The Nicest Jewel Thief Drops In...

By George Capsis

Carol Yost sent an article from the Post about an international jewel thief who lived, until he was arrested on October 24th, in a $10 million dollar townhouse on West 4th Street. Wait—West 4th is just up the corner from 69 Charles; so I e-mail our photographer, Joel, to take a picture and he instantly and expectedly emails back with, “what’s the address?” I tell him to check with the NYPD press office.

Then, I get a call from a very agitated woman with a hard New York accent, wanting to know if I am George Capsis of WestView and do I intend to do a story about her husband—whom I immediately assumed was the jewel thief (she had discovered Joel taking shots and demanded answers and an intimidated Joel quickly proffered my name as a shield). She had heard I was “a nice guy,” and she had two kids, and it was not true, and her husband had a lawyer and was going to sue. I explained that we were just a small community paper and the Post had already done the story, and she came back with “not everybody reads the Post.”

Dusty comes in and I begin telling her the story and she jumps. “That’s the hair stylist Damir Pejcinovic was arrested by the FBI on October 24, 2018 from his brownstone on West 4th Street. Neighbors knew him as “a very nice guy,” Photo credits: (left) NYPD, (right) © Joel Gordon 2019 - All rights reserved.

JEWEL THIEF ON WEST 4TH: International jewel thief Damir Pejcinovic was arrested by the FBI on October 24, 2018 from his brownstone on West 4th Street. Neighbors knew him as “a very nice guy.”

Memorial Sloan–Kettering Seeks to Eliminate Serious Conflicts of Interest

By Carol Yost

In an article on Friday, January 11th, published in collaboration with the nonprofit journalism publication ProPublica, the New York Times reported that the nonprofit Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, after being dogged by scandal, is officially taking steps to eliminate possible conflicts of interest. Earlier reports by the Times and ProPublica had generated the scandal by uncovering the ways staff members of the hospital had made lucrative deals with for-profit companies that manufacture doctors’ tools of trade—medicines and medical equipment—and provide healthcare.

High-level executives at the cancer center—all doctors in their own right—had also been serving on the corporate boards of drug and healthcare companies which in some cases had paid them hundreds of thousands of dollars for their “service.” These companies clearly hoped, not just for medical advice (if at all), but for immense profits from business facilitated by these doctors’ recommendations to Sloan-Kettering and possibly other institutions. Biases could also arise from this compensation when these doctors conduct medical studies and write articles for medical journals.

Now these top executives are barred from serving on corporate boards of the drug and healthcare companies. They also, along with leading researchers, will be limited in the ways they can profit from work developed by the cancer center. In addition, they are prohibited from investing in start-up companies that Memorial Sloan-Kettering has helped to found. Sloan-Kettering employees representing it on corporate boards are prohibited from accepting any personal compensation for this, such as stock options in these companies.

A 2014 study found that about 40 percent of the largest publicly traded drug companies had leaders of academic medical centers on their boards.

Sloan-Kettering’s chief medical officer, Dr. José Baselga, resigned days after it was reported that he had neglected to disclose millions of dollars in payments from drug companies continuing on page 3
Buyer Beware

Dear WestView News:

Andrew Cook’s letter in January should encourage everyone to do some research before they need health care—i.e., locate the nearest facilities their providers cover, know their hours, and find out if they are an urgent care center or an emergency department (which costs more).

I recently came close to being misled; in November, I had a splinter in my foot, in a spot I couldn’t see or reach. I visited an urgent care center my insurance recommended. The doctor who examined me said I needed an x-ray and biopsy, and tried to send me to another facility. I confirmed with my provider that that place was out of network, and went instead to a care center in midtown I had already checked out. The doctor used a needle and tweezers to remove the splinter. Since I hadn’t met my deductible, I was happy to pay the reasonable bill, and my foot is fine.

I was lucky to know about the facility I finally went to, and equally lucky to be in minimal discomfort. Had I been in greater distress, I might not have double-checked, and I might have been stuck with unnecessary bills for unnecessary procedures.

I urge my fellow readers to do some investigating before a health issue arises. Unfortunately, a facility might not inform you they are an emergency center and not an urgent care center, and a doctor might try to send you to an out-of-network care center. It’s up to you to take any possible precautions you can, by checking with your provider: what are the nearest covered facilities, what are their hours, and are they urgent care centers or emergency departments. It’s not fair to have to know all this yourself, but it’s the way things are.

—Alice Connerton

More than a Coat of Paint and a New Stove

George, your statement, “My guess—her studio apartment with a coat of paint and a new stove would get $3,000” (“If Only God Had Money,” George Capsis, WestView News, January, 2019), was based on old business principles, but not accurate about housing. There are many things, worn out and practically worthless, that you could spiff up a bit and charge a high price for. An apartment is not one of them. Tenants have far more legal protections than that, thank goodness. No landlord in his/her wildest dreams could simply freshen up my apartment and nearly quintuple the rent (which as you noted in your article is now $610.29 and rent stabilized).

First, a coat of paint is a repair for which the landlord cannot charge, whether I’m still there or not. I think tenants are due a new coat of paint every 3 years, and I haven’t had one since 1976 when I moved in. Again, it’s a repair that does not merit a charge or rent increase at any time or under any circumstances, tenant or no tenant.

Secondly, a new stove or refrigerator, if the landlord provides it, gives him/her the right to tack on a rent increase of $5 per month per appliance, figured into all rent increases, until the end of time. I’m going to provide my own new stove and refrigerator, which I have a legal right to do. He won’t be able to charge anything.

The only way the landlord could possibly raise my rent to $3,000, which he stated he would do in the eviction papers he filed three years ago (actually the landlord’s son, although he claimed to be landlord), would be in a three-step process:

1) He gets me evicted on some grounds or other.
2) He then gets an automatic 20% vacancy increase, called by critics a vacancy bonus. At my current rent, it would be exactly $122,058 per month tacked on to that rent. That’s a total of exactly $732,348, rounded to $732.49. Now, to a lot of people that’s still a low rent for a Chelsea studio. I say not! But looking at current rents it certainly would appear that way.
3) He then does a major refurb job, a complete redo, on my apartment, tearing out the walls, etc., which I could not legally ask for as a tenant, but now that I’d be safely out on the street he could do it on his own initiative. He files paperwork on that refurb job and asks for what I think is called a capital increase, a large permanent rent hike. He’ll come up with enough expense claims to get the apartment up to $3,000, with that 20% vacancy increase included. Any rent over $2,577.65 this year (it can change every year) is now off rent stabilization.

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—Alice Connerton

An Open Letter To Speaker Johnson

As we have argued since the first announcement of the L Train tunnel repair plans, thanks to innovative, out of the box thinking by Governor Cuomo and his team of experts, there is a much more intelligent method for the Canarsie Tunnel repairs that keeps the L train running and that does not disrupt the lives of hundreds of thousands of Brooklyn and lower Manhattan commuters, residents and businesses that would have been devastated by the MTA/DOT Plan. Coupled with new technology, the tried and true method of either nights and weekends only or closing one tube at a time (both things that had been successfully done with other NYC Tunnel repairs) had always seemed the better, intelligent and more considered all around approach.

However, as we feared from the outset, continued on page 3
Letters continued from page 2

it now appears that there is a lot of noise by outside interests to keep the 14th Street Alternative Service Plan, as well as newly installed protected bicycle lanes, perma-

ently in place, despite the elimination of their underlying justification. DOT Com-
misssioner, Polly Trottenberg, appears hell bent on staying the course, despite her as-

surance that all the changes were “tempo-
rarily,” which had also given her cover to ar-
gue that as such none of the normal review
and approvals were necessary.

We now look to our elected officials and
local Community Boards to hold Trotten-
berg and Byford to their words that all the
changes to 14th Street, as well as the pro-
tected bike lanes on 12th Street and 13th
Street, along with bus route changes that
eliminated the 14th Street and Sixth Ave-

ue bus-stop and its 14th Street crosstown
route, etc., etc., be rolled back immediately—
as the entire premise upon which the need
for them was argued has been rendered moot.

We will not tolerate doublespeak from
Trottenberg and Byford, or anyone else for
that matter, who openly advocated for their
permanence but promised, at every juncture, that it would be up to the down-
town community (not nonresident in-
lopers) to decide whether to keep them.
Our electeds were just handed a gift by the
Governor, a second bite at the apple, if you
will. This time around, however, we expect
them to forcefully advocate for the sanctity
and safety of the neighborhoods and com-

munities that they represent and not repeat
the mistake of accepting the representa-
tions of DOT and MTA that there was no
other choice, as was done throughout the
“so-called” public outreach process.

If not for the L train shutdown none of
this would have been forced upon us. Com-
mon sense dictates that absent the shutdown
premise, all these burdensome changes have
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What You Need to Know About Emergency Rooms and Urgent Care Facilities

By Joy Pape

Many people have some confusion about the difference between an emergency room and an urgent care facility. Even I, a health care provider, wanted to clear up some confusion. So, once again, I reached out to Dr. Warren Licht, Vice President of Ambulatory Operations for the Western Region of Northwell Health and Director of Medical Affairs for Lenox Health Greenwich Village (LHGV). Lenox Health Greenwich Village, located at 30 7th Avenue, is home to Manhattan’s first freestanding emergency room. In addition, Northwell Health, as part of a joint venture with GoHealth, operates five urgent care facilities in Manhattan, two of which are located below 23rd Street. (See Northwell Returns Doctors to St. Vincent Site, WestView News, November 2018, Volume 14, Number 11).

Joy Pape: Dr. Licht, before we begin, what’s with the names? What are the differences between emergency rooms, emergency departments and urgent centers?

Dr. Licht: (He chuckles.) Nothing. They are all ERs. ERs in the United States are called what they are by those who are speaking about them. Traditionally, patients, clinicians, hospital administrators, and insurance company representatives all have their own choice of word following “emergency” in their vernacular. And then, of course, there are the Hollywood television dramas.

In simple terms, the New York State Department of Health and the Federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services defines emergency centers as locations accredited to provide emergency medical care and treatment to all persons in need of such care, who arrive at the entrance of the facility whether by ambulance or by walking in, regardless of the ability to pay before services are rendered. The facilities are typically accredited to receive ambulances via the local 911 call system. At Northwell Health’s Greenwich Village, the ER is truly a center, a facility that provides emergency care, with various certifications that span many departments, provided in many specialized rooms throughout the facility. Care for acute heart attack, acute psychiatric illness, sexual assault, and acute trauma are just a few of the emergency conditions that are treated by a team of multidisciplinary professionals from many departments in specialized areas (rooms) of the center.

Joy Pape: What is an urgent care? Are they called centers, departments, or what?

Dr. Licht: (He chuckles again.) All the above. I think as these facilities have become more common in the continuum of medical care, I believe most people refer to them as simply urgent cares. Urgent cares are ideal for most non-emergency medical situations, especially when acute illness occurs outside of normal business hours or on weekends. In addition, should you not have a primary care physician, or they are not available to see you, these facilities are very useful. They can treat a host of acute conditions including minor fractures, stitches, back pain, mild nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, minor headaches, fever, ear or sinus pain, cough or sore throat, burning with urination, sprains and strains, rashes and minor burns.

Joy Pape: What are the differences between emergency centers and urgent cares?

Dr. Licht: The major differences between emergency centers and urgent cares is that emergency centers like the one at Lenox Health Greenwich Village (LHGV) are open 24/7 and are staffed by emergency medicine certified physicians and nurses and other specialized staff. Urgent cares have limited hours and different staffing models. Emergency centers receive 911 activated ambulances. Many emergency centers, like LHGV are disaster-prepared with certified decontamination units. Emergency centers can treat major trauma. Specialists are available for care coordination, and there is specialized imaging (x-ray) equipment. All are welcome at emergency centers regardless of insurance type or ability to pay up front.

Joy Pape: Speaking of cost, there is a lot of confusion about cost. Is there a difference between the cost of going to an emergency center or an urgent care facility?

Dr. Licht: Yes. Urgent cares require the ability of the patient to pay before being seen. Emergency centers will provide and treat patients regardless of the ability to demonstrate that they can pay. This does not mean treated patients will not eventually get a bill for services received. There is more price transparency in an urgent care setting than an emergency center due to the limited services provided and personnel available in an urgent care. This can be a complicated discussion.

And, in anxious situations patients are not necessarily thinking calmly. Clearly if a patient activates EMS by calling 911 they will be taken to an emergency center. Before they have even entered an ER, cost has already been incurred by calling for an ambulance. We all need to consider that expense.

If you are medically insured, not unlike having life insurance and car insurance, you need to know what your plan covers. What out of pocket expenses should I expect with different types of medical services used? What does my plan consider urgent, emergent, and routine? Do I have a co-pay, coinsurance, or a deductible? Many of us don’t know these answers. Know before a situation arises. Know this as part of a disaster plan for you and/or your family. If you don’t, and a health situation arises and you have the time during a situation, I recommend calling your insurer first. As an example, you cut your hand with a knife while preparing dinner. It’s 7:00 pm. You quickly wash the wound, inspect it, and attempt to stop the bleeding by applying pressure. Your hand otherwise appears to be intact. You decide you do not need to call 911. Do you go to an urgent care or an emergency room? Since you already know where your closest urgent care is located and their business hours (if not, use the internet), you head to urgent care. The cost of care is likely to be as low as a $40 co-pay. Care will likely be delivered and completed within the hour. If you go to an emergency room, your minimum co-pay may likely be $200, that’s if the facility participates in your insurance plan. Patients with graver illnesses are going to be seen first. And if you electively request to be stitched up by an on-call board certified plastic surgeon, the bill you may incur, per stitch, will obviously be more expensive.

