

November 2021

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VOL.15, ISSUE 11

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*Meredith Collins, Publisher*

I try to wake up thankful every single day. Thankful for my family and my friends and my pets and my home and my work. I have a good sense of humor and I like to laugh as often as I can. I am thankful for both the community I live in and the country I live in. It is not in my nature to let anything come between me and my happiness. For me, I am highly aware and grateful for a generous God

from whom I am blessed with all those things, and more.

The stories we've collected this month really made me feel good and I hope they have a similar effect on you. Throughout the issue people remark on how grateful they are for a variety of blessings, including some of those I just mentioned. As we often note, we continually meet people who mostly feel rewarded for what they get back through the gift of giving. And, boy, do these people give! Also noted is that they are universally grateful that they live here in the Williamsburg area. Do you think other cities are appreciated in the same way?

Least I forget to mention, I am also especially grateful for the advertisers who help make this magazine possible and for all of the readers who really make it all worthwhile. You and all my Williamsburg neighbors are a big part of the reason I wake up thankful every single day. NDN

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# BILL FRANCAVILLA



## Gratitude for Everything *he* has Been Given

By Narielle Living

Murawski Photography

Bill Francavilla, pastor of Living Hope Church, started life in the most ordinary of ways. He was raised in the Williamsburg area, graduated from Hampton Roads Academy and attended what was then called Lynchburg College, now the University of Lynchburg.

A history major in college, Bill says that he focused mostly on Atlantic world history. “My biggest obsession at the time was

the Age of Discovery and Europe and the Americas and all the cross-cultural contacts that they had.”

For a short time after graduating from college, Bill played the mandolin in an Irish punk band called The Ex-Patriots, and they still play at the Richmond Irish Festival each year. Because that job didn’t pay the bills, he began working in mutual funds at a bank, but he soon began looking

for a better employment fit. “It just wasn’t who I was,” he says. “During my lunch break, I would read either a history book or my Bible, and I would say to myself, “This is who I am.”” He says that the ironic part is that his father was a stockbroker for 30 years, but that path in life was simply not for him. “My dad is gifted and talented and everyone knows and loves him and my mom. My mom is very artistic. I couldn’t

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ask for better parents. I feel like they're such relational people, and I think that's how I learned to really do what I do."

Because Bill lived in Richmond, he got a job as a historic Richmond tour guide. "I worked for the John Marshall Foundation for a while, in the John Marshall House."

Despite having a job that he loved, his financial future was shaky, so he began selling insurance. At that point, he met Jessica, who had a 10-year-old daughter, Alex. Jessica later became his wife. They lived in Richmond initially. Within three years they had three children of their own. Today, Alex, 24, lives in Richmond. His son Liam, 12, daughter Rita Grace, 11, and son Gino, 9, are all thriving in Williamsburg. Bill and Jessica make decisions regarding the church, family and life in general together. "My wife is my partner in everything I do," he says.

Together, they decided on opening a business. "We opened a carpet cleaning business in Richmond," he says. "One day, I cleaned a carpet for a woman who

worked for a private Christian school." This woman was looking to hire someone to teach music, Bible and history at the school. "Those are the three things in this world I'm good at," Bill says.

He applied for and got the job. After being hired to teach, Bill discovered not only did he enjoy his job, he excelled at it. So, when he decided to find a new position in the same kind of job that paid more money, he ended up searching for a different teaching position. "The job I got was in Williamsburg, Virginia, as the middle school Bible teacher at Williamsburg Christian Academy."

The idea of being near his parents appealed to him, so it wasn't a big issue to move close to home. "We've been here for nine years. I taught Bible for five years. And there's something to be said about reading the Bible five times a day, every day, five days a week."

At one point, Bill said to his boss, "I feel like I could be doing better." His boss told him that he should go to graduate school.

This weighed on his mind as he considered his next step in life.

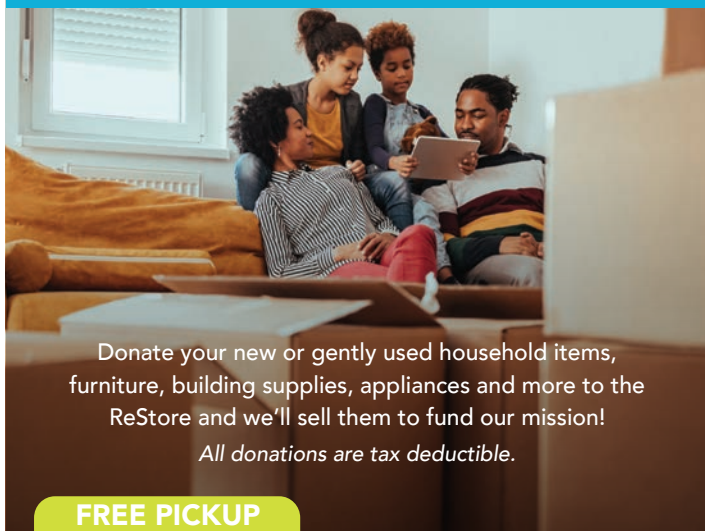
Then it was April 2016. Bill went to Farm Fresh one Sunday to get groceries, not knowing his life would change in a moment. A man entered the grocery store and began shooting, killing one person.

"I witnessed that murder firsthand. Later, I said to my wife, 'I feel like I've waited too long. It's time. I'm going to go get my master's degree and I'm going to become a pastor.' With her full support, that was the decision we made. That really got my attention. We're not promised tomorrow, and if I keep waiting, it's never going to happen unless I make it happen."

He substitute taught for a year while obtaining his master's degree from Liberty University. He graduated in 2017 and became the chaplain at the WindsorMeade retirement community for three years.

"I fell in love with every last one of those people there. I brought my kids with me to work, and they sang for the residents. There's nothing quite like holding the hand

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of someone who's dying and just praying them into heaven. It breaks your heart but at the same time, it brings joy, and I was so blessed to be there for the three years that I was."

While working at WindsorMeade, one of his fellow employees, who was an elder at a local church, told Bill they were looking for a pastor. "He said, 'You know, we have a great church. And what we need is the pastor.' I told him no three times."

Because Bill loved his job, he didn't think he wanted to change. Then he received a phone call from a good friend who happened to be another elder at the same church. "He called me and said, 'I believe you are our next pastor. When God tells me something, I have to listen. So, here's my offer. Come and speak. If you hate it, you'll never hear from us again.'" Bill knew he couldn't turn that offer down, so he arranged to speak to the church on a Sunday.

At that time, his daughter Rita Grace was seven years old. She had been to this church previously because Bill once

preached there to a congregation who met on a Saturday night. The Saturday night group consisted of many children, and their tradition was to allow the kids to dance in the front of the church. "The church welcomed it," he says. But on that particular Sunday morning, his three children comprised 75 percent of the children's ministry. "Worship started, and my daughter goes by herself to the front of the church to dance because that's what we did before. The whole congregation took notice of that, of course, and I did the service. I said to my wife, this might be where we're called."

For a while, Bill worked two jobs, at WindsorMeade and at the church. But that was not sustainable, so eventually he chose to work as pastor for Living Hope.

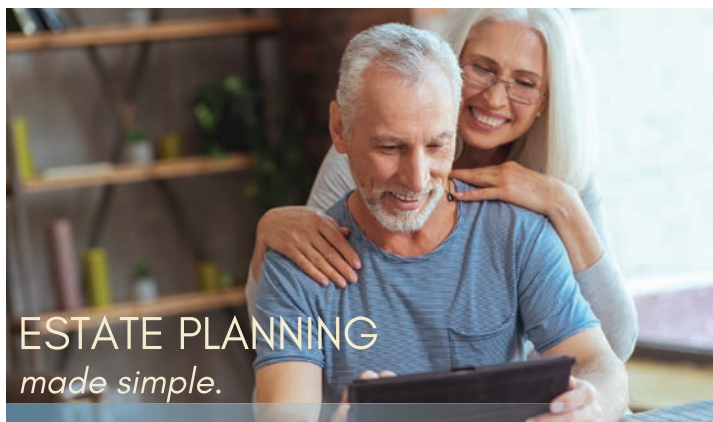
Bill was ordained with an organization called Open Bible Churches, and as such, Living Hope is an Open Bible Church. He admits, though, that it's not just him at the helm of the church. "My wife is so organized; she is the opposite of me. I'm the

one with my head in the clouds, she's the one who's on Earth, and it works very well. I love everything about her. When the director of Open Bible came out [to visit], he said to the elders, 'You realize with Bill's wife, you are getting a two-for-one special.' Everyone agreed."

One of the ministries that Bill is focused on at Living Hope is related to children. "We have a heart for kids with special needs." There are a number of kids who attend his church who have special needs, ranging from autism to Down syndrome.

Bill is so grateful for all of the pieces of his life and the people who are in it.

"It is so easy in this time, November 2021, to look at all the bad things that depress us. But, at the end of the day, we have so much to be thankful for. Honestly, I don't live like a rich man, I don't live the way that many would dream, but I have the best wife, I have the best kids, I have the best God and I have little to complain about. I can't have enough gratitude for everything He's given me." NDN



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# BETH CORSON



Murawski Photography

# Full Circle

By Lillian Stevens

Beth Corson began yoga classes after the birth of her second child.

“I’ve always been passionate about fitness,” she says. “But when I found yoga in my mid-40s, I fell in love with it.”

As a lifelong athlete, Beth has always been fascinated by the human body. She participated in competitive sports in high school and college. She holds a degree in athletic

training. Even so, the career path she chose early on was in real estate development and property management.

“I loved what I was doing,” she says. “But I also enjoyed working with athletes and learning about anatomy and kinesiology.”

Beth is now the proud owner and operator of Full Circle Yoga + Pilates studio. The studio is well-appointed, beautifully

designed, and staffed by instructors who provide an array of options and experiences meant to enhance wellness.

“Yoga is really for everybody and everybody,” Beth says. “Just come as you are, and you will learn that it’s about so much more than just the physical practice. It’s about meeting ourselves where we are, and not only being okay with it, but finding the

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beauty in it. With yoga, you are practicing being present and finding gratitude in each moment.”

Beth says she has much for which to be grateful, including her instructors and the expertise each brings to the table or mat.

“I’m so fortunate to work with teachers who are selfless in their approach to helping people create their own magic,” she says. “We have the most amazing staff who support everyone here. They are such a gift.”

From yoga and Pilates to Reiki, yoga therapy and sound healing, there are many offerings from which to choose, but everything at Full Circle is experienced through a yoga lens.

“The roots of yoga are in meditation,” Beth says. “Yoga is good for the body, but it’s also good for the soul. The physical practice is really a means to an end. It’s important for people to realize that, so they put the physical practice of yoga in perspective. It’s not about achieving the perfect warrior pose; it’s about finding stillness.”

She says that her mission is to make yoga

practice accessible to everyone.

“Everyone is welcome here. You don’t have to be 20-something, bendy or even fit. You don’t need expensive yoga pants, either.”

Indeed, all a budding yogi needs is good intention, a yoga mat, some water, and to be dressed comfortably. There are classes for all ages and abilities, including traditional yoga, gentle and chair yoga. Through the classes, Beth hopes practitioners will become better equipped to move through their lives while more fully enjoying their connections with others.

“But first, you must meet yourself on the mat,” she says. “It’s about experiencing the journey to the self. When you leave, you take your practice with you through the rest of your day and into your connections and relationships.”

