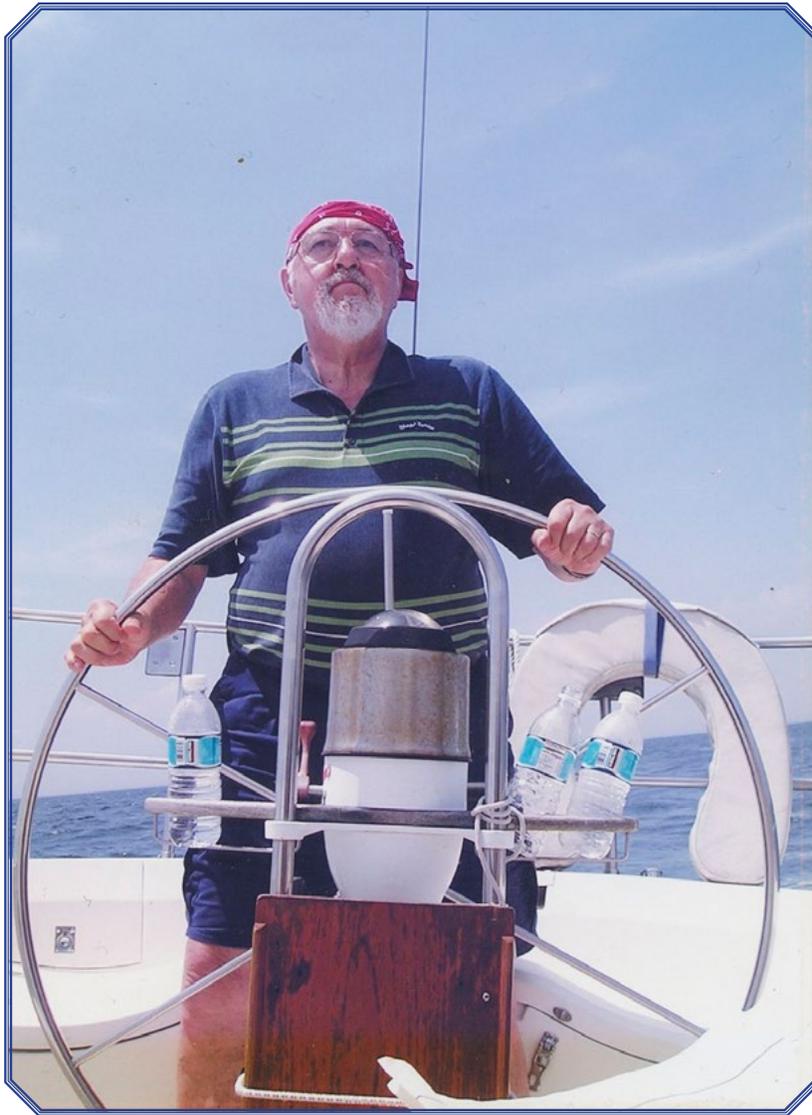
When he turned 18, he applied for US citizenship and went to work for Dunlop Tire and Rubber in Buffalo, NY. At a subsequent job at Bell Helicopter, he noticed a recruiting poster for the US Navy and enlisted: "Seemed like a good idea at the time. Got me out of the house."

As a sailor, he eventually applied to be an enlisted appointee to the US Naval Academy, graduating from Annapolis in 1960. Thus began a full and satisfying 25-year career as a naval officer: "I really thoroughly enjoyed my time in the Navy."

This also marked a reversal in his antipathy for education. He says that the structure and discipline of the Navy enabled him to settle down and learn. Deciding "submarines would be great," he went to submarine school. More education followed: navigator school, intelligence school, and, as an exchange student, the French Naval War College. "It was a choice billet – who would not want the Navy to pay for two years in Paris?" Ultimately, he had fulfilled the ambitions of his family and become an engineer after all.

He became a navigator and operations officer on the *USS Nathanael Greene*, a ballistic missile submarine. For four years, he was on submarine patrol, underwater for two months at a time twice yearly, monitoring the USSR.