Joy Pape: Again, thank you Dr. Licht for enlightening us, and to Northwell Health for the services you provide to the residents of the West Village.

(Permission granted to reprint this material to inform the public. Please credit WestView News, December 5, 2018, Volume 14, Number 11. For more information, please contact: (212) 390-0558.)

Joy Pape is an internationally known board certified family nurse practitioner, author, writer, and presenter. She believes every person is an individual and deserves person-alized integrative medical care and hope for a healthy and full life. She can be reached at 212-933-1756 or at joypape@mac.com

Emergency Centers and Urgent Cares in the West Village

EMERGENCY CENTER
Lenox Health Greenwich Village
30 7th Ave
(646) 665-6000

URGENT CARE CENTERS
Northwell Health-GoHealth Urgent Care
41 E 8th St
(212) 897-1991

New York Doctors Urgent Care
66 W 13th St
(212) 414-2800

CityMD West Village
331 6th Ave
(212) 219-2659

UMD Urgent Care
110 W 14th St
(212) 242-4333

CityMD Union Square West
14 W 14th St
(212) 390-0550
Sloan continued from page 1

and healthcare companies in dozens of articles he had written for medical journals. He also resigned from the boards of Bristol Myers Squibb and of Varian Medical Systems (a radiation equipment manufacturer). He then got a job with AstraZeneca to run its oncology department.

An executive vice president of the hospital received $1.4 million for representing Memorial Sloan-Kettering on the board of a newly public company.

A newly public company.

The hospital itself is not above making lucrative arrangements with for-profit companies, as when it made a deal with an artificial intelligence company founded by three doctors employed in various capacities by the hospital; it licensed images of 25 million patient tissue slides. Of course the doctors must also have profited. This could be explained away as a means of meeting any hospital’s enormous expenses, but anywhere profit lurks, there is the danger of corruption.

The hospital is currently reviewing the different ways its staff members are linked to for-profit companies and deciding what additional steps to take. So are other prominent cancer centers that are alarmed at the revelations about Sloan-Kettering. They also have member doctors serving on for-profit boards.

Surely all for-profit arrangements at a hospital should be stopped because of the ethically compromising situations they create, but Memorial Sloan-Kettering is studying the matter.
Jacques Benveniste, 1928–2019

12 days and finally arrived at Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp near Hanover. Bergen-Belsen was not an extermination camp, but many people died of typhus there (including Anne Frank). Food was in short supply, and body lice were common. My father and other teens tried to learn or improve their English. My father found a copy of Arrowsmith by Sinclair Lewis and worked his way through it, looking up hundreds of words in a dictionary. It was not until April 1945, after over a year in the camp that they were put on a train that travelled east. They never found out here they were going, because a few days later the train stopped and the locomotive and most of the SS guards disappeared. Soon a tank appeared, and it was an American tank! After that, the family was repatriated to Greece through Magdeburg, Brussels, Marseilles and Bari. In Brussels they were able to communicate with Athens and found out that my father’s eldest sister had died but that the youngest sister was well. In looking through the train that took them from Bergen-Belsen, they found a collective passport issued by the Portuguese government. My father felt this document had saved their lives.

My father had a great talent and love for mathematics: his trajectory in this field was impressive and brilliant. In spite of the disruption in his studies caused by the war, he finished high school on schedule and enrolled in the National Polytechnic Institute of Greece (think Greece’s MIT), having taken second place in the entire country on the national entrance exam. (‘And why not first place?’ his father is said to have commented sardonically.) While he would have liked to pursue a degree in mathematics, he felt that post-war Greece would need engineers more than mathematicians, and so he followed what seemed to him a more prudent course in studying engineering. His superb performance in college earned him a Fulbright scholarship to study civil engineering at the University of Minnesota, where he earned his Ph.D. in three years. After returning briefly to Greece, he received offers of professorships at Columbia University and the City College of New York. He chose the City College, where he taught until his retirement four decades later, eventually becoming Dean of the Engineering School.

I had often wondered how my parents had gotten together. After the war my mother lived in Paris, her family having moved there from Greece. It was not until my father’s memorial service that my mother related the whole story: en route from Greece to Turkey, they took the train from Athens to Thessaloniki, where they were put on a train that travelled east. They never found out here they were going, because a few days later the train stopped and the locomotive and most of the SS guards disappeared. Soon a tank appeared, and it was an American tank! After that, the family was repatriated to Greece through Magdeburg, Brussels, Marseilles and Bari. In Brussels they were able to communicate with Athens and found out that my father’s eldest sister had died but that the youngest sister was well. In looking through the train that took them from Bergen-Belsen, they found a collective passport issued by the Portuguese government. My father felt this document had saved their lives.

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My father had a great talent and love for mathematics: his trajectory in this field was impressive and brilliant. In spite of the disruption in his studies caused by the war, he finished high school on schedule and enrolled in the National Polytechnic Institute of Greece (think Greece’s MIT), having taken second place in the entire country on the national entrance exam. (‘And why not first place?’ his father is said to have commented sardonically.) While he would have liked to pursue a degree in mathematics, he felt that post-war Greece would need engineers more than mathematicians, and so he followed what seemed to him a more prudent course in studying engineering. His superb performance in college earned him a Fulbright scholarship to study civil engineering at the University of Minnesota, where he earned his Ph.D. in three years. After returning briefly to Greece, he received offers of professorships at Columbia University and the City College of New York. He chose the City College, where he taught until his retirement four decades later, eventually becoming Dean of the Engineering School.

I had often wondered how my parents had gotten together. After the war my mother lived in Paris, her family having moved there from Greece. It was not until my father’s memorial service that my mother related the whole story: en route from Greece to Turkey, they took the train from Athens to Thessaloniki, where they were put on a train that travelled east. They never found out here they were going, because a few days later the train stopped and the locomotive and most of the SS guards disappeared. Soon a tank appeared, and it was an American tank! After that, the family was repatriated to Greece through Magdeburg, Brussels, Marseilles and Bari. In Brussels they were able to communicate with Athens and found out that my father’s eldest sister had died but that the youngest sister was well. In looking through the train that took them from Bergen-Belsen, they found a collective passport issued by the Portuguese government. My father felt this document had saved their lives.
Can Words Repair a Broken City?

By George Capsis

Attorney Arthur Schwartz sent me an e-mail offering an interview with Jumaane Williams who is running, along with 22 others, for the post of Public Advocate. With election day fast approaching (Tuesday February 26th), I ask Arthur “does he have a chance,” and Arthur replied back “sure, he is number one.”

Public Advocate is a curious and at times controversial post—he or she supposedly speaks for all of us to make sure the city government does what we really want it to do. Obviously he or she has to single out the big issues like affordable housing, and when I asked Arthur to send me his platform—I received “My Platform For Housing Justice.” He has several other issues, but as he said, “this is the big one.”

Before I sat down to write I took a look at a video of Jumaane addressing an African American crowd in Brooklyn, which is his political turf and home, and was bemused to see him do a Martin Luther King response chant and wondered, how biased would his housing plans be?

He came in from the icy cold with his nice young lady handler, peeled off two layers and sat in my “reading the New York Times” chair. We began with his bio—his father came from Grenada to study medicine and become a doctor. Jumaane went to Brooklyn Tech HS, then Brooklyn College, and studied Political Science. “Is politics a science?” I challenged. He hesitated before he offered “yes” and added, (I think) “and acting” (he had planned to be an actor and is very good at leading a crowd).

The written platform offered “I would stand up for low income renters across New York City for real, scalable policies that preserve affordability, and protect families from predatory landlords right now.”

As I keyed this I thought about his phrase “protect families from predatory landlords.” Here in the West Village we don’t have families who are threatened by landlords, but only single aged men and women in rent stabilized apartments, like Mitch Donian, whose article appears in this issue and was in the other room waiting for dinner as I conducted the interview.

I asked about “gentrification” which his platform document warned “was sweeping through every corner of the city” and Jumaane quickly came back with “yes, it was causing reverse migration.”

His platform offers that “2.5 million New Yorkers are rent stabilized—and these rights will expire altogether in 2019” (oh wow, this must have been written last year—I gotta ask Arthur about this, but no way is rent control going to end—the streets would be flooded with protesters and landlords and the mayor would be hung in effigy).

Jumaane does a job on NYCHA and ends with “they should be put on the Worst Landlords List.”

This morning I heard on the radio that Corey Johnson wants to tear NYCHA down. I like that...

Jumaane continued from page 6

berg’s “Stop and Frisk” policy. That policy led to one in four Black men being stopped in any given year by the NYPD. And, as he predicted, even with the arrests stopped, NYC has become safer.

But Jumaane hasn’t just been oppositional. In his first eight years on the City Council he authored 58 bills which passed, which means that he knows how to work with colleagues to get things done. And

just last month, Mayor de Blasio adopted Jumaane’s 2014 bill requiring, at the minimum, a week of paid vacation no matter where someone works.

Jumaane is a special man, running in a Special Election. We will be a proud, well-served City if we elect him.

Vote on Tuesday February 26th.

Arthur Schwartz is the Male Democratic District Leader for Greenwich Village.
Judge Frederic Block for Dinner

By George Capsis

Some months ago, Nelly—the former chef and owner of the rent–rended Lima’s Choice restaurant—asked us to host a dinner for Judge Frederic Block because of our larger eating area. But before we bought the lobsters, she’d found another location for the event when, unfortunately, there was not enough room for Dusty and me. So, we put the good wine back on the rack, regretting, of course, the historic conversation we would miss just because somebody had a larger dining area.

But Judge Block did come to dinner on his own, after our Visvaldis concert, and it proved to be a very unique performance.

As the judge in his early eighties, I asked if he was considering retirement. He offered a set piece—one is made a federal judge for life—and “What else would I do?”

Well, he is doing a lot. He has written two books. One of them is moving toward a TV series in which an African American attorney identifies and saves unjustly convicted prisoners. This mirrors just what Judge Block accomplished for an African American man unjustly imprisoned for 15 years, and is, in fictional form, the subject of his first book.

During the dinner and throughout the rest of the evening, we proffered questions that he accepted like after dinner-treats. He reviewed his accomplishments and then, holding his iPhone, played us western and country songs he’d composed and even sang (we were speechless); the lyrics were brilliant.

I could not suppress my jealousy of this man’s accomplishments, but even more so, of his obviously unique intelligence and active engagement in life through be he is over 80 years old.

Judge Block was overwhelmed by the preface to his book Race to Judgement (which is more fulsome in praise than any review I have ever read). The book will be released and available to the public within the next few months.

Read Professor Erwin Chemerinsky’s preface to Race to Judgement that follows.

Preface to Race to Judgement

By Professor Erwin Chemerinsky

The government has no power greater than to take away a person’s freedom or even life. We trust our judges to balance justice and mercy to arrive at an appropriate sentence when a person has been convicted of a crime. Yet to a large extent, how a judge goes about this process is invisible to the lawyers in a case, the public, and even to the criminal defendant being sentenced. To be sure, judges often give reasons for their sentences, such as explaining when their sentence is dictated by a statute requiring a mandatory minimum sentence or how the punishment fits under the Sentencing Guidelines. But the human dimension of this—how a judge actually balances justice and mercy, what a judge feels in putting a person in prison for a long time or condemning a person to death—is rarely publicly explored.

Judge Frederic Block, a long-time federal district court judge, has written a magnificent book which describes the experience of a human being punishing other human beings. Judge Block does this by telling the stories of some of the cases that he has handled since coming on the bench in 1994. Each of the cases is compelling and Judge Block is a great story-teller. Each evokes important issues concerning our criminal justice system. Judge Block is candid in sharing his thinking and his feelings as he approached imposing punishments in these instances. He is remarkably self-reflective, often describing his concerns that his religion or the unfounded accusations against him or his recent reading might be unduly influencing the sentences he is imposing. Along the way, he tells us a lot about the workings of the federal courts and also about his life.

What comes across most clearly is how Judge Block is trying mightily to follow the law, even when it leads to results he feels are unjust, but also to use his discretion to do what he feels is right: imposing significant penalties when that seems appropriate, but also acting with compassion when that seems warranted. This is a book that can be enjoyed simply for its stories and its humanity. It is about the crimes people commit and what a judge considers in punishing them. It therefore is a book that deserves a wide audience. It is beautifully written and accessible to lawyers and non-lawyers alike.

But there also is an underlying dimension to the book that should be part of a larger conversation about the problems with our current sentencing system. I can identify several important issues that emerge from reading Judge Block’s book.