It’s not all hushed tones and Himalayan salt lamps, though. At 5 o’clock on Fridays, for instance, the disco lights come on for a class called Happy Hour Flow.

“Happy Hour Flow is vinyasa yoga,” Beth says. “It’s definitely more dynamic. That be-

ing said, our teachers are skilled and compassionate enough to teach to the people in front of them. So, if you aren’t sure this is the class for you, but it’s the only time that works for your schedule, the teachers here will work with you to your ability.”

Infrared light is used to provide the heat for the hot yoga classes. It’s a cleaner, more therapeutic type of heat that heats up the body’s mass, instead of the air.

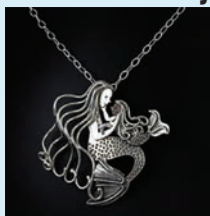
“With our Hot 26 class, you’re literally stepping from one pose back to a neutral pose then to the next pose,” Beth says. “It’s a nice option for someone just getting started who doesn’t want to put a lot of pressure on the upper body.”

For Pilates enthusiasts, a Springboard Fusion class combines mat Pilates with the springboard and other modalities, including elements of yoga and barre.

“It’s about challenging yourself toward a strong functional body, then maintaining that zest for life in order to stay connected, active and vital.”

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with the ultimate mindfulness pose, called savasana, or corpse pose. As its name suggests, it is a pose of utter stillness, ironically one of the most difficult, during which the body fully relaxes.

“In savasana you are really trying to achieve stillness,” Beth says. “That is the pinnacle.”

At Full Circle, Beth has been able to combine her business background with her passion for physical fitness and wellness.

“I was able to put myself through school managing properties and working for a real estate investment trust,” she says. “And I have been a certified personal trainer for more than 30 years. Even when I was working in property management, working in a health club in the evenings was a side hustle for me.”

When Beth and her husband, Mark, married and started their family, she turned her energies to being a stay-at-home mom, fully embracing that role.

“Our daughters are 15 and 13 years old now,” she says. “Being their mom is the joy

of my life.”

Upon discovering yoga, Beth found that she enjoyed it so much that she wanted to become certified to teach. Before long, she had completed the requirements for a certified yoga teacher, or RYT 200.

She says that walking a path in yoga allows her to be grateful for having the opportunity to share her passion, and gratitude for prayers answered as well as for prayers unanswered.

“Certainly no one prayed for a pandemic,” she says. “But I do find gratitude for the stillness that emerged, for the time spent with my family. I also feel like last year’s struggle has made many of us better and stronger as human beings and better as a community.”

The safety and wellbeing of all who enter Full Circle is of the utmost importance to Beth. There are pandemic protocols in place that are too numerous (and probably too technical) to list.

On the topic of gratitude, Beth gets somewhat emotional.

“There are so many reasons I’m grateful,” she says. “I am so grateful for having arrived at a place now where I can appreciate the things for which I wouldn’t ordinarily be grateful. Looking back, there were many challenges on my path to opening the studio, and those certainly weren’t fun. But I know now that those challenges were good for me.”

On the home front, Beth is, of course, grateful for her husband and for their family. “My husband and my family are so much a part of Full Circle,” she says. “They’ve been very supportive, taking on things at home so that I can do what I do here. I think they are as passionate about presenting opportunities as I am. They know that it’s quite a source of light in the community for all who come here and practice.”

Beth is also thankful for the community she has called her home for 15 years. “Williamsburg is beautiful and very welcoming,” she says. “It has been a great environment, a great family environment, and certainly a wonderful place to call home.” NDN



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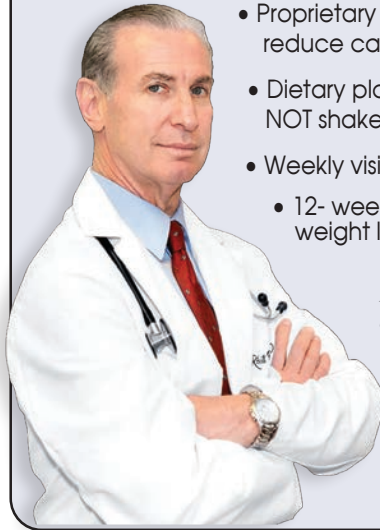


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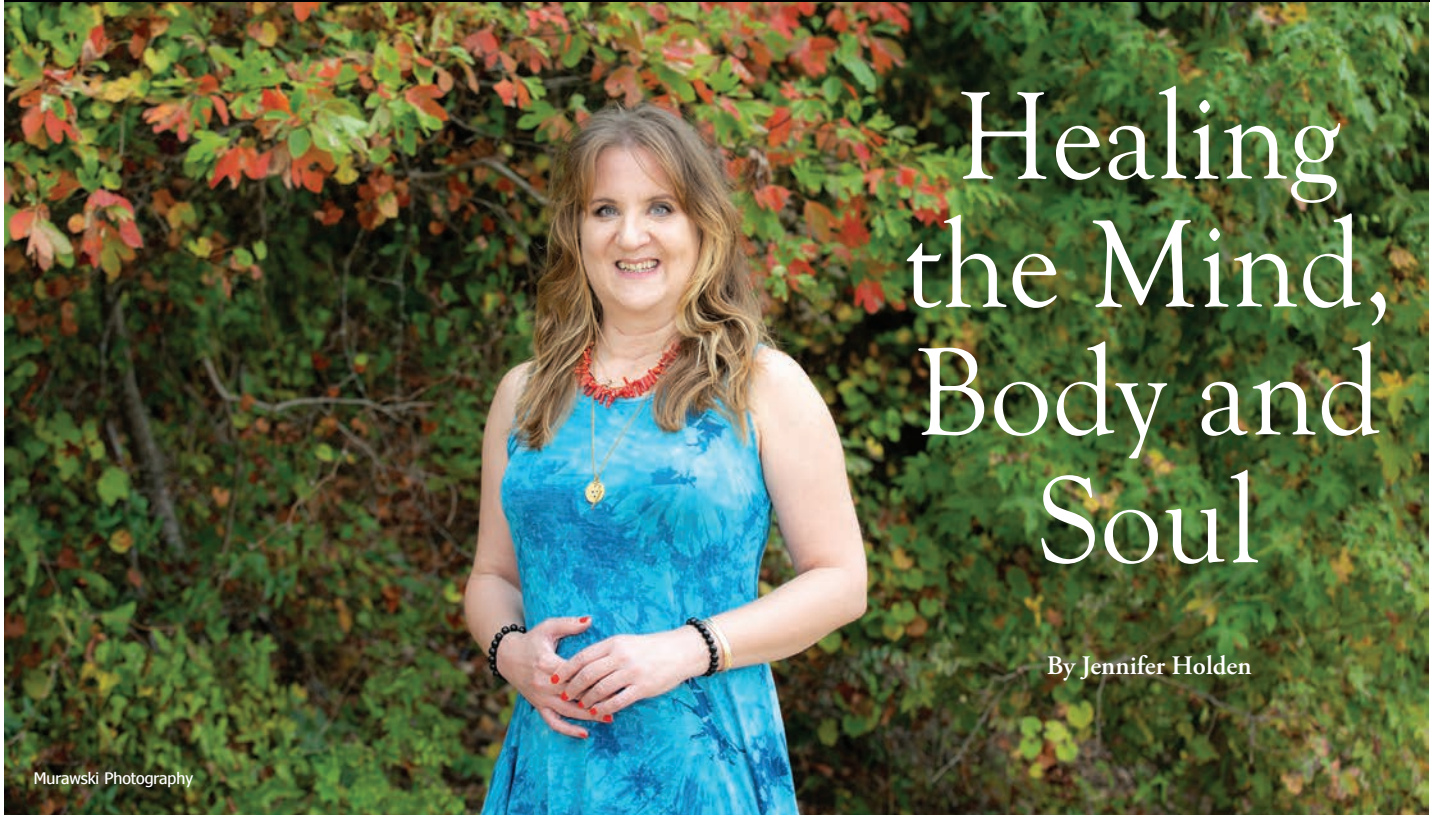
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# BRANA MIJATOVIC



# Healing the Mind, Body and Soul

By Jennifer Holden

Murawski Photography

Brana Mijatovic discovered her unique gifts as a young girl while living in Serbia. Since the age of eight, she's been in tune with other people's energy fields and can sense when something is askew. "I would notice when somebody was happy on the surface and could feel when something was off," Brana says. Today, she is a Biofield Therapy Healer and Intuitive.

Brana attributes her aunt, who worked as a psychologist, for nurturing her talent at a young age. "She noticed that I had these reactions, or predispositions, so she started

teaching me a lot of different things and pointing me to books that I could learn from," says Brana. By the age of 10, she was laying her hands on others in hopes of alleviating their physical or mental discomfort.

During her early teen years, always on a quest for knowledge, she studied Shamanism and Buddhism and the different modalities where people work with energy. She notes that in Serbia, the term bioenergy was very well known. "In Serbia, this was not something that was super strange, but at the same time, when I was growing

up, it was also not a career profession, and I had many other interests."

She pursued those interests before landing in Hampton Roads in 2005. Brana studied musicology and earned a Ph.D. from UCLA in 2003. She played piano and percussion professionally and worked as a college professor for many years before working full time as a healer at her business, Biofield Therapy.

Brana explains that biofield is a term used to describe the energy fields that surround people and contribute to their over-

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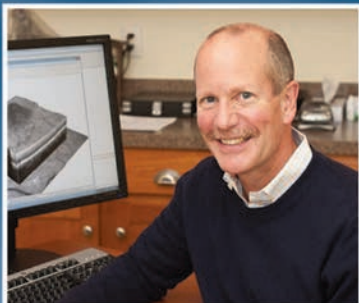
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all well-being. “There came a time where this became such a strong pull that I decided to focus my career on it completely.”

She studied various energy-healing therapies with a focus on Acuncnect™, which focuses on healing for issues like insomnia, chronic fatigue and anxiety; and Tesla, which supports physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth.

“Some of the people who come to me for help are those who deal with anxiety and emotional pain, those who are dealing with physical exhaustion, random aches, and those who want to discover or strengthen their intuitive and spiritual gifts,” says Brana. She stresses that Biofield Therapy is not a replacement for medical care through a licensed physician, but more of a component to overall body, mind and spirit wellness.

One form of therapy she encourages everyone to try is the art of writing. “Writing is one of the most important things we can do because of how it engages the nervous system. It’s different when we just think about something, as opposed to writing about it.”

She explains that sometimes people have a lot of static in their minds and embrace a tendency to overthink things while focusing on the subject so much that it becomes a kind of loop blocking their energy. She emphasizes that writing about the topics making a person unhappy can be very emotional, yet therapeutic in the long run.

“Of course, the first thing to do is to talk to a psychologist or counselor if you need to, but for more ordinary things, writing them down can really get them out of your system and assist in letting them go.”

She stresses that a major component in overall wellness is to focus wholeheartedly on gratitude. She encourages her clients to start their day by writing down three things they are grateful for in their lives. She emphasizes that even in the darkest of times, it is important to intentionally and repeatedly focus and bring deliberate attention to the good that is present in life.

A dedicated lifelong learner and educator, Brana often recommends books to her clients. For gratitude work, she recommends *The Magic* by Rhonda Byrne, and for those who have a hard time wrapping their heads around the idea of energy work, she recommends *You Are the Placebo* by Joe Dispenza.