Meanwhile, in 1963, he had married Jackie, "a California girl" who loved horses and dogs. They had two daughters, Joelle and Leslie, and Jackie raised show dogs "to keep her sanity while I was away....She was very good at it." Laughing, he described Jackie's com-



"It's not all the things you've done. Most important are the people.... It's who – not what – that defines your life."

munications to him on the submarine, filled mainly with news of the dogs, but always ending with the line, "Kids are fine."

Eventually, he says, "The Navy went nuclear, and I didn't." He left work underwater behind and moved into intelligence work, spending three years in Naples, Italy, as deputy for intelligence on the submarine staff.

The year 1973 brought more changes. Jackie was diagnosed with cancer, and they returned to the US. They acquired a farm in Warrenton, Va., that they named "Bergerac," in honor of long-nosed Cyrano and the long-nosed dachshunds they raised. Jean-Loup

worked in Washington as Head of Undersea Warfare for the Soviet-Warsaw Pact Division of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). Jackie lost her battle with cancer in 1977. Their daughter Joelle served in the military and eventually became a leading civil engineer with a major engineering firm in Hawaii. She and her husband, a Navy retiree, now live outside of Seattle. Leslie, also married, lives in Ashburn, Va. For many years, she ran a highly successful gallery in Reston specializing in animated art, work that she eventually moved online. As "Cinema Siren," she writes movie reviews for local publications.

He met his present wife Mary at a staff picnic her employer held at Bergerac. He noticed her when she – "a little slip of a thing wearing red jeans" – hit a home run during a softball game. He began hanging out at a restaurant Mary managed in DC, and "it just developed." They married in 1981 and had two daughters, Jane and Coco.

The family was rocked by tragedy in 1998, when 16-year-old Jane died in a car accident driving home from school. Jean-Loup says that Mary had been writing poetry as long as he has known her, but her work took on a new cast after Jane's death. She has shared some of her work at the annual Montebello Poetry Readings. Mary is a social worker in private practice. Daughter Coco, whom Jean-Loup calls a master of Trivial Pursuit, lives in Middleburg, Va., and works as office supervisor for AVI Food Systems.

Jean-Loup says that he has retired

many times. After he left the Navy, he “did the standard thing,” going to work for consulting firms known as “beltway bandits.” It didn’t take. He turned to publishing, serving as editor of *The Journal of Defense and Diplomacy*, which featured threat evaluations around the world, technical analyses for ships and aircraft, and interviews with notable people.

Jean-Loup did most of the interviews. When I ask whom he interviewed, he remembered Jacques Chirac, president of France, and “a bunch of Brits,” along with people from the political/military power structure in the US. His other post-Navy “careers” included working as a translator and as a language teacher in private schools in Warrenton and Middleburg, Va. Teaching French and Spanish there he said was “a lot of fun, I really enjoyed it. I think I retired from that three times.”

He met his present wife Mary at a staff picnic her employer held at Bergerac. He noticed her when she – “a little slip of a thing wearing red jeans” – hit a home run during a softball game.



Jean-Loup and Mary

I asked about the old books on bookshelves next to where we were sitting in his apartment. They’re in French, he says, and came from his family, mostly philosophical nonfiction — “not terribly interesting.” When asked what he liked to read, he said, “Yes!” He meant “everything,” but now mostly history and historical fiction. He claims a soft spot for detective fiction, too, but says, “I have a huge problem with books in my life. I acquire them and can’t get rid of them!”

Jean-Loup turned 90 this past February, and celebrated with family and friends at the Montebello Community Center. Asked to reflect on his long and eventful life, he said, “It’s not all the things you’ve done. Most important are the people.... It’s who – not what – that defines your life.” 📖

Donna is a member of the Montebello Writers Group



Photos by Linda Brownlee



Estaban Felices

Chester Taylor, El Club Español

Tban a una fiesta!

Las damas se pusieron blusas coloridas;
Violeta, verde cristal y seda blanca.

Algunas llevaban elegantes collares y
pulseras.

Los hombres se afeitaron y peinaron,
Y se pusieron una camisa que les que-
dara bien.

Allá se fueron.

Estaban felices.

En la fiesta estaban sus amigos.