First, there is the problem of draconian punishments and the point at which they become cruel and unusual in violation of the Eighth Amendment. In fact, Judge Block expressly poses the question of when sentences are so disproportionate to the crime as to violate the Eighth Amendment. The first case I ever argued in the Supreme Court was Locket v. Andrade, where my client received a sentence of 50 years to life, with no possibility of parole for 50 years, for stealing $153 worth of videotapes from K-Mart stores in San Bernardino, California. He received this sentence even though he had never committed a violent crime and even though no one in the history of the United States had received a life sentence for shoplifting under California’s “three strikes law.”

The United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that the sentence was unconstitutional cruel and unusual punishment, but the Supreme Court reversed in a 5-4 decision. In Locket v. Andrade and a companion case, Ewing v. California, the Court made clear that the government has enormous discretion in imposing punishments, even very lengthy sentences for minor crimes.

In the story of “John Doe,” Judge Block tells of imposing a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years in a case where that seems clearly excessive. As a conscientious judge following the law, Judge Block imposed this punishment even though he thought it was excessive under the circumstances. It made him think about being a judge when the law requires an unjust, though constitutional result. Laws like “mandatory minimums” and “three strikes” often require this of our judges. The “tough on crime” mentality of the last half century has led to legislatures, and sometimes voters, sometimes creating punishments that are far too harsh for the crimes involved. No politician wants to seem soft on crime. Judge Block tells us what it’s like to be a judge having to apply these laws.

Second, laws like these—such as mandatory minimums and three strikes—have meant a significant shift of power in sentencing from judges to prosecutors. In the John Doe case, it was the prosecutor’s choice to charge and try the case under a statute that required a mandatory minimum penalty that tied Judge Block’s hands. In Locket v. Andrade, the prosecutor could have charged Leandro Andrade with one misdemeanor count of petty theft, with a maximum sentence of six months in jail, or two counts of petty theft, with a maximum sentence of one year in jail; or one count of the felony of “petty theft with a prior,” with a maximum sentence of three years in prison, or two counts of petty theft with a prior, with a maximum sentence of three years, eight months in prison; or one count under the three strikes law, with a maximum sentence of 25 years to life in prison; or two counts under the three strikes law, with a maximum sentence of 50 years in prison. The charging decision was left entirely to the prosecutor and he choose the maximum possible. The judge was helpless to prevent this and the jury that convicted had no idea as to the consequences of their verdicts.

I am troubled by the great shift in the power to determine sentences from judges to prosecutors. This change in the law has not received nearly enough attention. Prosecutors are partisans in our criminal justice system. No matter how much it is said that a prosecutor’s role is to secure justice, they see sentencing from their own perspective. It is far better to have sentencing decisions in the hands of judges, but that is very much lessened when the prosecutor’s charging decisions make all the difference in terms of the punishment imposed.

Third, Judge Block describes the enormously disturbing reality that defendants can be sentenced for crimes for which they are not convicted and even for crimes for which they were acquitted. This is reflected in the first two chapters of Judge Block’s book, one involving a case that he heard while sitting by designation in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and the other he handled as a district court judge.

The law is clear that a judge in sentencing may impose punishments for crimes for which the defendant was acquitted. In United States v. Watts, 1997, the Supreme Court held that a jury’s verdict of acquittal does not prevent a sentencing court from considering a defendant’s conduct underlying the acquitted charge, so long as that conduct has been proved by a preponderance of the evidence. The rationale is that a conclusion of guilt requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt, but a sentencing fact need be proven only by preponderance of the evidence.

I always have felt that it unjust for a person to be punished for a crime for which he or she has been acquitted. Imagine a defendant is charged with 12 counts, 11 for very serious offenses and one for something minor. If the defendant is acquitted on the 11 serious counts, he or she can still be punished for them if convicted of the minor crime.

This is exactly what happened in the cases that Judge Block describes. The law allows it, but I hope the Supreme Court will reverse its earlier opinion and find that it is unconstitutional to punish someone for a crime for which he or she has been acquitted.

Fourth, throughout the book, Judge Block refers to the Sentencing Guidelines. These were adopted over 30 years ago to create more uniformity in sentencing. As Judge Block explains, they create a system that requires that a judge consider a number of prescribed factors and it yields a range for the permissible sentence. The United States Supreme Court in United States v. Booker (2005), held the Guidelines are advisory, not mandatory. Judges though, must still justify departures from what the Guidelines prescribe.

As I read Judge Block referring repeatedly to the “Guidelines range,” I was interested in knowing more about his thinking about the Sentencing Guidelines. Many, including judges I have spoken to, believe that they are too harsh. Some think they went too far in substituting uniformity for individualized sentencing. But others think that Booker’s making the Guidelines advisory has helped to cure this problem. After more than 30 years’ experience with the Guidelines, and continued on page 11
Mayor de Blasio Waves His Baton Over New York City

By J. Taylor Basker

At Symphony Space, punctuated by cadences of applause, our Mayor revealed his new orchestration of the citizens of NYC. In his sixth State of the City speech, Bill de Blasio promised New Yorkers a better life. NYC should be a model for the rest of the country that is descending into servitude to the 1%. He claimed the city under his administration had reversed this by giving back to workers “the prosperity they have earned.” Declaring himself to be a contemporary Robin Hood, he attacked greedy landlords, big business and income inequality. He urged policies designed to increase finances and improve of the quality of life for struggling New Yorkers. Thanking his wife for her initiative helping New Yorkers who struggle with mental illness and depression in the THRIVE NYC program, he praised all those who helped make the city great. He acknowledged this year’s heroes including civilians, police, and firefighters, and re-told their stories, reminding us of their great compassion and courage in our city, and why we are grateful to be New Yorkers.

Life has improved in New York where crime is at an all-time low, reduced more than under either Bloomberg or Giuliani. This has made it the safest big city in America, with the fewest homicides since 1951. It defied the conventional wisdom that many arrests equal safety, since the NYPD made 140,000 fewer arrests. Neighborhood policing is working. The prison population has dropped below 8,000 for the first time in 40 years. De Blasio emphasized that “the era of mass-incarceration did not begin in New York City, but it will end in New York City”, promising to close Rikers Island to a crescendo of applause. Safety has also extended to the roads; under his Vision Zero program there were the fewest accidents since 1910.

In addition to being the safest city, de Blasio wants to make NY the fairest. In 2018 he built the most affordable apartments ever in NYC. He thanked the City Council for passing the Access to Counsel Law, helping tenants obtain lawyers paid for by the city, who stop illegal evictions. Avoiding the details of the horrific problems in NYCHA, he promised “new everything” for 1785 public housing residents from roofs to kitchens and bathrooms. He moved 2,000 homeless off the streets into “permanent situations to get the help they need”, while closing 180 shelters that did not meet standards.

His recitation of achievements included full-day Pre-K for all four year olds to help each child reach their full potential. A record number are also being provided with free 3-K. His announcement that they set the all-time record for graduation rates in NYC received a thundering standing ovation. Three-quarters of students graduated on time; previously it was under 50%. Over half, 59%, went on to higher education.

To fulfill his promise to provide more jobs, he doubled awards to women and minority businesses with over 10 billion dollars in city contracts. He declared for tissimo: NYC is now a world tech hub due to his groundwork, bragging that Amazon and Google want to be here. However, there was a noticeable silence about the controversial deal with Amazon in LIC. Now there are over 4.5 million jobs in NYC for the first time, paid sick days extended, unemployment down and wages risen, with $15 minimum wage under his progressive policies.

De Blasio reported he made NYC more sustainable by banning Styrofoam cups after winning court battles with business, and warned that plastic bags and straws are next. The city is divesting from fossil fuel companies and investing billions into renewable energy. It sued pharmaceutical companies for their role in the loss of life in the opioid crisis, and plans to open controversial over-dose prevention centers to save lives.

Lamenting the loss of democratic values in Wash, DC, he sees the need for the city to strengthen our democracy and protect rights through new participatory budgeting and candidates who run for office without big money. The city sent lawyers to the border to fight “the inhumane detention of children”, and when Trump tried to take away law enforcement money because NYC refused to report the immigration status of residents, it won in court.

De Blasio emphasized that these successful ideas were considered too radical, expensive, “or shoulder, too progressive.” He proclaimed that we must go further to improve the quality of our lives despite the agenda of the rich and powerful that has dominated our politics from Reaganomics to the Trump tax giveaway. He quipped, “There is plenty of money in the world, in the city, it’s just in the wrong hands.” Working people have become more productive but have received a smaller share of the wealth they create. Thus this year he wants health care for all, including undocumented immigrants. NYC will be the first in the nation to require two weeks paid personal time, and when landlords cheat their tenants they will lose their buildings under a new agency. Marijuana will be legalized, but “grassroots” not large corporations will run the businesses (pun intended?).

With bravura, De Blasio announced a universal retirement system for those who have worked for decades and earned the right to retire in peace. New Yorkers deserve to live in the “fairest big city in America and that is what we are going to deliver.” People across the country are working longer hours, and those working the hardest often earn the least and have no benefits or protections. Thus he is expanding the Dept. of Consumer Affairs to add Worker Protection. Since nearly half of workers in the city do not have worker-sponsored retirement plans, the city will provide plans for them.

Con brio, he affirmed that happiness is part of our right in the Declaration of Independence and living in this city should be more than just surviving. He asserted that “come hell or high water” Albany will fix our subways. To make it easier to get around he added two ferries in August to the Lower East Side and Soundview and is extending service to Staten Island and Coney Island, cutting some commuters’ time to work in half. Changes to bus routes should speed them up. On April 1, the fate of NYC transit will be decided in the new state budget, and it is vital for all to pressure Albany. He believes a millionaire’s tax is the fairest way to fund the improvements we need, while other ideas such as marijuana revenue, congestion pricing, or a new transportation bond act are under consideration. This year Albany should make needed reforms with Democrats in the majority including rent regulation renewal, repeal of vacancy decontrol, voting reforms to make it easier to vote, and trial and bail reform.

His number one concern is education, and he announced the expansion of the partnership with Warby Parker for free eye exams and glasses for every Kindergartner and first grader. With appassionato he ended his performance, extolling his utopian vision for every working person, asking us to imagine a city where everyday life becomes more fair and where “people can live their lives more fully” where “work is rewarded and all this prosperity is shared.” These goals are not unreachable but achievable. With bravura he intoned the refrain we should “never underestimate the change we can make together.”

Dissonant commentary criticized his failure to collaborate with business on his plans to provide paid leave and raises, offering no tax breaks in return. Some Council members felt his establishment of a landlord watchdog agency was redundant, although the NYC Dept. of Housing and Development in over two-thirds of cases against landlords settled for less than 15% of penalties under the law. Scott Stringer was concerned about details not discussed re: solving record homelessness and the appalling problems of NYCHA. Where will the money come from? Ignored was the crisis in commercial real estate whose escalating greed causes stores to shut down in rapid staccato in some neighborhoods. Will the wealthy be willing to part with their money to make life better for ordinary New Yorkers and the poor? A few years ago there was a federal inquiry into wealthy donors to his campaign who received favors. How far will they let him go?

The Mayor plans to take his progressive vision to the nation, as part of a possible presidential campaign strategy. However, he may need to turn his baton into a magic wand to achieve it.

Doris Diether’s Birthday Celebration

CELEBRATING DORIS DIETHER: Doris’ many families, friends, fellow preservationists, activists and her many boyfriends merrily drank, danced and celebrated the Grande Dame, the recognized Queen of Washington Square Park, with thanks for all that she has done for us! Marionette by Ricky Syers, Photo by Allan Baille.
Greenwich Village has been challenged on many fronts, but the car-centric culture has been one of the biggest.

You may already be aware that when the early civic leaders decided Manhattan needed a simple, logical street layout for the city to grow north of Chambers Street, The Village was already well established, with influential Village property owners who would not allow their buildings to be wiped out. City fathers instead laid out The Grid to go around the Village.

That plan held until the early 1900s, when transportation needs grew so critical, in the rapidly expanding northward thrust, that subterranee railroads had to be considered for north-south travel. The early 1900s also saw the proliferation of private automobiles and metered cabs, as well as delivery trucks and surface trolleys and freight railroads. Elevated railroads for commuters had been erected in as many places as feasible, but people hated them, and heavy storms could still bring travel to a standstill. This led to decisions to create main avenues through neighborhoods where they had formerly been blocked, many with subways tunneling underneath them.

Today the scars of these avenue right-of-ways are still evident some 100 years later. Many buildings were either demolished entirely or a new, angled wall patched up the amputation, leaving the odd triangular lots and corners that result when a wide avenue is cut at an angle to the established layout.

In Greenwich Village, 6th Avenue was plowed through from The Village to SOHO and Tribeca; 7th Avenue South forever modified The Village from Greenwich Avenue down to Houston Street where it tied into Varick; and 8th Avenue was bulldozed in from Greenwich Avenue to Bank Street, tying into Hudson Street.

These remnant lots were seldom economically feasible for major buildings, so small one- and two-story service buildings sprang up in their place. The timing was right for the new demand for car “service stations,” which could fit their underground fuel tanks and driveways into tight corners.

By the 1940 Tax Photo records made of every lot in the city, we see gas stations at nearly every corner, much like towns all over America. Space constrains us from showing all the gas station photos, but you can go to NYC Municipal Archives, 1940 Tax Photos, http://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet, to see for yourself.