“For the longest time in the metaphysical world, it’s been known that gratitude has been a beautiful and helpful thing to feel and experience. But today, you can read the beneficial medical research of what it does to hormones and the heart, for example,” she says.

In addition to her private practice, Brana often holds meditation classes throughout the metropolitan Hampton Roads area and encourages the practice for those who are seeking overall wellness.

“When I first moved to the area, meditation classes weren’t easy to find outside of Buddhist temples. People came to me and said they couldn’t find them anywhere. I started teaching them, along with others, of course, and I’m happy to say, they kind of exploded

in the area,” she says.

“The things that help us don’t always have to be big and dramatic. Sometimes it’s the small things that have the most powerful impact, and by doing them repeatedly, they become the micro-habits that help us with changes we want to make.”

Meditation can mean different things to different people, from the novice to the lifetime practitioner. In layman’s terms, Brana says that meditation can be as simplistic as sitting in a chair, closing your eyes and focusing on your breathing and body in a quiet atmosphere for a few minutes.

She mentions that a lot of people think they need to have an empty mind for meditation, which isn’t the case, especially for beginners. Brana often reminds her clients that meditation is as diverse as the people who practice it.

Meditation coupled with gratitude has led to many breakthroughs for her clients. Leading by example, one of Brana’s daily rituals is walking outside in nature to clear her head and focus on the beauty of the natural world.

“One of my intentions last month was that everyone I meet in passing receive an unexpected blessing. I can’t work with someone’s energy without their knowledge, but I can wish that they receive an unexpected blessing and leave it up to God/the Universe to deliver. My good wishes for others have generally shown great results.”

A new, sole practitioner shouldn’t compare their results to those who have been practicing meditation 80 percent of their lives. Like anything else worth achieving in life, it takes time and dedicated practice.

“People need to be aware that meditation may not be all butterflies and rainbows. When we try to push things away, they usually don’t go away until they are resolved.” This is where her energy work comes into play.

“The accumulation of stress is one of the biggest culprits that leads to an energy channel being blocked.” Clients rely on Brana’s expertise to assist in the unblocking of energy channels.

Brana Mijatovic engages with clients of all ages and backgrounds. Testimonies of gratitude often pop up on her Facebook page from people validating her unique professional work. She’s thrilled to witness a major paradigm shift in real time with the posts to prove it.

Energy work results that were once celebrated privately with discretion behind closed doors are now being shared openly and very publicly as the work is more accepted by mainstream America. She is grateful to be a guide on her clients’ journeys to total wellness.

Since the pandemic, Brana’s has primarily been working with people remotely, or by what she refers to as “distance healing.” Once CDC guidelines change completely regarding Covid-19, she will resume seeing clients at her office. NDN



## PHYLLIS KOKORUDA

On November 21, Phyllis will be celebrating her 50th anniversary at Ace Peninsula Hardware in Williamsburg. She began her career at Peninsula Hardware in 1971 when she was hired as a sales associate by Herb and Chuck Watson. At that time, the store was located in what used to be the Williamsburg Shopping Center. Since that time, the store has been relocated twice and is now in the Midtown Row Shopping Center.

Within two years, Phyllis was promoted to Housewares Manager and in 1981 she became Store Manager. In 1989, Ace Peninsula Hardware was purchased by Terry Deaver and at that time Phyllis transitioned to Advertising Manager and Merchandising Manager. She was also responsible for promotions and special events, such as store grand openings. Since 1989, Ace Peninsula Hardware has opened six more locations and Phyllis managed each event.

Even after 50 years, Phyllis still has the enthusiasm for her position as she did when she started in 1971. She is proud to be a part of Ace Peninsula Hardware and if you didn’t know one might think she owned the business. We have been lucky to have Phyllis for all these years and she is truly the ‘Face of Ace.’ The next time you visit Ace Peninsula Hardware ask for Phyllis. Ask her if she plans on being at Ace another 50 years. She’ll probably say yes. We hope so.



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# WILLIAM WALKER



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## Grateful for Magic On Stage

By Susan Williamson

The curtains open, the lights come up, beautifully costumed dancers appear on stage, and the orchestra music plays: The Nutcracker ballet forged an indelible impression on thirteen-year-old William Sterling Walker. The then eighth grader was attending a school field trip to the Chamber Ballet performance at the Phi Beta Kappa

Hall at William & Mary, so many years ago. The Williamsburg native had grown up loving to dance, putting on music and dancing around the house. The family had recently moved from an apartment to a home near Queens Lake, and his spacious bedroom had a full-length mirror where he could watch his dance moves. When he attended the bal-

let performance, he realized for the first time that dance was something people could do as a career. Before that day, he says, “I had never seen, never even heard of ballet.”

William is still overcome with emotion describing that day and its effect on him. He came home and told his mother he wanted to learn to do that. His mother was excited



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and happy and proud. She told him he could start lessons in the summer. It was December, so, in the meantime, he went to the library and checked out every book he could find on the subject. He taught himself basic positions. His mother says, "He was born to do that, and he did it and did it well."

When time for starting lessons came, he eagerly demonstrated what he had practiced. Heidi Robitshek and Cathy Leech welcomed him into the Chamber Ballet, with Ms. Cathy telling him he had a natural gift. He attended the studio, which was located in the old K-Mart shopping center, five or six days a week. He quickly learned technique and loved it. He earned a full scholarship to the Virginia School for the Arts, which was located in the 1990s in Lynchburg, Virginia. He earned the Artist Merit Award in the summer of his tenth-grade year. But he was homesick for family and for Williamsburg. He returned home and, having discovered he performed better in a small classroom situation, attended Williamsburg Christian Academy for his junior and senior years. He

also had the opportunity to train with the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet and the Allegheny Ballet.

After graduating from high school, he auditioned with the Richmond Ballet and was accepted. He performed in Richmond and also had the opportunity to tour with the dance company. But as a professional dancer, he yearned to go to New York City, the place where everything was happening. He was invited to visit a friend who was living in New York. When he experienced the cost of living, the hustle of the big city, and hot and dirty subways, he says, "I knew big city life was not for me. Richmond was city enough."

He taught at Henrico County High School Center for the Arts and served as the junior director and veteran dancer for the professional company of the Virginia School of the Latin Ballet. He has danced and continues to perform in many locations, including Spain, Mexico and Columbia.

Ten years ago, he moved home to Williamsburg to teach at the Virginia Regional

Ballet, which Heidi Robitshek founded in 2007. The regional ballet has grown to have studios both in Williamsburg and Yorktown.

William loves everything about teaching. "Ballet is acting without words. Students can't perform without understanding the dance vocabulary. I love it when they make the connection between steps. When they understand the glissade (a gliding movement) is necessary to provide the momentum for a jeté (a big leap)." After the Covid pandemic caused the cancellation of in-person classes, like so many others, the ballet adapted and resorted to Zoom. He is grateful they had that opportunity. "We artists are not always the best at technology, but we adapted." William danced and conducted classes from his garage, using his recycling bin as a ballet barre. "The kids had to use whatever space they had available. Their dedication to the Zoom format was powerful."

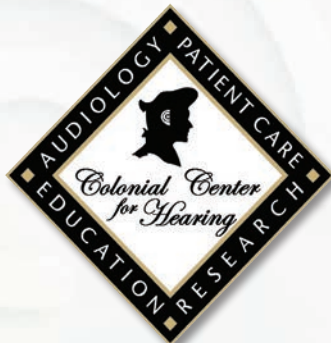
Another facet of teaching he enjoys is seeing how the kids forget their problems when they come to dance. "And they love to perform," he says. Not being able to per-

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form during the pandemic was disappointing to them and has made upcoming performances all the more exciting. Last year was the first time in fifty years that The Nutcracker was not presented locally.

Since the Phi Beta Kappa Hall is still under construction, this year's dance will be performed at Ferguson Center for the Arts in Newport News. Educational performances for area schools will be on Thursday, December 16 and Friday, December 17. William describes these shows as a wonderful outreach available to students at little or no cost. Often a PTA or other organization sponsors the trip. One can't help but wonder how many students will have the same awed reaction that William did upon seeing their first ballet performance. Public performances are scheduled for Saturday, December 18 with the Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra and Sunday, December 19. William says, "We are so lucky to have a symphony orchestra in a town the size of Williamsburg."

Later in the year, they will perform Fairy Tale to Fairy Tale, described as a magical ballet featuring the tales of Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and the Tales of Beatrix Potter. Performances and class information are listed on the website, [dancevr.com](http://dancevr.com).

William describes himself as an "artsy adult." "I was an artsy kid, now I'm an artsy adult. I enjoy going to concerts and theater and gallery openings. I appreciate all kinds of art. I wrote poetry before I took up ballet." Although between teaching and performing opportunities, he doesn't have a lot of free time. He also enjoys spending time with his family and friends. "I have great support," he says. "They love and respect what I do."

William says there is one aspect of his life that surprises people. "I like going to car shows and seeing car modifications." He refers to his car show hobby as his one "macho interest."

William found his calling at an early age. Thanks to the support of his mother and stepfather, his early and continuing hard work and dedication, and the opportunity to learn at the Chamber Ballet, he was able to pursue his dreams. He is doing what he loves, and he has come full circle in coming back to his hometown of Williamsburg to create those same opportunities for area students of the Virginia Regional Ballet. As a professional dancer and as an instructor, he crafts performances that will engender the same magic for first-time ballet audiences as he experienced as an eighth grader. NDN

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HEIDI SPEECE



Murawski Photography

# Earnie the Turkey Dog

By Narielle Living

Heidi Speece is a high school teacher with a penchant for “to-do” lists. She is organized. She is industrious. She is a planner. When Earnie, the Golden Retriever from Turkey, came into her life, everything got turned upside down. She wouldn’t have it any other way.

Originally from Nebraska, Heidi has lived in the area for 14 years. “I love it here,” she says. “I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. In fact, my grandparents retired here in the early 1980s, and every summer we came and spent the entire summer with them.

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We would go crabbing on the James River. We didn't have that in Nebraska."

After graduating from high school, she attended college at the University of Richmond and visited her grandparents on the weekends. "That has always been my goal, to live here full time. This is home."

Heidi has taught in both public and private schools for the last 13 years. In 2016, she noticed something had changed for her. "I was getting teacher burnout, which a lot of teachers get." She began to judge herself, having an inner monologue about her accomplishments and goals. "I asked the age-old question: Is this my purpose and what life is all about?"

Around that time, there was a news report about an animal rescue group. Heidi watched as the report detailed the efforts to rescue dogs from Turkey. "They called them Turkey dogs, and I thought that was a funny little name." After learning more about the operation, which rescued mainly Golden Retrievers, she was intrigued. "Golden Retrievers are the breed that I've always grown up with. We always had Golden Retrievers."

Heidi thought about it and realized she would love to have a Turkey dog. "Before I became a teacher, I worked on cruise ships and had traveled to Turkey quite a bit. I love the people, love the culture."

She found a rescue group to work with in the Washington, D.C. area who had rescued a dog named Ernie. "I went through the whole vetting process with them, and then on July 4, 2017, he flew into New

York City. A lovely couple in Philadelphia served as foster parents for one night, and they took him from New York City to Philadelphia. I picked him up in Washington D.C., and now he lives in the historic triangle. How much more American can he get than that?"