Hablaban de sus vidas, sus familias



Mariachi by Luis Emilio Renteria

Y lo que estaba pasando.
Comieron la comida de la fiesta:
Salsa, tortillas, fajitas, arroz y frijoles.
Estaban felices.
Entonces empezó la música.
Primero los mariachis con trompetas a
todo volumen,
El bajo marcando el ritmo,
Las guitarras españolas marcando la
melodía.
¡Cantaron con entusiasmo!
Era en vivo, fuerte y animado.
Mientras fluían los mojitos y las mar-
garitas,
La gente empezó a cantar sus can-
ciones favoritas:
Cielito Lindo, Volver-Volver, Guadala-
jara y otras.
Se podía ver la alegría en sus ojos.
Estaban felices.
Entonces empezó el baile con El Jara-
be Tapatío.

Después de que tocaran los mariachis,
El baile continuó con un DJ y música
disco.
La pista de baile estaba llena.
La gente reía y sonreía.
Sus mentes estaban lejos de los prob-
lemas.
Estaban felices.
Cuando terminó la fiesta,
La gente regresó a sus casas,
Disfrutando de la fresca noche de
primavera,
Hablando en voz baja, había sido una
noche divertida.
Estaban felices.

They were happy

By Chester Taylor, *the Spanish Club*



Latino! Latino! by Nicola Heindl

They were going to a fiesta!

The ladies put on colorful blouses,
Violet, crystal green and white silk.
Some wore fancy necklaces and bracelets.

The men shaved and combed their hair,
And settled on a nice fitting shirt.
Off they went.
They were happy.

At the fiesta were their friends.
They talked about their lives, their families,
and what was happening.
They ate the fiesta food—
Salsa, tortillas, fajitas, rice, and beans.
They were happy.
Then the music started.

First the mariachis with trumpets
blaring,
The bass guitar sounding the beat,
the Spanish guitars providing the
melody.
They sang with gusto!
It was live, loud, and spirited.
As the mojitos and margaritas flowed,
The people started singing their favorites,
Cielito Lindo, Volver-Volver, Guadalajara,
and others.
You could see joy in their eyes.
They were happy.

Then the dancing started with the
Mexican Hat Dance,
After the mariachis played, the dancing
continued
With a DJ and disco music.
The dance floor was now full,
The people were laughing and smiling.
Their minds miles away from troubles.
They were happy.

When the fiesta ended,
The people walked back to their
homes,
Enjoying the cool spring night,
Quietly talking, it had been a fun
night.
They were happy.

Chester is a member of the Montebello Writers Group

West Bank

By Angela Anderson



In 2014 I visited Israel and the West Bank with a group from St. Joseph's Church here in Alexandria. The pilgrimage was led by two Josephite priests, including our pastor. Our tour leader in country was a very knowledgeable Christian Arab citizen of Israel. What I saw opened my eyes.

There was a high wall with guard towers separating Israel and the West Bank. Going from one to the other felt like going back and forth in time a century, going from a first world country



pointed out as we visited various sites mentioned in the New Testament the distances between them. What we think

of as Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday were definitely not four days in a row. Different calendars in effect and translation and other issues gave this false impression. We could easily see when we looked across the hills that lacking modern transportation the timeline of events we read about in the Bible had to have been

much more spread out. With 15 years of Catholic education I had never heard this, nor had our priests.

But why had I not known about the wall before? Why do we never see pictures of it? A retired general with our group expressed surprise. At the time I was focused on taking

photos of religious subjects and it did not occur to me to photo the prison-like guard towers and the dire poverty I saw on one side contrasted with the other affluent side. And this was the West Bank. We did not travel to Gaza. In recent years we have heard more and more about the situation in Palestine, the tunnels under walls, the deprivations. But still we do not see pictures of the wall with the guard towers.