Here is a sampling from that record; it is not an exhaustive list. I challenge you to keep an eye out for these former service station locations: 20-22 7th Avenue South, 29 7th Avenue South, 48 7th Avenue South, 56 7th Avenue South, 76 7th Avenue South, 85 7th Avenue South @ 20 Barrow, 115-125 7th Avenue South @ 170 W. 10th, 137-141 7th Avenue South, 162-170 7th Avenue South @ 20 Perry, 157-159 7th Avenue South, 173 7th Avenue South @ 5 Perry, 177 7th Avenue South @ 61-65 Greenwich Ave., 536-544 Hudson St. @ Charles (NE), 532-536 Hudson St. @ Charles (SE), 627 Hudson St. @ 43 Horatio, 22-26 Little West 12th St., 39 Little West 12th St., 404 W. 13th St., and 300 W. 13th St. @ 64 8th Avenue & 1 Horatio. Only the last one remains today.

By Brian J. Pape, AIA, LEED-AP, is an architectural consultant in private practice, serves on the Community Board 2 in Manhattan, is Co-chair of the American Institute of Architects NY Design for Aging Committee, and is WestViewNews.org Architectural Editor.
Jonas Mekas Was Frozen History

By George Capis

66 years ago I was invited by Dick Brummer to his top floor apartment on Perry Street for an small evening party and I found myself glancing down from the rear window at a garden across the way on Charles Street that became the house I bought for my family and in which I am keying this right now.

Dick's family owned the Brummer Gallery on 57th Street which, if you Google them, was a famous institution. They sold many things, from Egyptian relics to avant-garde art from Paris, and a big hunk of what they brought over is now at the Met.

Dick was interested in what we called art films and I had gone to City College at night to study films under Hans Richter who did nutty things in Paris with the Dada gang and selected me to work on his film Dreams that Money Can Buy and I met Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray on the set the first night.

Dick and I got the idea to gather together all the people making art films, as they were also called, and we made a list and on it was the name of Jonas Mekas and his brother Adolphus, who we discovered lived on Orchard Street, which was THE street on the Lower East Side of Jewish retail shops (it was always flooded with shoppers).

They lived in what they called "old law tenement" and they shared the toilet with the tenant on the other side of the wall. There was no bath or shower, so they drove an ice pick into a cold water pipe in the ceiling and would step into a porcelain pan and pull the pick when they wanted to bathe (their tenement is now the Tenement Museum).

Jonas showed me a draft of a film magazine he was putting together with the name Film Culture and I quickly said "no, no, that's not right you gotta give it a better name." I wrongly assumed since he was from Lithuania and was new to English he would accept my suggestions. Not Jonas—and I discovered his granite stubbornness, which he never lost—it stayed Film Culture.

Some months ago I invited Jonas to 69 Charles and he came with his son since, in his 90s, he was frail and walking was treacherous. At one point he stopped and pulled out some typewritten sheets and explained that these were notes of my visit to his apartment 66 years ago written by his brother Adolphi.

Judge Block continued from page 8

more than a decade since Booker, it is time for a careful examination of how they function and whether they are desirable.

Finally, Judge Block's book forces us to continue to think carefully about the role of race in the criminal justice system. This especially comes up in the last chapter about Chevelle Nesbeth, a young woman who was convicted of attempting to smuggle cocaine in the United States.

Judge Block describes focusing on the collateral consequences of her conviction, all of the ways in which Nesbeth would be harmed by a criminal conviction. A felony conviction often is a lifetime disqualification from occupational licenses; in some places, it prevents people from being able to vote. In telling the story of Nesbeth's sentencing, Judge Block examined whether these consequences should be taken into account in deciding her punishment. In one of the more powerful passages, Judge Block describes having just read Michelle Alexander's book, The New Jim Crow. Professor Alexander powerfully details the collateral consequences of criminal convictions, especially in terms of their effects on defendants of color.

This caused Judge Block to write a 42-page opinion and to impose a sentence substantially lower than the Sentence Guidelines range. It also caused Judge Block to instruct the Probation Department to include a collateral consequences section in all future presentence reports. Hopefully, other judges will copy this practice. It should be part of a larger consideration of race in the criminal justice system.

These, of course, are just some of the issues and some of the stories in this wonderful book. Most of all, in reading the book I came away with the sense that regardless of whether I was a prosecutor or a defense lawyer, I would want Judge Block to be hearing my cases. I hope it never happens, but if I or someone I love committed a crime, I would want Judge Block to decide the sentence. I came away from the book with a strong sense that Judge Block does all that a human being possibly can to be conscientious, thoughtful, and fair in imposing punishment. And that is all, as lawyers and as citizens, we can expect of our judges. I am so glad that he wrote this book and gave us the chance to understand his thinking in making the profoundly important decisions about how to punish people for their crimes.

Erwin Chemerinsky is the Dean and Jesse H. Choper Distinguished Professor of Law, University of California, Berkeley School of Law.
It’s My Turn

By James Lincoln Collier

In the recent rather rambling chase for the presidency, there seemed to be a good deal of feeling abroad that it was Hillary’s turn. Bill had had his innings, and despite a small misstep—if that’s the appropriate term—came out of it pretty well. The Bushes believed that it was Jeb’s turn—it seemed only fair, as the other male members of his family had been president at one time or another.

Applying this principle more widely means that Earl Browder ought to have become president. He ran for the office pretty often and never even got close—for example: 80,000 votes in 1936 while Roosevelt got 28 million. Of course, one of Browder’s problems was that he was running on the Communist ticket, which put off a lot of Americans. At that time Communism was more popular than it is today but there was, nonetheless, some feeling in America that Uncle Joe Stalin ought not to have shot quite so many of his friends as he did.

Or take the St. Louis Browns. The only time they won a pennant was in 1944. Most of the best baseball players were in the military service, but the Browns had a lot of players the U.S. government thought unfit for military duty. The Brownies had a very good pitcher named Bobo Newsome who won twenty games for the hapless Brownies one year, but had to lose twenty to do it, principally because too many of the Browns’ hitters didn’t remember—or had never learned—that you had to score runs to win. Finally, the Browns had to slink away shamefacedly and become the Baltimore Orioles. Surely, the Brownies ought to have been given a turn at winning a pennant.

Or take the St. Louis Browns. The only time they won a pennant was in 1944. Most of the best baseball players were in the military service, but the Browns had a lot of players the U.S. government thought unfit for military duty. The Brownies had a very good pitcher named Bobo Newsome who won twenty games for the hapless Brownies one year, but had to lose twenty to do it, principally because too many of the Browns’ hitters didn’t remember—or had never learned—that you had to score runs to win. Finally, the Browns had to slink away shamefacedly and become the Baltimore Orioles. Surely, the Brownies ought to have been given a turn at winning a pennant.

Or take money. Not long ago I read in the newspaper that a thousand Americans own half the country’s wealth (something like that, anyway). What would Abraham Lincoln have thought of that? Or George Washington? Or George Bush? The Bushes have a lot of money, but nothing like what Donald Trump has—if we can take him at his word, which surely we can, as he’s president. Why should Trump have all that money when some writer is eating cornflakes for breakfast, especially when he has to pour ginger ale on his cornflakes because Trump has put a tariff on milk (I think that’s right)? Why isn’t it the writer’s turn to have a million billion dollars? If that isn’t unfair, I don’t know what is.

What about the Native Americans? They got to America before anyone else did, invented scalping, cultivated corn successfully, and made Custer wish he’d stayed home to hoe his tomatoes that day. How come Trump can be president when the natives were here first? Surely it’s their turn. Geronimo would have made a better president than a lot of those we’ve had recently. He’d have sorted out the Clintons and Bushes mighty quick, I can tell you, to say nothing of Donald Trump. I’d like to see Trump complain to Geronimo about Congress. What a hoot Geronimo would have gotten out of that. If he were in the White House we could get rid of that Easter Egg Roll on the front lawn and have scalping practice instead. I’d love to see the look on Putin’s face when Geronimo handed him a tomahawk and gave him a choice of senators. That would put a stop to a lot of loose talk about sanctions.

Or take the Nobel Prize. As far as I can see, it always goes to somebody from a country whose name is spelled entirely with consonants, mostly “l”s. Surely it’s the turn of somebody from a country like Sierra Leone which has plenty of vowels in it. I’m not sure that Sierra Leone is a country or what, but it ought to be because it has plenty of vowels. True, it’s hard to spell, but most people will get close enough. The name of my country isn’t so easy to spell either. A lot of people end up with the “Untied States.” Actually, at the present moment Untied seems about right. Any country that can have a whole family for president is pretty untied, if you ask me.

However, you may not have asked me. All I mean is that the Clintons, the Trumps and the rest have had their turn. I’d like to see how the Trumps would handle Geronimo. That’d be a test of presidential savvy all right. Especially for someone who’s never handled a tomahawk.
Depressed About Trump? Go on Jury Duty

By J. Taylor Basker

I received the dreaded letter demanding that I show up for grand jury duty right after the New Year. I had misplaced my response to their questionnaire that probably would have disqualified me, so I received a jury duty notice. I could have gotten out of it, but since it was a grand jury, which I had never been on, I was interested due to all the critical issues being considered by grand juries in today's current political crisis.

I had been on several jury cases in my life and actually received a lifetime exemption after a long case related to Lyndon Larouche for which I was sequestered in a minus-one-star hotel at JFK for a week. However I couldn’t find any of the court letters to prove I didn't need to go, so I went.

I am not a fan of courts, both reading about their injustices and personally experiencing how unfair they can be. I arrived with my usual rebellious, leftist attitude and entered a large room at 80 Centre Street filled with nearly every ex¬tant specimen of New Yorker. It was like a Petri dish social experiment combining species that would interact negatively, even destructively, with each other in normal conditions.

But here we all sat obediently in silence.

New York City courts represent everything Trump hates: racial and immigrant diversity, rich and poor together with equal rights and responsibilities. No preferences. Your money and prestige mean nothing. Dior and Dollar Store couture sit side by side with equal value and vote.

What was shocking to learn was that out of 500 notices sent, only 80 people showed up! New Yorkers are passing up a wonderful opportunity to understand how our courts can save our democracy! This experience has helped me regain hope in “the system.”

Recently Mueller’s grand jury was extended for six months, but I never understood what grand juries actually did, although we hear about them daily. Indictments are continually announced. But for me, and I think most Americans, what exactly this means is unclear.

The grand jury decides if there is enough evidence to suggest that a crime has been committed. If not, the case gets thrown out. This is a fair and efficient way to avoid bogus accusations and trials. If there is enough evidence they vote to issue an accusation or indictment. You need 16 votes out of 23 jurors.

What I found fascinating during this Trump era was the defined role in law of a grand jury. It examines, not only evidence concerning criminal offenses, but “…misconduct, nonfeasance & neglect in public office, whether criminal or otherwise…”

Grand juries have been in existence for over 800 years. Beginning around 1215 AD both trial juries (also called petit juries) and grand juries were used in England. The grand jury examined the evidence and made a formal accusation known as “bill of indictment” or “presentment “and the trial jury decided if the accusation was proven.

Only one out of 20 juries is a grand juror. Their responsibility is great. They decide if a person can be brought to trial for a felony and they prevent bogus accusations from going to court.

At this writing Mueller’s grand jury indicted about 37 individuals and several entities. This grand jury experience helps me realize how serious these indictments are—they indicate that there is convincing evidence that a crime has been committed. Sheldon Whitehouse, Democratic Senator from Rhode Island, said on a TV interview “I do not at all subscribe to the theory that a president cannot be indicted.” Yet the courts have forced the government to reunite 2,500 families separated at the border. The American court system is slow and cumbersome and imperfect. Yet Justice is advancing on Trump and ordinary American citizens are sealing his fate on grand juries.

Don’t Just Sit There, Resist – Part IX: Impeach, Indict, or Both?

By Alec Pruchnicki

The road to impeachment is clear. A combination of public scandals, congressional investigations, and Mueller findings will result in a long list of potentially impeachable offenses; the House will impeach; and the Senate will either develop a backstory and decide on the evidence whether or not President Trump should be removed, or it will continue to enable his excesses. But impeachment is only removal from office, not punishment for crimes. If anyone from a bank teller to a CEO were to embezzle money from a firm, the person would not punishment for crimes. If anyone from a bank teller to a CEO were to embezzle money from a firm, the person would not be subject to indictment afterward, but doesn’t mention indictment while in office one way or the other.

Although many politicians, especially liberals, believe that the Constitution is a living document that should be interpreted in relation to modern times, many conservatives are Originalists, like the late Justice Scalia, who believe that the original intent of the Founding Fathers takes precedence. So what was their intent?

Congressman Nadler has pointed out that according to the Constitution, congressional members cannot be arrested while going to Congress or be subject to libel laws for what is said during legislative debates. If Congress wanted to give similar protections to the president, they could have put it in, but they didn’t. Every one of the Founding Fathers knew that in 1649 King Charles I of England was executed for high treason, but they still didn’t put in any protection for the president.

Why not indict after the president is removed, or after he leaves office after serving his term? According to the Twenty-Second Amendment ratified in 1951, presidents may only serve for two terms. But in the original Constitution there was no limit, and nobody knew that George Washington was only going to be elected for two terms. A president could have been elected term after term indefinitely, so waiting for him to leave office would have been useless. They could have waited for him to be impeached, but that would assume that he was unable to undermine impeachment by illegal means.