A difference between the United States and Turkey, Heidi says, is that there are no animal shelters in Turkey. Here, we are fortunate to have rescue groups and facilities like the Heritage Humane Society. In Turkey, there is nothing. "They bring the street dogs in for a week or so, spay or neuter them, tag them and then put them back out on the street."

This practice can be devastating for a dog. "Especially for Golden Retrievers, who are seen as a bit of a status symbol there," she says. "They're cute little puppies but when people adopt them and realize how much work they require, there are no shelters to go to, so they just put them out on the streets." Golden Retrievers, she notes, don't defend themselves like other dogs do. "These dogs are just wandering loose in the forest and the junkyards and the streets, and it's become an overpopulation problem. There are lovely people in Turkey who spend their own money trying to feed them and take care of them, but they really rely on people in the United States where we cherish these dogs and this breed to rescue them and save them."

When Heidi first met Ernie, he was a typical dog: exuberant and friendly. But dogs who come from treacherous situa-

tions can take a minute to warm up to a new environment. "When we brought him to the house, he immediately froze up and started shaking. My little cat, Charlie, who is also a rescue, came out and sniffed him on the nose, and Ernie immediately relaxed and slowly walked into the room. About an hour later, he was racing around the place, playing."

It also took Ernie a while to go on long walks. Heidi says she would try to get Ernie to walk a little farther each day, and he needed lots of coaxing and persuasion. "After about two weeks, he was trotting around the neighborhood like he owned the place. He is always very friendly and loves other dogs, but it took about two weeks before we could go on a mile-long walk. He didn't want to be too far from home."

The saga of Turkey dogs and Ernie's impact on her life was so profound that Heidi wrote a book, *My Journey With Ernie*.

"He just changed my life," she says. "He really mischievous, but he's so loving and he's got this laid-back attitude. He greets every morning as a new adventure. I was very much an overachieving perfectionist, and Ernie is not." Ernie showed Heidi that she did not have to be perfect all of the time, and she did not have to cross everything off of her to-do list every day. "If something goes undone, it's not going to be the end of the world. The most important thing is that you embrace every day. He changed my life and made me just relax and enjoy the little things, where previously I was always racing to try to finish

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things.”

In addition to her gratitude for the changes Ernie helped bring to her life, Heidi intended the book to be a thank-you to the people who had rescued him. She also hoped to raise awareness of dogs in shelters, both international and domestic, and the work being done to save them. “I thought it would be a fun way to tell his story and also to raise funds for shelters and rescues.”

In July, 2021, however, things changed for the Turkey dogs. “The CDC, unbeknownst to all of us, decided to ban the importation of dogs like Ernie. We can no longer rescue these dogs in Turkey or the meat markets in China, and they can no longer come into America.” She says this ban has had far-reaching implications and has created issues for U.S. diplomats, aid workers, and military families abroad. Many of them have had to struggle through a mountain of bureaucracy to find ways to avoid having to give up their family pets when they return home. As of the

writing of this article, this temporary ban is still in place.

Heidi is confident in saying that Ernie is most grateful for tennis balls. “He has this crazy innate ability to find a ball, even if it’s 30 feet away from us. I live near a baseball field and tennis courts. We start our weekend off every Saturday morning going over there to find long-lost balls. I’m not exaggerating when I say he’ll drag me 20 to 30 feet off the path, and he will find a ball buried in a pile of leaves.” When she is not having adventures with Ernie, Heidi loves photography. “I love going to the Colonial Williamsburg area and capturing some of the scenic areas down there. And I love writing, of course. Before COVID, I loved going on at least one or two big trips every year.”

It is absolutely clear that Heidi and Ernie are grateful for each other. But beyond that, Heidi’s gratitude extends to the people who helped her and her dog and so many dogs like Ernie. “There’s something so special about animal rescue, and

whether it’s domestic or international, it’s these dogs and cats and it’s almost like they know that they’ve been rescued and given a second chance. The joy they can bring to a person’s life is amazing. My absolute thanks goes out to all the people who dedicate their lives as volunteers and are working with shelters and giving these animals a second chance.”

It’s no surprise that Heidi Speece feels this way. Her grandfather was one of a group of people instrumental in getting Heritage Humane Society back on its feet.

“My grandfather helped to restart the Heritage Humane Society. I remember coming down here in early 90s. He and a group of local community folks saw that it had shut down, and they saw the need for a shelter. They restarted it and now, to see its expansion, I bet my grandfather is just busting his buttons up in heaven.” NDN

*My Journey With Ernie is available wherever books are sold. The proceeds from the book will be used to support efforts to overturn the CDC ban and to support animal rescues.*

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# Giving Back with Gratitude

By Narielle Living

Murawski Photography



Wendy Walker grew up in Binghamton, New York, and every year she visited her grandparents in Williamsburg. “They were my grandparents on my father’s side of the family. They had moved to Williamsburg from Binghamton. When I was really young, like second or third grade, I came down in the summertime.”

As an adult, Wendy chose a career as a respiratory therapist. When she and her husband started a family, however, she wanted to be home more. The hours of a respiratory therapist were not a good fit for raising children.

“I grew to not like that job anymore,”

she says. At that time, she had two children, one who was a baby. “Working in the medical field, I was working 12-hour shifts and every other weekend. On those days that I worked, I never saw my kids. I had to leave before they got up and when I came home, it was bedtime. That really wasn’t what I wanted to do.” She was determined to make a change, putting her family first.

After giving it some thought, Wendy decided a good option for her was to pursue a career in real estate. “I had always thought about real estate and was interested in it, as many people probably are.” After researching what needed to be done, she started

going to school and studying to get her license. “It’s not that hard to get your license so I took some evening classes and did that.” She got her real estate license in 2005.

But the simple story she tells was, in fact, not so simple. “A lot of things happened leading up to that.” Not long after moving here in the early 2000s, Wendy and her then-husband were in a car accident. “We were involved in a really bad car accident, and people died.” They had been hit by a drunk driver.

There is no denying that an event like that changes people. Although it ultimate-

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ly contributed to her divorce, Wendy says that she and her ex-husband are friends now.

When Wendy first began working in real estate, she truly loved it. She did well and was able to purchase her own home. She felt like she had found her calling.

Today, Wendy has continued to study and move forward with her career. "I am an Associate Broker as a Realtor®. Once you've been in the business for three years, you can study to become a broker, and you're not a broker unless you own your own firm."

Her children are no longer babies, but they continue to be the light of her life. Oldest daughter Lauren just turned 22, and during the pandemic she took a break from attending college to travel a bit. She spent the summer in Montana and worked for a boat rental company.

"My baby just turned 17," she says. Daughter Kayley is a senior in high school and will be graduating early to begin college at Thomas Nelson in January. Wendy

is clearly proud of and grateful for both daughters and speaks of them in glowing terms.

Many Realtors® specialize in helping particular groups of people buy a certain kind of home. But for Wendy, it's simply about helping everyone. "I never really did that when I started," she says. "They said that you should have a niche or something like that but I don't think I do. I've been doing this for 16 years now, and the majority of my business is all based on word of mouth and referrals."

With the real estate market in an evolving state, Wendy has some words of advice, especially since she remembers the last big housing crisis of 2008. "I worked through the last time when prices went up and all of that, and understandably people get concerned. But what I really learned is that people have to move."

She says that there are a host of reasons for this, but the fact is that there are people who simply need to change houses. She speculates that COVID might have made

people wary of selling their house because they were reluctant to allow strangers into their space. Whatever the reason, the inventory recently has shrunk. "The true issue is there's a huge lack of inventory." But there are a number of people looking to buy, which is what makes the market so difficult right now.

Wendy cautions people about jumping in if they don't need to or aren't ready to. "I'm not going to make anybody buy a house, but I'm here to help and advise, and if somebody's scared or doesn't feel comfortable doing it, maybe now isn't the time. It can be overwhelming. But we've been able to give our buyers advice to help them to win in multiple offer situations and negotiate strongly and fairly, and make it as smooth as possible. We can help people get through this and be the calm in the storm and guide them through closing. If somebody's scared to do it, then now's not the time. Wait until you feel better."

For those who might be thinking about selling, she says the time is right. Howev-

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er, she cautions one thing: "The one thing that is a must for anybody who is looking to move is that you need to buy the house that you're going to buy before you sell your house. Unlike markets in the past, you can't have a home sale contingency and get a house in this market."

This year, Wendy has had a lot of change. She married her best friend, Rob Collins, who also happens to work with her.

"We got married in May, and it was absolutely perfect," she says. "It was just him and me and my two daughters."

They were married in a ceremony on the banks of the James River off the Colonial Parkway. "It couldn't have been more perfect. It really couldn't have."

In her spare time, Wendy and her husband love to travel. "I've always worked hard so I could play hard, and travel is the biggest part of that equation. COVID really put a damper on that for all of us, but we've traveled a lot more locally, like to Charleston and places that I've never been. They were lovely places that we could drive

to. And our daughters love to travel, too."

Wendy says that she is especially grateful to have made it this far, especially through COVID. "We feel very fortunate that we've survived this. I'm really, really grateful for that."

One of the ways that Wendy expresses her gratitude is by being committed to giving back to the community. When she visited her grandparents here in Williamsburg, she often accompanied them on deliveries with Meals on Wheels.

"When I started in real estate, my oldest daughter Lauren was in second grade. I started delivering Meals on Wheels then, and we still do it," Wendy says. "We have a route every other Monday, and I did that for about 16 years. Rob has been doing it lately, too. I remember when I was a child going with my grandparents how happy it made the people to see me, and I had fun doing it when I was little. I always took my girls with me when they were little, and it was just a really nice thing to be able to do." NDN

## Next Door Neighbors

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# MELANIE LOVE CLARK



## Do Good Things & Be Kind

By Alison Johnson

Murawski Photography

Since 2020, Melanie Love Clark has been on a mission to make people smile and not only when the professional photographer is behind the lens.

Everywhere Melanie goes, she hands out compliments to friends and strangers alike. She tells people that she loves their hair or their clothes, that they have beautiful families, that they're doing a great job as employees.

Why? Because Melanie had noticed

too many unsmiling faces during the COVID-19 pandemic, and because her life also had changed for the better with the arrival of two adorable grandbabies, her first, and a health transformation centered on a 140-pound weight loss.

"A lot happened in 2020 to open my eyes to what was really important and what wasn't," she says. "I believe that energy spreads. If we put out positive energy, it's going to multiply. I'm grateful if I can

spread a little bit of happy, because I know what it's like to feel badly inside."

At a time filled with negativity and uncertainty, Melanie's outlook has shifted as she focuses on finding kind words to share. "It has changed my whole way of thinking, because now I notice the good in people before the bad," she says. "It doesn't take anything out of me to maybe make a real difference in someone else's day."

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diet and regular exercise plan also has given Melanie newfound strength and optimism. “I do things because I can,” she says. “I skip through stores simply because I can. I try new things just because I can.”

As the owner of Love Snapped Photography, Melanie’s job is to document joyful milestones such as engagements, pregnancies, births, reunions and graduations. She witnesses kids turning from infants to preschoolers to awkward preteens to poised high school seniors.

“I get to watch all these families grow through my lens and see all the transitions,” she says. “It’s wonderful. I have so many special clients who continue to come back to me year after year, allowing me into their lives.”