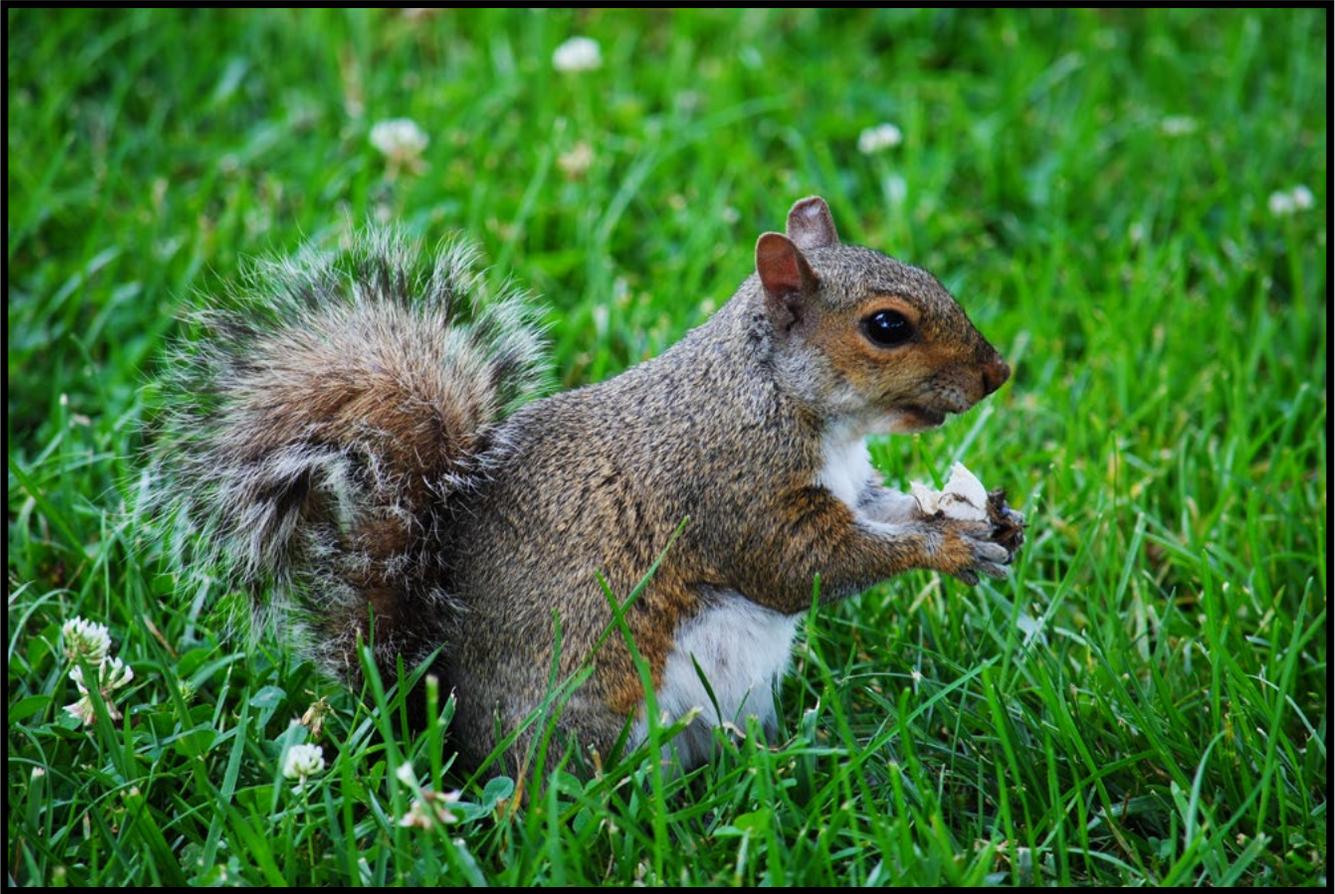
Given what I saw in 2014 I was not really surprised that some Palestinians would engage in horrible revenge and that Israel would try to obliterate what it could not entirely wall off. 🕯



to a third world country. On entering Bethlehem in the West Bank we encountered a gigantic billboard warning visiting Christians against the doctrine of the Trinity. The few Christians still living there made their living mostly from carving olive wood religious objects. The two priests ordered Nativity sets for their parish churches getting a deal for the double order. Every Christmas I am reminded of the visit when I see St. Joseph's Nativity set near the altar.

Another geographic revelation from the trip related to the Bible. Our guide







Photos by Rodney Fisher