If you remember President John Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, or Martin Luther King Jr., you know that political assassinations are not unheard of in the United States. An internet conspiracy follower shot up a pizza parlor because he believed it was a front for a child abuse ring. If Republicans in Congress are frightened into obedience by threat of a primary election challenge, what would happen if their lives were at stake? Calling a president to account for his actions with an indictment is just as necessary as waiting for an impeachment.

Once all the evidence is in from congressional investigations, state investigations, and Mueller’s work, all options should be available to resist this president. Impeach? Indict? No, both—and as soon as possible.
Elizabeth Street Gardens: A Classic Double-Cross?

By Brian J. Pape, AIA, LEED-AP

Neighbors of the Elizabeth Street Garden (ESG), in the NOHO and Special Little Italy District (SLID), have expressed their concern that years of promises and being ignored have brought about a farce of controversy. CB2 joined in recapping the disingenuous way the city has mistreated this district at its public board meeting on January 24th.

To focus on the current status of this beautifully decorated lot, privately rented from the city by the antique store next door to it and managed by ESG Inc., a non-profit group that offers free year-round public programs, really misses the point.

The ESG site was part of the Free School Society’s P.S. 5, built in 1822, then donated to the city in 1853 for other educational use according to the deed restrictions. The 1940 tax photos show the ornate P.S. 21 school, rebuilt in 1903, with a basketball court fenced next to 209 Elizabeth Street. The city demolished the school in 1974, and the double-cross began.

In 1981 the city sold the southern part of the school site, which was then used for a 151-unit Section 8 affordable housing building at 21 Spring Street, reserving the northern part (the ESG site) “exclusively for recreational use.” Why was there no controversy in changing from educational to residential use? Well, in those days, neglect and crime tested the resolve of all who lived there.

Instead of abiding by the deed restrictions, or even abiding by its obligation to keep the lot as recreation space, the city allowed the site to deteriorate, trying to pass off the use of the site to the 21 Spring Street tenants who could not afford to maintain it. Into this morass stepped a neighborhood business, Elizabeth Street Gallery, a store selling antiques and architectural decorations (and some large sculptures too), that rented the weedy, fenced lot from the city.

The city made the Gallery owner promise to clean up the garbage and he did that and so much more. Since 2013, the lot has been opened by neighbors, similar to many other downtown open garden plots. For the seniors living at 21 Spring Street, and all the other neighbors, the Garden is a godsend, as they have repeatedly testified at hearings.

The double-cross isn’t over yet. In 2012, the councilperson for the Essex Crossing Redevelopment area, in a different district, made a backroom deal ear-marking the ESG site for affordable housing. The neighbors and CB2 were not informed about this until a year after the deed was done. Once this double-cross was discovered a concerted effort was made to return it to “exclusively for recreational use.”

For WestView News readers, several previous articles have presented opposing viewpoints about this site. At numerous public meetings advocates have presented impassioned pleas for their causes. Mayor de Blasio is looking for more affordable housing, emphasizing that the need is great—especially for the local senior population—and no one disagrees with that.

The community board has studied the various issues for years, reported their findings at the open meetings, and strongly advocated for much-needed park space as well as more consideration of better sites for affordable housing blocks close to community and recreational centers, public libraries and parks, but their findings seem to go unheeded. Friends of ESG want the park-like atmosphere preserved as a public neighborhood park forever, as promised by the city.

This impasse seems to beg the question: can we get both affordable housing and more park space, rather than either/or? The city needs both to survive.

The Haven Green proposal is an affordable senior housing development for this site. In November 2018, the public got its first preview of a potential development plan from Philip Habib & Associates for Penrose LLC and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). The Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) responds to a Request for Proposals (RFP) from the HPD. The proposed work requires the City Planning Commission (CPC) to approve the real estate disposition, as well as multiple other approvals.

The proposed development is a seven-story, 74-foot tall, 92,761 GSF (gross square feet) mixed-use building containing 123 units of affordable senior housing, 4,454 GSF of ground floor local retail, 12,885 GSF of community facility space for Habitat for Humanity offices, and 6,700 GSF of site, there are sacrifices they will impose on others. Half of the Haven Green apartments are to go to residents of Little Italy who presumably want to stay in their area. They must sacrifice their neighborhood and move a mile away to Hudson Street, which is significantly different from Little Italy. They must also sacrifice the time it would take to build something there instead of Haven Green, which could be up in a few years.

I think that affordable housing in the far West Village, including the Hudson Street site, is needed and should be done. But would residents of that area living in luxury condos or townhouses be willing to have a massive (may be 25-30 stories) high-rise of racially integrated affordable and low-income housing built within a block of their homes in one of the whitest and richest neighborhoods in Manhattan? It only takes one person with enough money, of which there are plenty, to hire a lawyer and stop the whole project in its tracks. Or would they all be willing to change the nature of their neighborhood so that the gentrify of Little Italy can have their beautiful little garden?

When we change our position to “I support affordable housing and this is what we, including myself, should sacrifice,” then we can actually get it built, starting with Haven Green. Build housing on Elizabeth Street already.
There is a Steak of the Day, a selection of burgers, and pasture raised (like at the butcher shop). One of the meats is grass-fed and used in the "Mozz Bomb" as well as in Mozz Sticks (fried mozzarella sticks), chicken parm bread and other salads and sandwiches. **Duchess Cookies** replaces Chip NYC in Gansevoort Market, and **Noodle Culture** has set up a stand there as well. The chef, Alonso Guzman Arellano is Mexican but his cooking is traditional Taiwanese. The scallop pancakes are filled with beef and jalapeno, and various dumplings, soups and noodles are also on the menu.

**Hudson and Charles Dinette – 522 Hudson Street between Charles and West 10th Streets.** The butcher shop, Hudson and Charles, has taken over part of the space formerly occupied by The Quarter. The meats are grass-fed and pasture raised (like at the butcher shop). One of the most popular items is the KFC, Korean Fried Chicken. There is a Steak of the Day, a selection of burgers, and tallow fries. So far the Yelp reviews have been largely positive. The owners did much of the renovation work themselves (they have experience in this area as they were doing painting and other odd jobs to raise money when they first opened the butcher shop.)

It now appears that **BLKSQ Pizza** is the latest closure at 44 9th Avenue (at 14th Street). A yellow "Closed by order of the Commissioner of Health and Mental Hygiene" appeared in their window at the end of December, and now their website is down and the reservation site is not accepting reservations. Ever since **The Diner** closed two years ago, the restaurants that have opened there have closed in record time (Farbird Southern Kitchen, Chubby Slim's Joyful Nosh). The Russian restaurant **Onegin** (391 Avenue of the Americas near Washington Place) has been dark for the past few weeks, and Yelp report it closed. A few months ago it also went dark, but then re-opened, and the website for the restaurant is still active, so it is possible that it is not the end for Onegin.

**Coming Soon**

Italian luxury leather goods purveyor **Il Bisonte** will be opening a location at 381 Bleecker Street (near Perry Street). Il Bisonte was founded in 1970 in Florence, and has expanded worldwide with stores in Europe, the US and Asia. The old Croman-owned Taste of Lima space which has been empty since mid-2016 has signage in the window indicating that a restaurant called **Fiat** will be opening there. **Avenue Downtown** will be opening at 260 Sixth Avenue (between Bleecker and West Houston Streets) in the large space where Da Silvano used to be. The chef, Roberto De la Cruz, also runs a midtown Avena, and used to be the Executive Chef at Armani Ristorante 5th Avenue and Cipriani.

**Closed/Closing**

**Vivi Bubble Tea** (65 West 8th Street at 6th Avenue), the bubble and Chinese fast food chain of shops has closed this location. **Fava Bistro** (74 7th Ave South at Barrow Street) seems to have fallen victim to its cursed location: there have been at least 4 restaurants there in the last 10 years, maybe more (Some of the ones I remember are Centro Vinoteca, Catmint Wheel Cake has replaced Mr. Panzerotto at 124 MacDougal Street (near Minetta Lane). A wheel cake is a Taiwanese specialty with a cakey exterior and flavored fillings. The Citizenny Bunkhouse (379 Bleecker Street between Charles and Perry Streets) opened a pop-up during the holiday season, and closed on December 22nd. However, a sign in the window indicates they will be re-opening on January 23rd. The store features bedding, pillows and other decorative items from artisans around the world.

**CORRECTION:** We want to make sure our readers know that **Downtown** will be open- another location at 381 Bleecker Street (near Perry Street). Il Bisonte was founded in 1970 in Florence, and has expanded worldwide with stores in Europe, the US and Asia. The old Croman-owned Taste of Lima space which has been empty since mid-2016 has signage in the window indicating that a restaurant called **Fiat** will be opening there. **Avenue Downtown** will be opening at 260 Sixth Avenue (between Bleecker and West Houston Streets) in the large space where Da Silvano used to be. The chef, Roberto De la Cruz, also runs a midtown Avena, and used to be the Executive Chef at Armani Ristorante 5th Avenue and Cipriani.

**Moved/Other**

Baked goods return to 298 Bleecker Street (near Barrow): a reader reminds us that the old-fashioned French bakery Lafayette used to occupy this space years ago, and now a sign on the door announces the imminent arrival of Chip NYC, the freshly baked cookie spot that used to have a stand in Gansevoort Market. In a pattern we've seen repeated more frequently in the past year, a pop-up morphs into a permanent store: The Citizenry Bunkhouse (379 Bleecker Street between Charles and Perry Streets) opened a pop-up during the holiday season, and closed on December 22nd. However, a sign in the window indicates they will be re-opening on January 23rd. The store features bedding, pillows and other decorative items from artisans around the world.

**Closed/Closing**

Vivi Bubble Tea (65 West 8th Street at 6th Avenue), the bubble and Chinese fast food chain of shops has closed this location. Fava Bistro (74 7th Ave South at Barrow Street) seems to have fallen victim to its cursed location: there have been at least 4 restaurants there in the last 10 years, maybe more (Some of the ones I remember are Centro Vinoteca, Duet, and Maison de Makoto.) Also open but a short while was Nightingale (407 Greenwich Avenue between Bank and West 12th Streets) which replaced the beloved Good.

**Also Open**

Asian restaurants continue to open at a fast pace in the Village: **Kogane Ramen** (337 West 14th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues) now occupies the downstairs space where Mulino a Vino used to be. The owners also have a restaurant of the same name in Brooklyn. In addition to the usual ramen soups, you can find suéte à ramen and a ramen burger.

**Catmint Wheel Cake** has replaced Mr. Panzerotto at 124 MacDougal Street (near Minetta Lane). A wheel cake is a Taiwanese specialty with a cakey exterior and flavored fillings. The Citizenny Bunkhouse (379 Bleecker Street between Charles and Perry Streets) opened a pop-up during the holiday season, and closed on December 22nd. However, a sign in the window indicates they will be re-opening on January 23rd. The store features bedding, pillows and other decorative items from artisans around the world.
Eating the Brand

By David Porat

Lexus, Starbucks and Restoration Hardware (RH) are all trying to make friends by tickling your taste buds and satiating your tummy. All three have opened up impresive, or shall I say grand, temples to their brands in the Meatpacking and Chelsea Market Neighborhood. I have enjoyed in curious ways visiting all three and yes, they do satisfy your hunger amongst other things.

Intersect by Lexus is maybe my favorite of the three: it is the least impressive physically, and yet, the décor is very tasteful. The restaurant has a relatively unassuming storefront on the south side of 14th Street between 9th Avenue and Washington Street. It is managed by Danny Meyer’s Union Square Hospitality Group, with the premise that it will feature rotating chefs from well-known restaurants. The Global Chef-In-Residence, as they are called, develop the menu and dishes, and will change every 4-6 months. I happened to wander upon it after reading about it online and have been back three times to eat in the upstairs restaurant (there is also a café on the ground floor and a cocktail lounge which features a round bar upstairs across from the restaurant). Currently, the space is a platform for Frenchie, a restaurant owned by Chef Gregory Marchand. The original Frenchie is in Paris, but Marchand recently opened a new branch in the Covent Garden neighborhood in London. The chef has a book that came out in 2017 which I almost bought on my first visit (I hesitated because I thought I would get it on Amazon, but I was pleasantly surprised that it was not available there) and then later actually bought (a signed copy!) on one of my subsequent visits. The book includes chapters on New York (where Marchard worked at Gramercy Tavern), London and Paris. The restaurant has a lunch menu, a larger and slightly more expensive dinner menu and a bar menu, all of which are thoughtfully done. The food, whether it be his interpretation of a Lobster Roll, Fried Chicken, or more classic French items was impressive and I would recommend going before the next gig starts. The prices include service and were, in my mind, very reasonable for the quality.

Starbucks Reserve Roastery, which opened in December, is a 26,000 square foot space that includes a large and small coffee roaster, a restaurant, a bar, a few shopping areas, a bakery and a take home area. The whole is very visually appealing; it has a wood, cooper, and leather theme and it appears that no expense was spared in creating an environment that will attract tourists and locals who are looking for a lifestyle experience rather than a quick cup of coffee. A quick cup of coffee can still be obtained across the street at a ‘regular’ Starbucks. This corner, lacking the distinct look of separate storefronts appear to continue around at least two entrance doors shown, there were still questions about window sizes and how the façade that, despite careful light-colored brick moralizing an overhung soffit, which seemed too simple for this district. Other questions about the penthouse height and surface treatments were heard.