Melanie, 44, grew up in Connecticut and relocated to Williamsburg in 2007 with her husband of 15 years, Dan, to be near his adult daughter. “It was the throes of summer, and I was sure we had moved to the surface of the sun,” she recalls with a laugh.

“I still haven’t fully acclimated.”

Before becoming a photographer, Melanie had a long career in healthcare in the special needs community. Often caring for adults on the autism spectrum, she has worked as a supervisor at a group home in Connecticut and for a local day program.

Melanie also is the mother of an adult son and daughter, ages 25 and 21. The first was born when she was just 19 years old; she worked nights to support her family as a single mom, sometimes struggling to make ends meet.

While Melanie had long wanted a nice camera, she couldn’t afford one while her kids were young. But about 10 years ago, Dan gave her a Canon T3i digital camera for Christmas. “I loved it,” she says. “It all spiraled quickly from there.”

Blessed with natural talent, Melanie began snapping hundreds of pictures of her children, which soon led to requests from friends and neighbors to photograph their families. Without ever taking a class, Mel-

anie trained herself on camera angles, equipment, lighting and more by reading articles, watching videos and making mistakes.

“I took a lot of very bad pictures, and I learned from them,” she says.

Eight years ago, Melanie took a risk and launched Love Snapped Photography. She started out small, advertising on free online forums and relying on word of mouth to build a customer base. She credits her family, especially her husband, for supporting her dreams.

Melanie specializes in family photography, using natural light whenever possible and including plenty of candid moments with her posed shots: a 1-year-old in a beautiful dress, screaming because she doesn’t like her equally beautiful cake; a mother comforting a nervous toddler; a little girl holding her father’s hand and gazing up at him as they walk to their car.

“Those moments are so real,” Melanie notes. “They’re going to be incredible memories in the future; the best ones in my opin-

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ion.”

During sessions that typically last 60 to 90 minutes, Melanie tries to connect quickly with her subjects in order to incorporate their unique personalities into her film. She makes silly faces, tells jokes, chats about their hobbies, and reassures parents that yes, most kids don't behave perfectly on shoots.

“The kids are the key, because really they run the whole show,” she says. “They're most likely to be itching to be done with everything, although I have to say, the dads can be pretty bad too, especially during football season. I promise them it will be quick and painless.”

Melanie is appreciative of the many beautiful settings available in the Williamsburg area, with York River State Park and Colonial Williamsburg two of her favorite spots. She is busiest in the fall and spring when she frequently edits film until one a.m. or later.

Luckily, Melanie embraces a full schedule. “In the middle of summer and winter, things slow way down, and I much prefer

staying busy and staying creative,” she says.

During those slower stretches, Melanie stays occupied by making her own props. With help from Dan, who rarely balks at her “wild ideas,” she has crafted newborn beds, baby outfits and dozens of fake desserts. She also redoes chairs and benches to add artistic touches.

One of Melanie's biggest challenges is keeping up with photography trends while staying true to her own style, which she describes as simple and clean. Currently, for example, a popular movement is to mix in unusual colors such as blue for grass or an overall orange tone, much like an Instagram filter.

Outside of photography, Melanie enjoys spending time with her family and her pets, a senior cat and two cocker spaniel puppies. She also likes biking, walking, playing tennis, and, according to her husband, shopping.

Melanie hopes to continue spreading joy for many years to come, both personally and

professionally. This past summer, she held a “Portraits for Positivity” event where she offered free pictures for anyone who came to tell her about an act of kindness.

People arrived with kids and pets on what turned out to be a 100-degree day, but Melanie happily spent two hours shooting them all. She also asked everyone to write down their good deeds on canvases, which she later set up near her home computer for inspiration. She plans to organize another such event when her schedule eases up, possibly this winter.

“Caring about others should be rewarded,” she states.

For Melanie Love Clark, finding, celebrating and capturing such moments of light are things that make life beautiful.

“I am grateful for every morning that I can get out of bed and start my day on a positive note to make the best of it,” she says. “I make a choice to try to do good and be kind, because the world can just use more of that right now.” NDN



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# EDWARD MORENO



## The Gift of Chamber Music

Murawski Photography

By Narielle Living

Ed Moreno remembers that when he and his wife, Janine, moved here 30 years ago, Williamsburg was a very different place. “It was much more sleepy, with a lot less crowding and less noise.” But he is grateful to be here and loves the area and especially loves his role as President on the Board of Directors with the Chamber Music Society of Williamsburg.

Ed and his wife moved to Williamsburg from the western part of Massachusetts. “We were in the Berkshires, in South Deerfield. South Deerfield was bucolic, beautiful, but

we moved down here because my wife, Janine, had a job offer here.” They were able to eventually convince their parents to move here, as well, and have found this is the perfect location for them. “She doesn’t want to go any farther north because she hates the cold. I hate the heat,” he says with a laugh.

“I grew up all around the place, but when I was very small, I lived in Northern Alabama. When I was a kid, I loved the heat and the humidity.”

Previously, Ed had worked in the museum division for Colonial Williamsburg, but

today he is a fine arts appraiser. “For the last 20 years, I’ve been doing fine arts appraisal, mostly European or American Fine Arts.”

When Ed and Janine first moved here, they were unaware of the existence of the Chamber Music Society. “Both of us were working, and I don’t think we got involved with the society until toward the end of the 1990s.” It’s not a stretch that Ed became active in working with this group. “I grew up in a household of music,” he says. “Both classical and, as first-generation immigrants, there was a lot of Latin American music in

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my house as well. And I played the violin for many years until I went to college.”

For music lovers, sometimes the cost of attending performances can be frustrating. “We always wanted to go to live music venues. However, the cost of live music was sometimes prohibitive. Every now and then, when we lived in Boston, we’d spend \$200 to get tickets to the symphony, but we couldn’t do that very often.”

Ed was thrilled to learn he had another option here in Williamsburg. “I had a very good friend, Bill Bynum, who I had known for a while. We started talking about music and different composers and composers that we liked. Unbeknownst to me, Bill had founded the Chamber Music Society here. He was a professor at William & Mary, and in ‘87 he decided to get together with the library, and he founded the incorporated Chamber Music Society.”

According to Ed, around three or four years ago Bill recommended Ed to the board of the Chamber Music Society. Ed joined the board and has been industriously

working on it ever since. Ed notes that he is thankful not only for the music that the Chamber Society is able to present, but he is also grateful for the board of directors he is privileged to work with.

“It’s very much a collective collaborative board,” he says. “The board is a working board, and board members all work really well together. We have a fabulous music selection committee and membership committee. We have different positions on the board, everything from hospitality and other people field questions. Everybody has a function on the board. That’s how we keep costs down, and all the monies go toward getting amazing musicians.”

During the pandemic, the board met via Zoom. But as Ed notes, while the world pivoted to doing so many things on platforms such as Zoom, the reality is that it takes some nonprofits a bit more time to catch up to that sort of technology. Although they discussed trying to host virtual performances, it was more complex than simply turning the camera on and hopping online. “I think

the reality is that we’re kind of in that first stage of the development of nonprofit organizations where we really haven’t explored a lot of things. For example, for professional Zoom accounts, you need a credit card. We did not have a credit card. But by the time we started applying for a credit card and got people comfortable in the Zoom sessions, we decided the process was just way too much. Plus, more importantly, Bill Bynum unfortunately died.”

With the death of his friend, things changed. Ed says that Bill was such an integral part of the Chamber Music Society that his death has left an unexpected hole. Currently, they are in the process of reimagining themselves. “He was actually donating a lot of his time in doing things, unbeknownst to a lot of people on the board,” Ed says. “I knew what he was doing because we talked about it quite often. We had to kind of restructure because he was doing mailings and keeping membership lists and so we really did have to spend that time during the pandemic to restructure so that the respon-



Helena S. Mock, Esq.  
Managing Attorney



Catherine E. Sears, Esq.  
Associate Attorney

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sibilities and the duties Bill was doing very quietly on the side could be spread out to the other board members.”

As president of the board, Ed is grateful that everyone works together harmoniously. “We take votes, people vote yay or nay. There’s never been any kind of rancor. There’s a great deal of collegiality and a spirit of trying to get it done right. And that’s the pleasure, to be able to interact and see tangible results with people who are just as dedicated to getting this thing done as you.”

Chamber music has been historically performed in a more intimate setting than a symphony. “This is opposed to music that was done in large court reception rooms and was out in the open with a large amount of musical instruments. These were small groups who played in intimate settings inside of people’s houses, castles that kind of stuff. It allows the composer to construct very subtle passages that perhaps would be lost in a larger venue. Chamber music is listening music. It does have crescendos and it can get emotionally and psychologically

involved, but there’s not a lot of room for heroics. When you only have four or five people playing, the composer is allowed to really figure out things that he probably wouldn’t be able to do anywhere else. Listening to chamber music, it’s a lot easier to actually hear four or five instruments as opposed to 20 or 50.”

Performances are held in the auditorium of the Williamsburg Regional Library. “It’s perfect for chamber music,” Ed says. “It is just the right size.”

Ed notes that the one secret that most people don’t know is that they can usually get tickets, which are considerably less expensive than found in larger cities, prior to the performance. “Oftentimes, there are tickets left over or people who don’t come, and you can buy single tickets at the venue. It might be a great way to test the waters of chamber music.”

The smaller library venue, according to Ed, is a contributing factor in making the experience so enchanting. “I remember when I was just a kid, there was a blues club

in Washington. I went to see B.B. King, who was just becoming famous at that time. I don’t know whether they were serving alcohol, but we got in there with somebody’s sister. We were 20 feet from B.B. When you’re at a live performance in very close surroundings, there’s just something magical that happens.”

From working with the wonderful people of the Chamber Music Society of Williamsburg to being able to spend time with family, Ed Moreno says that he has much to be grateful for right now. One of the things he especially appreciates is the time he spent with his mother when she lived here. They had moved her down from Marblehead, Massachusetts, and because she loved music, it was not long after arriving that she started attending the chamber music concerts.

“Mom continued going to those concerts until she passed away. We’d all get dressed up and go have a quick dinner, and we’d pile into a car and go to hear classical music. It was just fabulous.” NDN

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# SHADE PALMER



Murawski Photography

# Living his BEST life

By Lillian Stevens

Shade Palmer has a lot to be proud of and at his age he finds that there's a lot for which he is grateful.

He's proud of his long career in education, first as a teacher at Bruton Heights School, then assistant principal at Berkeley Middle School. His last post before retiring in 1990 was that of principal at James Blair Middle School. Put simply, the nonagenarian loves kids and always has.

It was just last month that Shade



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turned 90. Family, friends, and even former students honored his birthday with a Covid-friendly parade. Dozens of cars paraded past the Ironbound Road home that Shade and his late wife Carletha built over 50 years ago.

“That birthday was something else,” Shade says. “I still can’t believe it. I had never seen so many people in one day in all my life. Family, friends, retired teachers, friends from church (First Baptist), they really turned out.”

No doubt, he has touched a lot of lives, as evidenced by that turnout and all of the well-wishes. Shade spent some of his best years teaching, but marvels at it all, especially all these years after retiring.

“I felt like the work I did was pretty ordinary work,” he says. “But they keep telling me how I had touched a lot of lives. I’m grateful that I can still call so many former students and their parents my friends.”

Indeed, with a twinkle in his eyes and a

broad smile on his face, Shade talks about times gone by when he was a young teacher. He participates in the conversation from a hospital-type bed in the family home as Shade is paralyzed from the waist down.

Niece Tabitha, “Tab”, serves as primary caregiver for her uncle and was on hand for this interview.

“My uncle had a staph infection in 2015 that spread to his bones,” she says. “But he was always active, right up until his illness.”

“Yes,” Shade says. “I was a busy person in those days, but there’s no point in being lonely and disgruntled. I can’t do the things I used to do, but there are things I can do. So that’s what I try to focus on.”

One thing he enjoys is conversation and reminiscing about his younger days. Buddy, his beloved dog, sits perched on the bed, which faces a wall of family portraits and photographs.

“Those pictures are the first thing I see in the morning and the last thing I see at

night.”

Shade was raised in a small town in North Carolina. “I grew up in a place called Hallsboro,” he says. “This town was so small that it had a sign that said ‘entering Hallsboro’ on one side and ‘leaving Hallsboro’ on the other side.”

Shade’s father worked at a sawmill while his mother tended to the family.

“I didn’t know what a role model was back then, but my daddy was the best man who ever lived,” Shade says. “I was nine when he died. They said he died from lung problems. His death hit me very hard.”

Shade’s mother was left to raise eight children. “She only had a fourth-grade education herself, but she instilled the importance of getting education into us. My sister went on to be a teacher too.”

Over the years, there would be other role models. Shade’s smile broadens as he tells of an elementary school teacher named Mattie Powell who took him under



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her wing.

“I don’t know how to describe her,” he says. “It was almost like I had two mothers. We had such a good time. I remember like it happened yesterday.”

After high school, Shade was drafted to serve in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

“I was drafted into the Army,” he says. “My mother was very upset about that because I had two older brothers who had already served in World War II. I remember listening as she talked with the Army recruiters, begging them not to take me into the service.”

As it turned out, Shade’s draft orders weren’t negotiable. His next stop was Fort Bliss, Texas, where he had basic training before being transferred to Anchorage, Alaska.

“I will never forget it,” he says. “I had 11 days of leave time after basic training to come back to Hallsboro and catch a train from Hallsboro to Seattle, Washington. I took a train from Hallsboro to Fayetteville to Raleigh to some other place all the way to Seattle, Washington, by train. It was a long trip.”

In Anchorage, Shade was assigned to teach the nomenclature of a weapon and physical education. It was during that time that he realized if he could teach grown men, he could also teach children. He’d been sending money home to help his mother with expenses, including his sister’s education, but by this time he was interested in furthering his education, too.

# Give the Gift of Literacy

Tania Sandoval grew up playing “dentist” as a child in El Salvador. In the United States, she worked as a housekeeper before enrolling with Literacy for Life, where she improved her English and also attended a small group class specifically for English language learners interested in dental assisting. The group previewed the language they would need in the Today’s Dentist course, and they met regularly through-

out the course to study and review the material.

After Tania completed the course, Norge Dental Center eagerly hired her as a dental assistant, and Today’s Dentist has recently invited her to become an instructor.

“I love my job,” says Tania, “and I am so thankful to Literacy for Life. They gave me the English skills and confidence I needed to fulfill my dream.”



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After his honorable discharge from the Army, Shade was able to attend college on the G.I. Bill.

“I caught a bus in Hallsboro and rode it to Fayetteville,” he says. “Then I got a taxi from Fayetteville to take me to Fayetteville State Teachers College.”

He remembers walking in the front door of the Admission Office and telling the lady at the front desk that he wanted to talk to the person who could get him admitted to the college. “I got to meet the president of the school,” Shade says. “I told him my name is Shade Palmer and I just got out of the service and I have this paper that says I can enroll in school. He told me I was the first soldier to come into the office and say I wanted to go to school.”

Shade thoroughly enjoyed college, as did his sister before him. “I can remember thinking there was nothing like college,” he says. After graduation, Shade moved to Williamsburg to live with an uncle. He got a teaching job at Bruton Heights, where he eventually met his wife, Carletha. “We were teaching at the same school,” he says. “After we met, we started dating and ended up getting married.”

Both he and his wife enjoyed prolific teaching careers. When he was hired as principal at James Blair, he says he was especially proud to become one of the first black principals in Williamsburg James City County (WJCC).

As a teacher, Shade made sure his young students got to see history up close and in person, taking them on field trips to cities like Philadelphia. “The children saw where Betsy Ross made the first flag of the United States,” he says. “They just marveled at that. Then we went to see the Liberty Bell and those kids were amazed at that cracked bell.”

In order to pay for the trips, Shade had a side hustle redeeming S&H green stamps. “Back in the 50s and 60s, parents went to the stores to buy groceries and received green stamps based on the dollar amount of their purchases. They brought their green stamps to me. I would get in my car and drive to Richmond where I redeemed those stamps for household goods and toys that we raffled off at the school.” The funds raised financed those field trips, which Shade says were both educational and a lot of fun.

Today, the retired educator may need a wheelchair, but his disability doesn’t hold him back. “He’s been to Nebraska to visit family,” says Tab. “And now he wants to go back to Alaska!”

She plans to take him once the pandemic subsides, as long as his health allows.

“I haven’t been there since 1950-51 when I served in the Army,” Shade says. “I would love to go back there. I doubt I’ll recognize it though.”

Meanwhile, Shade Palmer looks forward to the Thanksgiving holiday. “We will spend it right here with a big family dinner.” NDN

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# Grateful

FOR TRAVEL

By Kristine Hojnicky

Mary Lou Yeager of Williamsburg-based travel agency Royal Travel Center was recently recognized by Conde Nast Traveler as a 2021 Top Travel Specialist for Scotland. It's an award that Mary Lou is incredibly proud of, as she has worked tirelessly on behalf of her clients throughout her 44-year career as a travel advisor to make their vacation dreams a reality.

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"I love mapping out and designing journeys for memories of a lifetime."

Mary Lou's passion for travel began when she was a ten-year-old girl as she pored over the Rand-McNally Atlas plotting out cross-country road trips. Her love for it blossomed after she met her husband, Bailey Yeager, United States Naval Academy '59, and they spent their honeymoon driving to Coronado, California for his first tour of duty.

"After moves at home and abroad in Spain and the Philippines, travel was infectious," she says.

Mary Lou studied journalism at the University of Georgia, specializing in radio, television, and theater. Though she put her professional ambitions on hold, like many military spouses raising a young family, she continued to flex her creative muscle by writing children's books and screenplays. She married her love of travel with these writing projects by focusing the stories on characters who take trips around the world.

While stationed in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Mary Lou had an idea. "I'd always wanted to have a career," she explains. "I just had to wait for it to happen. I would become a travel advisor and I could write about all these great places people were going. I don't know what I had in mind, but I was very wrong!"

She found a travel agency nearby and went in to ask for a job, anticipating they would love her for her experiences and talents. The manager asked if she knew how to write a ticket; this was back in the days when agents were responsible for hand-writing airline tickets after coordinating a reservation over the phone with the carrier.

"I said no, but I can learn. His response was, when I learned how, I should come back. It did not take me long to find a junior college with a travel and tourism department. I was on a mission."

In 1978, the Yeager family, which now included four kids, a collie dog and a Persian cat, moved to Williamsburg where Mary Lou's husband became the Commanding Officer of the Navy Cargo Handling and Port Group at Cheatham Annex. Mary Lou found a job at a travel agency, as she now knew how to write tickets after completing her junior college course in Pennsylvania.

Following her husband's retirement from the Navy in 1981, Mary Lou opened Royal Travel Center, a brick-and-mortar agency located on Lafayette Street where the Chesapeake Bank is now. Royal Travel Center moved again in 1996 to the K-Mart Shopping Center. In 2006, Mary Lou made the difficult decision to move the business home and close the store front.

"The industry had changed, and it was a practical move for several reasons. Economics for sure. But for me, I could do what I wanted to do which was custom design travel," she says. "What I did not know in 2006 was such a thing as a pandemic. Home-

based agencies have not experienced the worries of furloughing employees, rent, utilities, and so on. We have seen a lot of store fronts close, and in speaking with my colleagues in the industry, the last 18 months have been very challenging.”

Today, Mary Lou still runs Royal Travel Center as a home-based agency. She is joined by her daughter-in-law Jenny, and Bernie, Kari and Sven, their bear “cub reporters” who provide commentary on the hottest travel destinations in the company’s monthly newsletter to clients. And despite the pandemic, which has certainly had a significant impact on travel and tourism, Mary Lou says she’s seeing a rise in reservations, especially for bookings several years out.

“We’re starting to see more reservations for 2022 and beyond. Where it becomes challenging is when the tour operator or the cruise line cancels. It’s a lot of work for the travel specialist to undo all the reservations they’ve painstakingly made for the highly customized itineraries we create.”

While it is valuable to work with a travel specialist in these instances, Mary Lou explained that it is also incredibly valuable to use a travel advisor because they can bring more value to a vacation than an individual could access on their own.

“The average traveler may not work with an advisor and may plan a vacation just fine on his own. But think about it in this way. When you need something special, you see a specialist. If you have a problem with your toe, you see a podiatrist. Your vacation is no different. We can help a client find value because we have the knowledge and expertise about these destinations, whether it be the best restaurants, a customized road trip, or arranging excursions at the best rates. And then when you throw in some of our agency’s other affiliations like Virtuoso, then you’re looking at a total VIP experience with the best rates at the most luxurious properties with upgrades and the finest amenities.”

Though Royal Travel Center is independently owned and operated by Mary Lou, it is additionally affiliated with McCabe World Travel in McLean, Virginia. As such, she can offer clients access to Virtuoso, the leading global network of agencies specializing in luxury and experiential travel, with more than 20,000 advisors.

Mary Lou credits this affiliation and her specialized travel certifications for repeat clients and referrals.

“I’ve been fortunate to earn special designations such as the CTC (Certified Travel Counselor), MCC (Master Cruise Counselor) and S.C.O.T.S. (Scotsmaster), which demonstrates to a client the depth of my knowledge when it comes to specific types of vacation planning,” she says.

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a subcategory of the travel and tourism industry or to a specific country, as in the case with the Scotsmaster program.

“In 1987, my late husband and I took a group to Scotland, and I just fell in love with this beautiful land. The University of Edinburgh used to offer a program in association with the Scottish Tourist Board, which required me to learn about the geography, wildlife, food, music, history, and more. It took me two years to complete because this was before computers, so I had to mail the materials and exams back and forth. But it culminated with attending an in-person graduation ceremony in Scotland in full commencement regalia. It is one of the accomplishments I am most proud of.”

Another accolade Mary Lou is very proud of is being named on Conde Nast Traveler’s annual list of Top Travel Specialists for 2021 for Scotland. It is a recognition that signifies the reasons why a Conde Nast Traveler reader should book a trip with a travel specialist and includes some of the best experiences these experts have ever put together to show the scope and prowess of their work, and to remind readers of all the adventures ahead once they return to post-pandemic travel.

Over the course of her career, Mary Lou has organized and led tour groups in size from eight to 100. These groups include Kiwanis to Japan, Atlanta Old White Rugby Club and Clan Macfarlane Anniversary Celebration to Scotland, and the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Voyage of the Godspeed to England, and countless group cruises.

She recalls her most rewarding clients were a young couple looking to travel to England, France and Germany on a very low budget.