Although the retail space on the ground floor is designed for small local shops, with at least two entrance doors shown, there were still questions about window sizes and how the storefronts appear to continue around the corner, lacking the distinct look of separate buildings. Further consideration may be given to these details in future presentations. The consultants have appeared before in public hearings with their designs for historic neighborhoods, and their firms’ experience include many successful buildings. Their efforts to design the new buildings to fit in with the streetscape will go a long way to achieving approvals.

By Brian J. Pape, AIA, LEED-AP

The public was treated to presentations for new building proposals at recent LPC and CB2 meetings. This first offering seems to be a welcomed addition to a rather neglected spot on the once thriving “Positively 8th Street” section near Jimi Hendrix’s former Electric Lady recording studios. This corner in previous years was occupied by a four-story hotel (similar to the hotel at the other corner down at MacDougal and Waverly Place), but has now been reduced to one-story “taxpayers,” and the tenement to the left of it is heavily modified and well-worn. Two doors further left at 171-173 MacDougal is a beautifully repurposed six-story factory/ bindery building built in 1891, with red brick and bold cornices, remodeled in 1966 as a Christian Science church facility. Washington Square Park starts at the Waverly corner. The proposal by Morris Adjmi Architects and Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, for their client Straus Group, incorporates three building lots on MacDougal, so they propose to renovate the tenement building to restore many exterior details and market-rate apartment interiors, then add a new ground-up mixed-use (market-rate apartments above retail) building on the other two lots. As presented, it is an as-of-right design conforming to zoning laws, building codes, and height and area requirements, meaning that if it weren’t in a historic district, it would be approved at the city staff level and permitted without any public hearings.

But it is in the original 1969 Greenwich Village Historic District, and aropolis of the public presentations, comments from those in attendance were offered to the presenters, who seemed to be attentive to them. Some comments were critical of the large 8th Street façade that, despite careful light-colored brick detailing, still seemed too immense to some, who wonder if more differentiating could be added as on the MacDougal side. Other comments focused on the corner chamfered entry treatment, with a simple column supporting an overhanging soffit, which seemed too simple for this district. Other questions about the penthouse height and surface treatments were heard.

Changes Coming to West 8th Street and MacDougal Street Buildings
Uprooted

By Mitchell Donian

I have been uprooted. After living in Greenwich Village for sixty years I am homeless. In an effort to regain a place in the community my good friend and publisher George Capsis of WestView News suggested I write my story with some biographical detail.

I had a rent controlled apartment, was being harassed and badly served by my landlord, and was offered what appeared to be lovely living quarters upstairs with my niece and her husband. I took the jump, settled for a smaller space and the feeling was right. Turns out the husband is a pot smoker 24/7 and a kleptomaniac. He rifled through my belongings, took everything of value that suited him, and a month later threw me out.

My name is Mitchell Donian. I moved to 204 West 10 St. in 1958 shortly after attending Columbia University. I attended on the GI Bill, having served in the Korean War. Most of my service was as a journalist for the military newspaper Stars & Stripes. I was a good student at Columbia and even lectured a class on Mary Shelley when my professor asked me to cover for him when he left early on summer sabbatical. I earned 184 credits but never graduated, having unfinished language requirements.

In my attempts at employment during the Eisenhower recession I proofread for the Village Voice and later for the Jewish Standard. I also built and ran a coffee shop restaurant, The Iron Cat, in Brooklyn Heights. I am an excellent cook...Armenian...Chinese...Italian...name it, and an accomplished mas- seur. Eventually I got in the film business as a technician, working on documentaries all over the country, South America and Africa. After a few years experience and friendship with the late Gordon Parks Jr., I worked as Director of Photography for the feature Super Fly. We started shooting at Boomers’, a restaurant/bar between 10th and Christopher. Bobby Timmons played some mean piano there. The producer floated a rubber check for the equipment. My footage with Curtis Mayfield served to raise the initial money which brought the film into being.

One of my big accomplishments was to serve as Executive Producer for Last of the Blue Devils, a documentary about Kansas City Jazz. In an effort to make it pay off to the backers I created a television series, writing the book and 13 episode outlines. Redd Foxx signed on and Edgar Sherrick, a leading Hollywood producer, agreed to be the umbrella producer. This was in 1983. The only black presence on television at that time was a maid on one sitcom. All the networks turned it down, even start-up HBO. They didn’t like Fox and turned down Flip Wilson and Bill Cosby, saying they were “has-beens.” Six months later—The Cosby Show. The way I laid out the series it would still be viable today. I gave up my producer credit for a time to Clint Eastwood at the request of Warner Brothers because Clint was promoting a Charlie Parker movie and needed a connection with jazz. I could use his help now in getting the Blue Devils project going.

One last biographical note. While on a visit to my mother in LA a few years back I was offered a try-out for the role of a Palestinian for an Aaron Spelling project. At the time I could not accept. I believe the project is still viable and am seeking agent representation to re-open the deal. Since then, I have written book and lyrics for two musicals, one of them complete with music from some very talented composers. So much for biography. Right now, thanks to a friend, I am a guest. But being a guest has its limits. I am looking for a permanent place in Manhattan, preferably in the Village. Buy or rent, I can pay. If you can help please call George or email me, Mitchdonian@gmail.com. If there is a little studio in Westbeth, that would be ideal.

Jefferson Market Library Offers Environmental Justice Course

Mark your calendars and sign up for the new (free) Environmental Justice and Community Action course brought to you by Jefferson Market Library University Programs of the New York City Public Library. Registration opens to the public on January 29 at 10:00 am and closes on February 11 at 8:00 pm. Students may register online, in person at the second-floor information desk, or by phone by calling 212-243-4334. The Library is located at 425 6th Ave, New York, NY 10011. The class will run on Tuesdays from 6-7:30 pm

Environmental Justice and Neighborhood Action is a class that will be taught in seminar style. It will introduce students to the history, concept and movement of environmental justice. Students will learn about environmental justice from the perspective of race, class and gender. They will study the role and types of community actions in achieving environmental justice principles. Students will also put theory into practice through teamwork, collaborations and planning. As part of the course, students will identify projects involving collaborations in putting environmental justice principles into neighborhood action.

The concept of environmental justice embraces the principle that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. The course expands on this knowledge by establishing a direct relationship of America’s segregation history and its connections to environmental pollution. By the end of the class, students will be equipped to articulate why race, class and gender matter in environmental justice and how these socioeconomic factors map out closely with pollution, unequal protection and vulnerability.

The Professor is José Gámez Contreas. He is a Ph.D. candidate in Public and Urban Policy at Milano School of Policy, Management and Environment of The New School. He has extensive background in community organizing, small business planning, and political engagement. His dissertation focuses on the intersection of environmental justice and green jobs. He has earned two master’s degrees, one in public and urban policy; and one in environmental law and policy. If you have any questions about the course contact him at gabj753@newschool.edu

The Jefferson Market Library is committed to diversity and social inclusion. This course is designed for people of all ages and backgrounds. No prior experience with the topic is necessary. No textbooks are required. Readings are available online. Space is limited, so register now and share this information with a friend.

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Sunday February 3, 3 pm
Dvořák Romances
Acclaimed pianist Margarita Rovenskaya and friends perform romantic works for piano and strings.
César Franck - Piano Quintet in F minor

Tuesday February 5, 7:30 pm
A Stitch in Time: Quilts by Cindy Beal
Award-winning quilter Cindy Beal is a Greenwich Village artist whose career has spanned four decades. The quilts presented in this exhibition range from the 1980s to the present day. Join the artist and friends for drinks and opening of the exhibition on the first Tuesday in February. The show runs until late February. Free, but registration is necessary.

Friday February 8, 7:30 pm
Pop Stars: Art Songs Re-imagined (Marking Black History Month)
James Dargan, baritone, and Amir Farid, piano, will take you on a journey through some of the tunes of Gabriel Fauré and Franz Schubert, highlighting the connections between their songs and some of the music we’ve come to consider ‘popular’ music. The concert also features some Dargan arrangements of popular current classics.
Tickets start at $20.

Saturday February 9, 7:30 pm:
Bolero, Tango and Romance!
An Evening of Spanish Dance & Song in Revelation Gallery.
Come celebrate Valentine’s Day early in this soirée full of love and romance. Be ready to dance!
Tickets $20

Sunday January 10, 3 pm
Concert:—Maryam Kheirbek
PROGRAM: Beethoven Sonata, Op. 90, Op. 1 110, Chopin Ballad #3 and 4
Pianist Maryam Kheirbek is internationally recognized for her dynamic stage presence and creative versatility. She gave her first public recital at the age of nine, and made her Carnegie Hall debut at the age of sixteen.
Tickets $10 - $20

Thursday February 14, 7:30 pm
Valentine’s Jazz Concert: The Music of Love
Join the internationally-acclaimed Charu Suri Trio on Valentine’s Day, as they perform original music as well as jazz renditions of timeless love songs. Suri’s first album, “Lollipops for Breakfast,” won a Global Music Award. She and her trio perform regularly in the New York City area and are planning to tour various cities in the U.S. in 2019.
Tickets $25

Saturday February 16, 7:30 pm
Let My People Sing (Marking Black History Month)
St John’s celebrates Black History Month 2019 with a concert of diverse music features three African-American vocalists. Join singers Lindell Carter, Jonathan Green, and Kofti Hayward in celebrating the rich repetoire of the American spiritual alongside opera favorites and songs of Cole Porter.
Tickets $20

Sunday February 17, 3 pm: Francesca Khalifa
Italian pianist Francesca Khalifa presents
• J. S. Bach—Concerto nach Italienischen Gusto
• L. van Beethoven - Sonata No. 31 Op. 110
• J. Brahms - Variations on a Theme of R. Schumann Op. 9
Tickets $10 - $20

Mondays February 18 and 25, 7 pm
Chant Workshops
Learn the performance practice of the music medieval West with Professor Lawrence Harris. Ideal for choir directors, choral scholars, and music students. Previous knowledge of chant notation is not necessary. A 7pm preliminary session helps those less experienced in preparation for the workshop. Free but registration is advised. Email chantproject@stjvny.org stating attendance from either 7pm or 7:30 pm.

Saturday February 23, 3 pm
Music for Piano and Strings
Jack Kulowitsch and the Strathmere Ensemble present some of the best-lover repertoire of the string quartet oeuvre.
• Mendelssohn—String Quartet no 2 in A minor
Mozart—Sonata for Violin and Oiano.
t$20 (Free to seniors but booking is essential)

Sunday February 24, 3 pm
Music of a Sunday Afternoon
Join St John’s Honorary Assistant Organist, Jonathan DePeri (pianist, organists, harpsichordist) and friends in a Sunday afternoon of chamber music.
Tickets $10 - $20

Tuesday February 26, 7 pm
Carnival of the Animals (Revelation Gallery)
Opening of "The Carnival of the Animals": works by Lisa Kaiser.
Join artist Lisa Kaiser in an evening of music and drinks in the presence of many animals!
The Opening Night is free but registration is essential. The exhibition runs until late March.
Winter Thoughts

By Tom Lamia

It is cold in South Bristol, Maine. Of course, it is midwinter and this land lies east and north of all but Alaska among our states. There is snow on the ground and ice on the ponds and roads. One might say the landscape is bleak and the seascape forbidding, but not I. I say the worm, though frozen, has turned.

Maine has a new governor, a woman and the first of her kind in this state. Last year I wrote about a remarkable Maine woman, Frances Perkins, whose conditions for accepting FDR’s invitation to become labor secretary became the blueprint for the New Deal. Perkins is buried nearby in Newcastle in a small cemetery adjacent to the family’s 17th century brickyard on the Damariscotta River. Maine women of note include Senators Margaret Chase Smith, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins. Janet Mills, the retiring attorney general and the new governor, will be added to this distinguished list.

The preceding paragraph appears in this “Winter Thoughts” essay for a hopeful reason: As it is often darkest before the dawn, so may it be coldest before spring brings new life to Maine. The former Governor, Paul LePage, about whom I wrote last year, brought a tough, often surly attitude to Maine’s government, calling himself “Trump before Trump” and showing little compassion for those who have trouble making it in the struggle for a comfortable life. Unlike Trump, however, LePage could legitimately claim to have had his attitudes formed by his own struggles to survive and prosper.

LePage served two four-year terms and never reconciled his views with those of his political enemies. He started his administration by ordering the removal of a New Deal era frieze depicting Frances Perkins and others from the Maine Department of Labor building, saying its message, being pro-labor, was antithetical to Maine’s new pro-business policies. Throughout his governorship he fought in the courts to sustain his controversial policies. After the voters of Maine approved Medicaid expansion, LePage went to court to prevent it. He and Mills, his attorney general, regularly presented their differing views on constitutionality to the courts.

Now that is done.