“I’m quite sure that a number of other agencies would have looked at their budget and turned them away. But they were so intent on doing this trip and after learning more about why, I decided to work with them. I worked out a spreadsheet and just began subtracting from their total amount, and we did it. They came back and shared that everything about the trip was perfect. They were so happy, which made me feel incredibly happy and proud.”

Mary Lou Yeager is grateful for her upcoming opportunity to embark on a two-week study tour of Belgium this fall with a focus on World War I history. She’s become very interested in military history over the last several years and hopes to explore more destinations through that lens.

“My favorite place to travel besides Scotland and England is France. If someone were to ask me if I wanted to travel to France next week, I would drop everything and go. I also enjoy cruises. But my dream vacation, if I had no restrictions financial or otherwise, would be to take the Trans-Siberian Railway from Vladivostok all the way to Moscow.” NDN



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# Next Door Neighbors Business



Murawski Photography

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

We interviewed Yeong Hong for this story. However, she was not available for a photograph. The photo you see here is one of her husband, Steve Oh, who works in the Bonanza Social Kitchen and Express alongside Yeong.

# Kimchi *and more!*

By Alison Johnson

Six days a week, Yeong Hong works long hours at her family's café to help share a diverse mix of Asian dishes with the Williamsburg community.

A South Korea native, Yeong co-owns Bonanza Social Kitchen & Espresso with her husband, Steve Oh, also a chef. Their menu includes rice bowls, noodle dishes, soups, stews and broths, Asian-style chicken wings and a variety of appetizers.

Korean dishes are often full of vegetables, seafood and grilled meats; herbs such as garlic, ginger, green onion and red pepper; and fermented and pickled foods. Bonanza's most popular item is the bi-



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bimbop, or steamed rice with vegetables and chicken, beef strips or spicy pork.

“We hope for our customers to stay healthy and happy,” Yeong says. “That is all we care about. We want people to have a good experience with tasty food. It is different food from what a lot of them eat every day, and that is good for them to try.”

In addition to food, Bonanza serves coffee, tea, beer and traditional Korean drinks such as soju, a clear, colorless distilled beverage that comes in peach, apple, citron and grapefruit flavors. The café also features Blue Bell ice cream.

Yeong, 52, first arrived in America at age 16 and previously helped Steve run two other successful coffee shops, the first in California and the second in Northern Virginia. After moving to Williamsburg in 2017, the couple opened their latest venture in December 2019 at the Monticello Shopping Center.

The timing seemed perfect: South Korean food has gained in popularity in recent years as Americans have gravitated toward clean-

er, healthier diets and shown a willingness to experiment with new ingredients. More people also have discovered Korean culture and art, especially K-pop music.

But the COVID-19 pandemic hit hard. Bonanza, which had been packed before the virus spread, managed to get by with a high demand for takeout orders, plus regular disinfecting, mask-wearing and social distancing.

Today, like many restaurants, the café has grappled with severe staffing shortages as more customers begin to return for in-person dining. On some days, in fact, Steve and Yeong have had to limit menu options and pause taking orders.

Depending on the day, Yeong might have to juggle waitressing, shopping for food and supplies at a Korean market in Newport News or at Costco, dishwashing, cleaning and running the cash register. She often works from 10 a.m. to 10 or 11 p.m. except on Sundays, with perhaps a short afternoon break to check on her two teenagers, Stephan, 19, and Grace, 15.

Many nights, Yeong also cooks late dinners at home for her husband, who is so busy that he frequently eats just one meal a day.

“I will do any work to help my family,” she notes. “We don’t make a lot of money, but we are happy. We only want our customers to feel welcomed, comfortable, valued and ultimately impressed with their experience at our restaurant.”

Bonanza always closes on Sunday so the family can go to church, which is an important aspect in their lives. “We think that God is first, and we need to rest, too. But also, we have to do laundry and go to the store for our kids. We have only a little time for anything else.”

Originally from Seoul, Yeong learned to cook early in life. “Korean parents don’t spoil their children,” she says. “They teach us to make food and do other jobs for the family when we are very young.”

In 1984, her stepfather, a government employee, moved the family to Hawaii for a job there. Yeong and her siblings spoke vir-



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tually no English.

“It wasn’t easy, to tell you the truth,” Yeong recalls. “There were bullies at the high school who told us, ‘Go back to your country.’ We picked English up in time, but it took maybe one year for us to really talk.”

For years, Yeong alternated between living in America and South Korea based on her stepfather’s career. Then in 2000, she met her husband in Hawaii. Steve, who was an assistant movie director in their native country, was an exchange student studying film.

After they married, Steve and Yeong stayed in the United States for good. While Yeong’s sister still lives in South Korea, her parents settled in Northern Virginia and both of her brothers are in America. Her older brother runs a convenience store in Stafford, and her younger brother is a computer programmer with the federal government.

In addition to running several small businesses over the years, Steve has worked in the kitchens of Japanese restaurants. “He has a lot of experience in cooking and managing,” Yeong says. “He is like me. He works very

hard.”

The couple discovered Virginia on a visit to Yeong’s parents. They first lived in Williamsburg from 2005 to 2010 before spending seven years nearer to family in Northern Virginia. Stephan, however, was very unhappy in his new school system.

“He is on the autism spectrum, and he was really in a bad situation,” Yeong says. “I still cry when I think about it.”

In late 2017, the family returned to Williamsburg for its schools and later sold their Northern Virginia coffee shop. Stephan since has thrived at Warhill High School, where Grace is also a student, although lately he has struggled with anxiety due to COVID-19.

“He is very smart but also a perfectionist, and it has been hard,” she says. “He wants to go to college one day. He has been okay again, and my daughter also does well here. So, our family is good.”

Bonanza is about 15 minutes from Steve and Yeong’s home. While its menu does feature some American fare, including fried

chicken, popcorn shrimp and French fries, it is mostly focused on South Korea’s unique flavor combinations and long farming history. Vegetables are central, food is more often boiled, grilled or steamed than fried, and sauces have varying spice levels.

One of the best-known Korean foods in America is kimchi, a traditional side made of pickled vegetables. Kimchi lately has been promoted by celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow for its vitamins and probiotics, which some health experts believe can help boost the immune system and fight inflammation throughout the body.

Yeong Hong hopes that Bonanza’s customers will not only learn about different cuisines at her café but want to prepare similar dishes at home. She is happy to offer advice on where to find recipes and buy specialized ingredients and sauces.

“Really it’s not so difficult to cook this food,” she says. “I see that people like almost everything we have. So, I like the idea that they will bring it home to their family and some friends and share it.” NDN

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Murawski Photography

# DESTINED TO MAKE MUSIC

By Narielle Living

Sometimes people are fortunate to be gifted with having a purpose in life, a purpose that can help define a person's future. Alex Parker, a senior at Jamestown High School, has found his purpose by making the world of music integral to his life. There is no doubt that music will be a part of his future.

According to Alex, he mainly plays trombone, but that's not his only instrument. "I also play bass guitar, and I play other low brass instruments like euphonium, which is essentially like a tiny tuba."

In addition, Alex doesn't play music only for the school band. "I'm in essentially any ensemble I can get into at the school."

When he was first introduced to band in elementary school, nobody would have predicted he would immerse himself in the world of music. "I really didn't like it very much at all," he says. "I didn't really get into music until I participated in the middle school jazz band." At the time, Alex had not yet picked up the trombone. "I only played

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euphonium, and they're usually not a part of jazz bands." But Alex wanted to be in the jazz band, so after "pestering" the director for weeks, he was allowed to sit in on jazz band. After spending time listening in on the jazz bands, he was hooked. "The community with the jazz bands around here is usually a smaller group, and they're usually a lot closer."

Prior to playing in the jazz ensemble, Alex didn't give the musical style much thought when it came to what he wanted to play. "I was introduced to jazz by playing it, and I was like this is actually really interesting. I dug into it from there."

It is difficult for Alex to choose a favorite musician, but he does name a few trombone players he admires. "I would say it depends on what I'm playing," he says. One musician that is a big inspiration for Alex was trombonist J.J. Johnson, who was popular in the 1950s. "Also, Carl Fontana," he says. "He played with Stan Kenton and that group." Alex loves Big Band music and credits that style with cementing his per-

sonal pursuit of jazz. "That's actually what got me into jazz in the first place," he says. "Duke Ellington, Count Basie and all those groups."

When Alex moved from middle school to high school, certain aspects of being in the band changed for him. "I think the biggest change was the amount of commitment," he says. "In middle school, you sometimes have rehearsal in the afternoons, and then you have one concert every couple of months, but with high school, I essentially have after-school rehearsals three or four days a week plus different classes, and there's a lot of opportunities besides traditional band. In the spring, the musical always has a pit orchestra, and they always want a lot of the brass players to be in that group. So, there are multiple opportunities which is a little stressful, but you get used to it over time."

Opportunities to play music have been plentiful for Alex. He says that there are many audition-based groups in Virginia, including the All-State band competition,

which auditions in the Fall. According to Alex, students selected to be in this band are considered the best in the state. "After you're picked, then you have three days to get together a set of music and perform for a couple of different venues."

Alex has performed in the All-State jazz band since his freshman year of high school. School bands are not the only venues where Alex performs. "I do a lot of busking in Colonial Williamsburg," he says. "I'll go out there with friends and play a lot. I've had some opportunities to perform with the Williamsburg Classic Swing Orchestra, which was formed by Steve Turner and Chuck Maranzano, two Williamsburg area musicians and educators. The initial goal of the band was to keep the great big band music alive."

Obviously, since Alex is a senior, he has been making plans for his next steps. "After a lot of deliberation and a lot of thinking, I've decided I definitely want to pursue a career in music. It was not an easy decision, because a lot of people really deter you from

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going into music, even other professionals in the area.”

Alex says this type of attitude is based on the fact that surviving in the musical field can be a struggle. “Unless you’re a really successful teacher or you really made it as a professional,” he adds. “Music as a career is usually pretty multifaceted, so what I would enjoy doing is a little bit of everything. A lot of musicians produce their own music. They can market themselves; they’re able to write their own music; they’re able to play with other groups; they have a lot of opportunities to do a lot of different things. What makes me so interested in music in the first place is how many options there are in terms of creating something.”

This summer, Alex was able to attend Berklee College of Music in Boston for a program. He describes it as essentially a shortened semester, and he was able to take a number of classes there. “I had ensembles, and I got to perform in Boston a lot,” he says. “The biggest thing I got from Berklee was seeing how powerful music could be for bringing people together. Hundreds of kids from all over the world were there. And there are people who came from completely different backgrounds and have completely different stories but were able to come together and still make fantastic music just because we had that passion in common. I loved it.”

And what does a musician do when he’s not making music? “When I’m not making music, I’m a really big reader. I have a huge bookshelf, and I’m a huge Stephen King nerd. I love fantasy-adventure classics, that kind of thing.” He goes on to say that during the school year, if he’s not playing music, he is writing music or organizing bands at school. “This year, I’m helping to teach the freshman brass class three days a week.” But that’s not all he does. When he is not playing, teaching or writing, he is organizing a jazz combo. “A lot of my time is spent working with different facets of music, like I talked about earlier.”