Mills is the other side of the LePage coin, a bright-eyed and sparkling person of energy, wit and accomplishment. Like LePage, she is an unalloyed product of Maine. If life has been hard on her (as it surely has been), she does not show any scars. She is a talker and a laugher, proud of her rural heritage and eager to get to work on her new duties and to turn that work into a new day for Maine.

The Mills administration will test my theory of government (shared by a majority of humanity) that a smile, a wave and an embrace of those who need encouragement is the first step to forming and executing policies that make us all better and feel good about it.

These thoughts are among my Winter Thoughts in large part because I see a population here in Maine and throughout our country, eager to turn the corner from the cold and bleak of winter, mean-spiritedness and government by dictatorial fiat to a new season in which elected representatives and their appointed officials work to make lives better, with smiles on their faces and the people’s interest in their hearts. Oh, yes, and with efficiency and without corruption. This is what I expect of our new governor’s administration.

The Women’s Rest Room and Abortion

By Dr. Donna Schaper

Call me a drama queen or call me a woman. At least call me focused: I have one thing I want changed. It is the lines at the theaters in which women stand while men do not. Unisex bathrooms don’t only help people with “non-conforming” gender identities, they help women in general too.

The right to choose an abortion may be directly akin to the way we stand in line, while a few men go in and out. Little things mean a lot. Yes, there are marvelous exceptions to the interminable sexism. But they are exceptions. This annoying and relatively minor problem is emblematic of the major problems we face.

Women have a lot in common—and not just the right to manage our sexual and reproductive lives. A lot of people waste our time. The women’s marches of January 19th gave us a lot to think about. As one sign said at one of the rallies I attended (I attended all three), “If you are in a broad coalition where there aren’t divisions, then you are not yet in a broad enough coalition.” Bernice Johnson Regan of Sweet Honey in the Rock was listed as the author. I liked that sign a lot.

Not all women want to have an abortion even in a complex or inconvenient pregnancy. But the great majority of women DO want to have that choice. These women are overwhelmingly supported by those women who want the justice of choosing. Poll after poll shows that the American public overwhelmingly supports the right to choose an abortion, even if the person being policed would not choose one themselves.

We have often quipped that “if men needed abortions, abortion would be a sacrament.” Why do we say snarky things like that? Men don’t even “need” all the bathrooms they get. That’s one sign of what can only be understood as blindness to fundamental inequality.

You might have seen episode one of season two of The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. The title character’s father doesn’t even realize his wife, Rose Weiszman, has left him for a couple of days. When he does, he responds with outrage. How could she do that to him? A better version of male supremacy could not have been written. First, he doesn’t get it. And then when he gets it, he thinks it’s all about him. Whatever suffering she might have experienced is invisible to him, so imprisoned is he in his own hyper self-consciousness.

This kind of unconscious sexism remains widespread. It’s not just men in the 1950s. Many who would like to have unprotected sex with us, especially when we are all younger, is another version of this unconscious sexism. Why don’t men see their own interests in as-suring the right to reproductive technologies? Because condoms are “uncomfortable”

Just let me say one word, JUDGEKA-VANAUGH to show you the size of the problem, both personally for women and publicly for the country. Kavanaughs’s heroic challenger got a third of the airtime he did, if that. What is her name again?? Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, that’s her name.

Fortunately, New York State has found its senses recently and its governor has decided to become abortion cheerleader in chief. Our laws will once again become the best in the nation—and abortion will move out of the “criminal” code (!) and later term abortions will be possible.

There is actually good news about abortion for people in the West Village and beyond. These essential rights to reproductive justice, once legally guaranteed, will let us get back to the long-term work of earning more than 85 cents on the man’s dollar and getting public venues to stop privileging men in bathroom lines.

Things could be different beyond New York State’s good news. Pay us the same as you pay men and we’ll do twice the job. With Ginger Rogers, we will do everything Fred Astaire did, in high heels, and backwards. This larger issue will come when women unite around not putting up with stupid stuff anymore, like long lines at the theater, that not only waste our time but also insult our humanity.

Our religious freedom joins our sexual and reproductive freedom in being unimportant. We are supposed to think the way Roman Catholicism and punishmentalist Christianity think about us. They know better and have controlled the airwaves and the public policies for too long. Many of us think differently about God and think God loves and respects women as much as HE/SHE/THEY respect men. We also think that women are equal "humans” to the idolatrous superiority of men. Once God and laws get on your side, even the Mrs. Weiszmanns of the world will stop putting up with certain kinds of men.
Understand the Essentials of Eczema —Your Skin Will Thank You!

By Dr. Peter Saitta

Our city during the holiday season is a very special place. Streets are filled with Christmas cheer, Santa is on his sleigh, and shop windows are magnificently dressed for the occasion. But the freezing cold air and bitter winds of our famous New York winters can sting, irritate, and dry your skin, all of which will make your atopic dermatitis much more of a problem.

Atopic dermatitis, also known as eczema or atopic eczema, is a complex, complicated, and very common problem. It can be affected by genetics, geography, your body’s immune system, and a cold, windy climate like the one in which we live. It rarely appears for the first time in adulthood; rather, it most commonly manifests within the first five years of life. A great deal is known about the condition in all its forms, however, no one really knows why some people outgrow it while others do not. Approximately 20% of children and 3% of adults will contend with atopic dermatitis for a lifetime.

Recently, I had the privilege of discussing the condition with one of our city’s most prominent dermatologists, Dr. Ronald Brancaccio. Our offices are located in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and on our very own Perry Street. We explain to our patients that atopic dermatitis is definitely not an allergy, although it is frequently seen in individuals with a family history of asthma, hay fever, and other allergies. It is important to note that food cannot cause or exacerbate atopic dermatitis.

Atopic dermatitis is rarely cured, but it can easily be managed under the care of an experienced dermatologist. Dr. Brancaccio suggests the following guidelines that may help you deal with the condition at home:

1. Steer clear of harsh soaps and use unscented Dove soap for best results.
2. Wear breathable fabrics such as 100% cotton, and steer clear of scratchy, heavy materials like wool.
3. Do your best to limit stress. Few of us could live, or even imagine, a stress-free life, but if you have atopic dermatitis, an increase in stress is likely to trigger a new episode or worsen an existing one.
4. Moisturize your skin daily with a moisturizer that contains petrolatum, glycerin, and some ceramide. I enthusiastically recommend CeraVe Moisturizing Cream. Find it over the counter in the white and blue jar and use it often.
5. Keep a journal of the things that trigger your atopic dermatitis and avoid those things when possible. If these suggestions aren’t enough, my colleague, Dr. Anna Karp, and I are here in our Perry Street office to help you with various types of medication, light and laser phototherapy, and other simple and painless methods of successfully controlling atopic dermatitis.

Dr. Brancaccio, Karp, and I hope you had a happy holiday and will have a healthy new year. Make controlling your atopic dermatitis one of your New Year’s resolutions. It’s the doctor’s order and your skin will thank you!

Caruso’s Quips

By Charles Caruso

It’s impossible to carry a pizza home with dignity.

Tom Brady is Jack Kennedy. He’s a winner, rich and famous, Irish from New England, handsome with a beautiful wife.

The truest test of friends is how they act when you’re broke.

There’s so much walking in Hemingway’s Paris memoir that it could be titled ‘Moveable Feets’

By their books shall ye know them.

Time slips away at the hinges.

Would we have loved Che so much if he had looked like Woody Allen?

A light blowing out is an augury.

After all the dreaming and planning, after all the reading and research, after all the speaking and listening, we end up obsessed with the most ridiculous part of our decaying treacherous bodies.

Few people met Anthony Bourdain, but millions miss him.

People who are always using the word ‘class’ never have any.

Too sweet is as bad as too sour.

Slogging Through Winter, Part Two

By Jane Heil Usyk

I’ve already pushed through December and January. Now there are only three months left to go until beautiful (or mostly beautiful) May.

Three months. What can you do with three months? Once I wrote a book in three months. I don’t feel like doing that again, though. Three dark, depressing months.

What can one do to counteract that?

Well, not too much jumps up at me; you can go to the movies, which I do, several times a week. And you can celebrate at every opportunity, to brighten the day, put yourself in touch with other like-minded, depressed folks like yourself, and provide a forum for sharing observations on the current season and anything else you’d like to share.

Here are my plans for this winter (some have already occurred). In December: well, for thousands of years people have recognized the problem of less and less sunlight and worked on it, coming up with yule logs, Christmas celebrations, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, candles, singing, gifts, trees, et cetera.

In our senior center we have a Spanish class, and our class always has a Christmas party. Everyone brought their signature dish, and we shared all the food and chatted each other up. Some years we’ve had a musician, but not this year. Some years we sing, but this year we didn’t. So it was just a lot of conversation, and friendliness, and food and wine. It was a celebration, something out of the ordinary.

In January my friend Joan, whom I met at Lucca on Father Demo Square almost forty years ago, had a big party—and this was after the brunch my husband and I had with John and Margaret on New Year’s Day. They were both fun, but Joan’s was terrific! Her apartment is big enough for a separate smoking area in the back, so people were back there smoking. There was also lots to eat: lox, olives, cheese, hummus, shrimp, Turkish chili. Ten kinds of dessert. And a LOT of wine. Plus, I knew nearly everyone who was there—about twenty nice people, some I hadn’t seen in years and years. I especially enjoyed talking with one of Joan’s cousins, an old lawyer named Max.

So that was helpful in January. Also, there is Three Kings Day, January 6th, which happens to be our anniversary. We will print your thoughts in the next issue

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By Robert Heide

Michael Smith, who for many years wrote a column for the Village Voice called Theatre Journal and was chief drama critic at that now shuttered newspaper, has written a detailed account of his life as a man of many guises, editor, writer, playwright, poet, director, mayoral aide, musician, and publisher of Fast Books Press which published his 520 page memoir entitled Michael Townsend Smith—Me and Others—An American Life wherein are found adventures coupled with direct, sometimes piercing, insights into what might be called the Naked Truth. I found it a great read. This is the first chapter ‘Holy Memories’ (1935-1956) covers his life from birth in Kansas City, Missouri, through the War, to Caffe Cino where Andy also came to see my play The Bed which he filmed and premiered on a split-screen at the Filmmakers Cinematheque. The longest running show at Cino was 1930s style musical Dames at Sea, based on the Busby Berkeley movies, and directed by Robert Dahdah with Bernadette Peters in her first stage performance. The Cino had many hit plays like I Like It (for more money), Michael graduated to full-time chief theater critic, writing his influential Theater Journal column, and taking over the Obie Awards. Then Michael had found a home base at the Caffe Cino at 31 Cornelia Street where he wrote his play I Like It and directed and lit many shows there and at LaMama, Theater Genesis, the Living Theater and the Open Theater with Joe Chaiken and Jean Claude Van Italie.

Somehow, suddenly, Michael quit to the disappointment of his father who withdrew financial support. Michael continued dance classes for several years in New York with his uncle Alfred Munt and aunt Maxine, who later opened a theater called The Changing Scene in Denver. At one point they convinced me to write a new play entitled Split Level and produced it on a double bill with my play Moon following its successful run at Caffe Cino. In New York, Michael met agent-photographer Helen Merrill who introduced him to Tony Perkins. The two became friends. Michael first developed a stage door crush on the famous star of Tea and Sympathy on Broadway where Perkins played a troubled gay man.

Latter through Merrill, Michael began proofreading and copyrighting for Ed Fancher, Dan Wolf and Norman Mailer at the Village Voice where he wrote ‘Hub Caps’, a column about cars. Jerry Tallmer, chief critic at the Voice, invented the term off-off-Broadway and founded the ‘Obie’ Awards. Michael met and worked with Judith Malina and Julian Beck at their Living Theatre on 14th Street and 6th Avenue, where the jazz play The Connection was a big hit and drugs were everywhere—marijuana, cocaine, crystal meth, dexamphetamine and heroin, the last being the play’s subject. In 1962 when Jerry Tallmer left the Voice for the New York Post (for more money), Michael became drama critic, writing his influential Theater Journal column, and taking over the Obie Awards. Then Michael had found a home base at the Caffe Cino at 31 Cornelia Street where he wrote his play I Like It and directed and lit many shows there and at LaMama, Theater Genesis, the Living Theater and the Open Theater with Joe Chaiken and Jean Claude Van Italie.

I myself was running between Andy Warhol’s Factory where drugs were plentiful—Andy put me in his movie Batman/Dracula, and Camp with Jack Smith—and to Caffe Cino where Andy also came to see my play The Bed which he filmed and premiered on a split-screen at the Filmmakers Cinematheque. The longest running show at Cino was 1930s style musical Dames at Sea, based on the Busby Berkeley movies, and directed by Robert Dahdah with Bernadette Peters in her first stage performance. The Cino had many hit plays like This Is the Rill Speaking and The Madness of Lady Bright by Lanford Wilson, Robert Patrick’s The Haunted Host, Tom Eyen’s The White Whore and the Bit Player with Mari Claire Charba and Helen Hanft, and plays by many others. Joe Cino was a love-God, almost an Italian Saint, nurturing his playwrights and Cino regulars called ‘Cinotees’ like resident artist Kenny Burgess, chief lighting man Johnny Dodd and costumer Magi Dominick who told me that when a regular show was cancelled they went to Lamston’s Five and Dime on 6th Avenue, bought a comic book like Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and used it as a script. Magi starred as Snow White, and one night I got to enact the part of Grumpy. Before each show, Joe played his favorite music over the sound system, including God Bless America and When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain sung by Kate Smith. Michael fell in love with Johnny Dodd, living with him for over seven years in an apartment at 5 Cornelia Street. Later in 1967, Michael discovered Joe Cino in his Caffe high on drugs in a bloodbath stabbing himself multiple times with a kitchen knife depondent over the death of his lover John Torrey, who had electrocuted himself one year before. Smith and his friend, harpsichord musician Wolfgang Zuckerman, took over the theater, but received too many police summonses for operating a cabaret without a license, and financially couldn’t sustain it. Diana Di Prima’s Monuments was the last play there in 1968.