When Alex works on organizing a jazz combo, he doesn’t necessarily hold auditions. “I find it hard to audition people for music because it’s so subjective. When I invite people to the combo, I look to see if they’re really excited about music,” he says. “There are a few key players at Jamestown who are really interested in doing more, and those are the kind of people I want in that group... people who want to push themselves a bit.”

Alex encourages anyone who is interested to go ahead and pick up an instrument and learn how to play. “Instruments don’t bite,” he says. “I’ve never seen anyone who learned an instrument feel like they lost something by trying. There’s so much you can get out of music; even if you don’t become a professional musician, it teaches you how to approach life. At least for me, it helps teach me discipline, because it’s something you have to work at every day. You have to approach it methodically; you can’t rush into it.”

Alex Parker is on a path that he loves as he continues to make music, and he notes that he has been able to do all this because of the support of his parents, Desiree and Gary. “Until I was 16 and had my license, my mom was the one who drove me around to all my performances. They’ve both been incredibly supportive.” NDN

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# WHEN Blight HITS

By Narielle Living

Colonial Williamsburg is known for its beautiful gardens and exquisite landscaping detail. Melissa Sharifi, one of the Landscape Managers, works hard to maintain her area and keep everything in top-notch condition. Plants are her passion, and she strives to educate people about the plants she cares for. Lately, however, she has had the added stress of a disease that has finally reached the Colonial Williamsburg boxwood plants, boxwood blight.

Melissa has worked for Colonial Williamsburg for eight years, and during that time she and her co-workers were aware of the boxwood blight issue. “Five years ago, we

  
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banned all boxwood on site, whether it's in wreaths or weddings or planted. We only plant boxwoods that we have propagated from our existing collection."

When she first started work as a gardener with Colonial Williamsburg, Melissa shares that she didn't know much about boxwood blight. "It wasn't in Williamsburg back then." When she became the Integrated Pest Management technician, she worked to become knowledgeable about this issue. "I got a quick education on it because there was a house in Williamsburg that was tested positive, and it was very close by." Upon learning about boxwood blight, Melissa reached out to the York County Extension office to get more information. "At that point, we developed a protocol for what we would do when it hit us. Basically, we started preparing everybody because we knew we were going to get it."

The key to dealing with this issue, Melissa says, was having the mindset of when they were going to get it, not if they were going to get it. "We did a lot of in-house training," she says. "We also created kits that are a five-gallon bucket, and we put everything we need in there. Sanitizers, Tyvek suits, bags to take samples. There are three things that we look for to indicate a positive ID." The kits were a great help, she says, in being able to treat a case of blight immediately. "We weren't scrambling for anything."

Everything ran very smoothly with their first detection of boxwood blight, she says. Their in-house training had paid off. "The person who found it does not have any formal training in horticulture. He's now our IPM technician, but it was literally his first month on that job. From top to bottom in our organization, we're all on the same page. Everybody is prepared for it and knows exactly what it is."

Melissa has worked in landscaping for about 20 years and has worked with Colonial Williamsburg for eight years. "I was recently promoted to this position in the early spring."

Originally from Richmond, she decided to work at Colonial Williamsburg because of the gardens. "It's just a really beautiful place. And there's every aspect of landscaping here. I have a broad background and it just kind of fit."

In addition, the move allowed her son, Leo Rojas, to attend Matthew Whaley Elementary School, which she says he loves.

For Melissa, this job is perfect. "I've always worked outdoors. My grandmother and my mom both were gardeners. I think the reason I feel a connection to Colonial Williamsburg is my grandmother owned a house in Goochland, Virginia when I was growing up. The previous owner of her house was the president of the Native Plant Society. When I was growing up, she had all these fascinating plants that I had never seen anywhere, and coming to Colonial Williamsburg reminds me of my grandmother's house."

Melissa mentions that for some, this can be an important issue, especially in certain neighborhoods. In addition to the high cost of the boxwoods, she says that there can be a real emotional connection to the plant. "A lot of people have plants that were cuttings from their grandmother's garden, or they're sentimental. People get really sentimental with the boxwoods. It's really important that people recognize this disease and the symptoms to help stop it from spreading.

## Your Local Real Estate Update

from the Williamsburg Association of REALTORS®

### The Value of a Local Listing Service and the Current State of the Real Estate Market



**Charlotte Jones**  
President of the  
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Much of the public doesn't know what a multiple listing service (MLS) is but if they do, the first thing they think of is a large-scale website that displays real estate listings, but multiple listing services are much more. The MLS is just one of the many tools an experienced, local REALTOR® will use to help you sell or buy a home. An MLS is a private database that centralizes real estate listing and property information in a local market. As a tool the main purpose is to expedite collaboration between a listing agent and a buyer's agent enabling them to share information and work together to better facilitate and execute a real estate transaction. Only licensed real estate brokers and their licensed agents can access and list homes on an MLS.

While some MLS data can be located on large public open platforms, only licensed professionals will view all available data, including owner info, disclosures, agent only comments, price history, sales comps in the area and much more. In the Greater Williamsburg area, we have the Williamsburg Multiple Listing Service (WMLS) working for our local REALTORS® and their clients to provide the promise of a fair market. They accomplish this by setting standards, providing the best new technology, and encouraging collaboration amongst agents and brokers. REALTORS® are constantly assessing real estate market conditions, how it is evolving, consumer attitudes, interest rates and so much more!

Buying or selling real estate, for a majority of consumers, is one of the most important decisions they will make and choosing a real estate professional continues to be a vital part of the process. One of the many advantages of listing your home for sale with an agent who subscribes to the Williamsburg Multiple Listing Service is that your agent will be able to provide you with timely, accurate price information and up to date housing statistics. Local sales reports contain statistics such as closed sales, pending sales, new listings, average sales price, median sales price, and average days on market which help home sellers and buyers better understand the local real estate market in which they plan to sell or buy property. By contacting a local Williamsburg REALTOR® when you are ready to sell or buy property in the Greater Williamsburg area, you will gain access to valuable real estate statistics that you cannot find on national third-party websites. Additionally, a local Williamsburg REALTOR® is knowledgeable in local market trends, local disclosure forms and contracts which will help streamline the real estate transaction to get you the best deal possible, which will culminate in a smooth and timely closing.

Knowing past and future local Williamsburg real estate trends is just one of the vital services REALTORS® provide to their clients. Advertising a home for sale in the local Williamsburg Multiple Listing Service will help you locate more motivated buyers and secure the highest possible price for your home. Through use of a local MLS database, REALTORS® help maintain fair competition by providing accurate, up-to-date statistics to keep agents on the cutting edge and the public in the know. Although you may not see them or hear about them every day, behind the scenes these local Multiple Listing Services are working for you and others realize the American Dream of homeownership.

The great news is that the local Williamsburg real estate market remains strong, in fact recent reports indicate that 36 more sales occurred in August 2021 over August 2020 and sales prices continue to climb (average of 7.8% higher than last year) through much of the local region. However, regardless of current real estate market trends, a local Williamsburg REALTOR® who belongs to the Williamsburg Multiple Listing Service, will be fully equipped with an up-to-date listing database and ancillary products and services designed specifically to help buyers and sellers wishing to buy and sell real estate in the greater Williamsburg community.



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Scouting and identifying diseased shrubs is really all we can do to try to stay ahead of this. It's here."

Melissa has some advice for when people's boxwoods are struck by blight. She says that if one of your boxwood plants is struck with blight, the first thing to recognize is that there are a few choices that must be made. "You can remove them," she says, noting that there are experts that recommend doing this. Another alternative that she offers is one that has not been successful in English boxwoods but has been successful in American boxwoods. "You have the option to cut the disease out. The disease is not systemic, it's not carried in through the roots, it's not in the trunk. It's in the branch tips and it's in the leaves. Kind of like cancer, you can cut the disease out and cut back far enough into healthy tissue that the plant might make a recovery." Prior to utilizing this option, however, check with a professional. There are other things, she says, that must be done to make this a success. "You've got to go down below where the leaves have fallen off, you've

got to sterilize the soil, but if you can do all that, there might be some success."

The third option, according to Melissa, is to not do anything at all. There are people who make this choice, and she says that often it is simply out of frustration. "A lot of people choose that method. It's a very frustrating disease. The process is like getting bedbugs or lice, you've got to sanitize everything. Nobody wants to come near you. You feel dirty. And then it just keeps coming back in your landscape, so you become exhausted and you're burning stuff and wearing Tyvek suits and using sanitizer and it just becomes really frustrating and exhausting to try to save them." Many people choose this option, and Melissa says there was a case in Richmond where a woman decided to simply give up, so she did nothing. "She didn't have the resources to do it, and she didn't want to remove them, so she chose to ignore it."

Often, because boxwoods have been present in a yard or neighborhood for generations, there is a stigma attached to those

who have to deal with this blight. However, Melissa says that it's not something to be ashamed of and it's nobody's fault. "It's in all the big neighborhoods in Williamsburg now. And there's a lot of neighbors who hate each other at this point but it's not anybody's fault. It's spread on insects. It's spread on birds. It's spread with people walking their dogs, it's spread by a newspaper thrown in your yard that might have it on it. It's important to know that this is a plant disease, it's not a human disease, not an animal disease. Nobody's going to die over it."

Melissa continues to care for the gardens and educate visitors and locals on what is happening to the boxwoods here. She urges people who may have to deal with boxwood blight, however, not to choose this final option of ignoring it, as this can make a bad situation worse. "It's here. Don't ignore it. If you're educated and you see someone in your neighborhood who has it and you're pretty sure, just let them know. Education and outreach are huge, and that's what's going to be a big defense against this disease." NDN



## *Family Matters.*

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*Williamsburg's*  
**IN THE**  
**NEIGHBORHOOD**  
 photo challenges

**Thankful for...**  
**VETERANS**  
 At the American Legion  
 Fall Conference

We thought you might enjoy three photo challenges this month since many of you will be getting your "grub" on and might need a diversion when you push away from the table. We hope you enjoy these as much as your food!

Find the 12 differences between the original photograph (top) and the altered photograph (bottom).

OCTOBER 2021  
 In the Neighborhood  
 VITAMINS & MORE AT GNC



INTERMEDIATE





*Williamsburg's*  
**IN THE**  
**NEIGHBORHOOD**  
photo challenges

**Thankful for...**  
**VOLUNTEERS**  
*Tending gardens at  
Riverside Doctors  
Hospital*

Find the 12 differences  
between the original  
photograph (top) and  
the altered photograph  
(bottom).



BEGINNER





*Williamsburg's*  
**IN THE**  
**NEIGHBORHOOD**  
photo challenges

Thankful for...  
**GENEROSITY**  
Toy collection for  
children at Christmas



Find the 12 differences  
between the original  
photograph (top) and  
the altered photograph  
(bottom).

ADVANCED







# WHO ARE WE THANKFUL FOR?

*You!*



**Ford's Colony**  
 4 Bedroom | 3 Baths | 3458 Sq. Ft.  
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Check out the website:  
 4068PowhatanSecondary.info

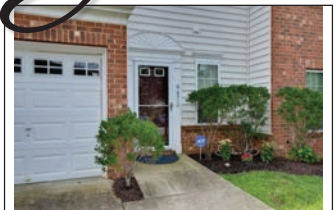
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 I am blessed beyond measure and want to thank all of my clients - now friends, my friends and my family for all of your referrals and support. I am oh so grateful! Have a Blessed holiday season! Love and hugs to all!

**Rebekah BREWSTER**  
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**HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**



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