Michael included my play Moon in an anthology he edited entitled The Best of Off Off Broadway. He then switched from gay to straight and met a woman in Denver named Michelle with whom he fathered two boys. Michelle, alas, ran off to Paris with another woman. Later, he lived at Westbeth while serving as an aide to May- or Koch. Twenty years ago, Michael reunited with Carol Storke in California, having originally met in their college days, he at Yale, she at Smith. After living together for several years in Santa Barbara they moved to Silverton Oregon, where he writes, publishes, and edits in a refurbished chicken coop, and she, an equestrienne, cares for and rides her horses. They have found true love and deep respect for each other.

Me and Others author Michael Smith, editor and publisher of Fast Books (P.O. Box 1268, Silverton, OR 97381) fastbookspress.com published last year Robert Heide 25 Plays which is on sale at the Whitney Museum bookstore on Gansevoort Street, the Drama Book Shop, Three Lives and on Amazon.
THE 14TH STREET SHUTDOWN would have forced bikes to side streets, like this one, but can now be reconsidered since MTA's non-shutdown plan was announced. Credit: DOT Vision Zero website.

By Brian J. Pape, AIA, LEED-AP

After months of valiant and sustained efforts to save their neighborhoods from an ill-advised MTA/DOT scheme for an L Train shutdown planned to start April 2019, local citizens persuaded Governor Cuomo to seek a 3rd opinion from engineers. Engineers recommended alternate plans, which do not require full shut-downs.

Since the Oct. 2012 Superstorm Sandy that caused the damage to the L train tunnels (and many others), MTA worked on a repair strategy, announcing one on their website Jan. 2017, without many details. Elected officials were caught off-guard, saying the plan differed from earlier discussions of changes.

The community then had to scramble to learn more about the plan, and appeal for better solutions. The appeals most often seemed to fall on deaf ears. Given the difficulty of volunteer groups to muster the resources to counter such a mammoth bureaucratic behemoth, how can one not be grateful that citizens’ voices are now being taken seriously, evidenced by Gov. Cuomo’s interventions?

With MTA’s acceptance of the L Train non-closure repair plan, the DOT’s anticipated daily 84,000 commuters above ground on 14th Street will not occur. Using the closure as an excuse for a “testing ground” for radical alternatives that changes our safety is still being fought, with these criteria:

1. Abandon the 14th Street “busway” which includes an “unstated” vehicle ban on 14th Street, diverting excessive traffic throughout the Village, Chelsea, and Flatiron, threatening their safety;
2. Restore four-lane vehicular traffic on 14th Street;
3. Cancel the 14th Street sidewalk expansions and bring back dedicated bus stops;
4. Reconsider the bike lanes on 12th & 13th & 14th Streets.

Andy Byford, President of NYC Transit, came to Community Board meetings to discuss the new plans in January. He said 95% of the MTA project is exactly the same, but they don’t yet have the full alternative service plan. They’re working this through with Polly Trottenberg, DOT Commissioner, e.g., bus lanes, bike lanes, bus service, etc. They need a few weeks to look at the engineering challenges, and that they’ll get back as soon as they know. Responding to a question for more electric buses, Byford said NYCT is buying 60 electric buses, including 15 articulated electric buses, and looking for a proper depot and on-street charging where buses lay over. The Fast Forward plan, he said, includes routes only the subway, and bus routes are being revised to meet demographic changes.

L Train Not Shutting Down—But Will 14th Street?

By Arthur Z. Schwartz

Back in 2016 the MTA did an Environmental Assessment of its now abandoned plan to shut the L Train down for 15 months, so that it could do electrical repairs in the Canarsie Tunnel. That 200-page report had a half-page about mitigation. It said to add some more trains going north and south in Brooklyn and add “a few more busses on 14th Street in Manhattan.”

Then in 2017, the bike rider advocacy group, Transportation Alternatives (TA for short) announced a contest. “Let’s use the closure of the L Train as an opportunity to change the face of 14th Street.” They got dozens of design entries and gave the prize to someone who proposed a “Busway” which also included cross-14th Street bike paths, where all vehicles would be banned.

Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner Polly Trottenberg is a big fan of TA. Somehow, six months later, DOT announced a far more extensive Mitigation Plan, which included a 14th Street Busway and a two-way cross-town bike path on 13th Street. Our community was broadly united against the plan, because it was going to throw cross-town traffic on 12th Street, 13th Street and 15th to 20th Streets. On 13th it was impossible to see how there could be two bike lanes and any room for vehicles. Every Block Association in South Chelsea and North Greenwich Village/ West Village, united as the 14th Street Coalition. It organized meetings, demanded changes from the DOT, MTA, and public officials, and then filed a Federal Lawsuit alleging violation of Federal environmental laws, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) because of the plan’s lack of attention to the disabled and the elderly.

That lawsuit got settled, after the MTA agreed to add four elevators at 14th Street and 6th Avenue, and the Feds required a new Environmental Assessment (EA) addressed to the Mitigation Plan. But that EA, though 1000 pages long, was a fraud, in part because it didn’t consider doing work on weekends and at night, and in part because it threw out a bunch of statistics about increased bus and bike demand which were created out of very thin air. Part of what was presented was that the changes were “temporary,” and would be rethought once the shutdown was over. So, we went back to Court, arguing that the State Environmental Law was being violated. (Your author is the Coalition’s lawyer.)

Flash forward to January 2019. DOT has moved bus stops on 14th Street, added SBS bus equipment (for faster boarding), painted all sorts of weird traffic lanes, banned all left turns all the way across 14th Street, closed Union Square West, changed the direction of University Place between 14th and 13th Street, and created a one-way, 16 ft. bike lanes all the way across 12th and 13th Streets. Then and the Governor pulls the plug on the 15-month shutdown and says work will go on, one tube at a time, on nights and weekends.

Our community is the great place it is because 60 years ago Jane Jacobs led a fight against another DOT Commissioner, Robert Moses, who wanted to run a highway down 5th Avenue. Jane believed in community planning. In her classic book about city planning, she said: “We shall have something solid to chew on if we think of City neighborhoods as mundane organs of self-government. Our failures with city neighborhoods are, ultimately, failures in localized self-government. And our successes are successes at localized self-government…” There exists no conceivable energetic and all wise “They” to take over and substitute for localized self-management.” Then she addressed the difficulty in standing up to City Hall: “It is not easy for uncredentialed people to stand up to the credentialed, even when the so-called expertise is grounded in ignorance and folly.” The shutdown crisis was being used to take away the vibrancy of localized self-planning in Chelsea and the Village.

Wanting to regain community control, I went to DOT and said, “now that your plan isn’t needed, let’s put things back the way they were, and our lawsuit will go away.” But DOT’s response has been: “we are studying the issue, we have to assess the impact of the reduced service between 10pm and 5am.” Total malarkey (that’s an old Yiddish term.) What is really going on is that Commissioner Trottenberg wants to implement her busway anyway. (I call it “Polly’s Folly”) And although her bike lanes are largely unlawful truck parking zones, which Mayor de Blasio says he can’t police, she wants to keep the largely unused/locked bike lanes too. The Coalition, in Court, proposed a new round of studies, led by an independent expert, real consultation between the DOT and the four affected community boards AND with the block associations, and a 45-day warning before DOT takes one step further.

As WestView goes to press, DOT’s response has been silence… Anyone up for a mass purchase of Yellow Vests????

Brian J. Pape, AIA, LEED-AP, is an architectural consultant in private practice.

Regarding signalization improvement, Byford said the L and 7 lines have been re-signalized. In answer to a question about installing disabled access, an elevator on 14th Street & 6th Ave. will be installed now, plus 36 more accessible stations in five years spaced to allow accessible stops closer to each other.

The big question remains of how do we pay for all these repairs and improvements? Congestion Pricing could generate up to 1.7 billion dollars per year to help fund MTA NYC Transit’s Fast Forward Plan. CB2 fully supports the creation of a Congestion Pricing plan that will implement changes on vehicles entering the Central Business District (CBD), including tolls on the East River Bridges and added surcharges to Taxis and For-Hire-Vehicles, especially a thwarting charge on unoccupied For-Hire-Vehicles, subject to reserve all of the monies being collected going into a ‘locked-box’ dedicated to MTA NYC Transit upgrades and repairs.

Concerned citizens have taken it upon themselves to start a new Initiative to monitor the impact of the changes already felt within the neighborhood, and have launched trainwatch.org. The site is capturing issues and incidents, photos and videos to highlight the negative and perhaps dangerous changes to streets.

It is not Zero Hour; there is still time to adjust; it ain’t over til it’s over, folks!

Brian J. Pape, AIA, LEED-AP, is an architectural consultant in private practice.

Arthur Schwartz is the Village Democratic District Leader and President of Advocates for Justice.
The Strand Bookstore

Landmarking Debate

DEBATE: Does landmarking decrease commercial value? GVSHP exchanges views with Strand Bookstore owner. Photo by Danielle Smolian.

By Carol Yost

There has been a proposal to landmark some buildings near where the 14th Street Tech Hub is going to be. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) would actually like to include some buildings near where the 14th Street Tech Hub is going to be. The concerns expressed about the impact of landmarking come at a time when the city is at a point where we cannot absorb any unnecessary expenses. This designation will rob us of the flexibility we need to change with the needs of our customers in the Village.

Unlike Amazon, we have never asked for taxpayer-funded subsidies, tax breaks or special favors. We do want the government to provide changes to our business that already operates on tight margins. I've reached out non-stop to the mayor's office, to this committee, to Councilwoman Rivera; yet when the richest man in the world and the Strand's main competitor asks for a tax break in New York, he gets handed $3 billion dollars. Maybe I'm naive, but I really hope that is not the way the world really works. Landmarking our building will only—and let me repeat—only make it harder for us to survive and pass our treasured family-owned business down to my children and hopefully, to theirs. We've been told that no one wins against the Landmarks Preservation Commission, but the Strand will not go down without a fight. We need your help. Please join us at the next public hearing on Tuesday, February 19th, at 1 Centre Street, 9th floor, at 9:30 am, and support us in this fight. You can learn more about the hearing and other updates by following @strandbookstore on social media, or by emailing us at nancy.procheckstrand@gmail.com.

Nancy Bass Wyden

The Strand has been in business in the Village for over 91 years. It was my grandfather's, my dad's and now mine. My dad and my grandfather both worked until they died, working six days a week for most of their lives. During the Depression, my grandfather slept on a cot in the basement of the store and sent his two kids into foster care because his wife died and he had no money. We've been at our current location on Broadway for 62 years. My dad, who started working here at age 13, saved up his money for 68 years to buy the building that the store occupies 20 years ago. He knew, even at the young age of 13, that if he didn't, there would soon come a time after he inherited the business when he would not be able to afford the rent and would be forced out, much like he saw in the late 1960s with the 47 neighboring bookstores of 4th Avenue's Book Row.

My dad had seen that story play out time and time again outside the Village, too. In 1950 there were 368 bookstores in New York City. That eroded to 249 bookstores in 1981, and today, there are only a precious 79 bookstores to serve Manhattan’s 8.5 million inhabitants. Many of those bookstores only sell specialty genres like Christian books, cookbooks, and mysteries. Our margins are small and wages are only increasing. We operate in a fragile environment. All while having been all of my life, I know what it takes to keep the store continuing. We are at a point where we cannot absorb any unnecessary expenses. This designation will rob us of the flexibility we need to change with the needs of our customers in the Village.

Andrew Berman, Executive Director of GVSHP, thinks she has nothing to worry about, and says he can prove it; he believes that landmarking would help stop high-rise building and soaring rents. Wyden and Berman testified at a recent hearing to the Landmarks Preservation Commission. There will be another one on Tuesday, February 19th, at 9:30 am, at 1 Centre Street, 9th floor, and anybody who cares should go and try to testify. Look at what Wyden and Berman say in the statements that follow.

STRAND OWNER NANCY BASS WYDEN STATEMENT

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Andrew Berman of Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) would actually like to include some buildings near where the 14th Street Tech Hub is going to be. The concerns expressed about the impact of landmarking come at a time when the city is at a point where we cannot absorb any unnecessary expenses. This designation will rob us of the flexibility we need to change with the needs of our customers in the Village.

Andrew Berman

Everything Old Is New Again on Bleecker St.

By Gordon T. Hughes

Peter Allen co-wrote a song titled “Everything Old Is New Again.” The song was a hit and used in a show which made it to Broadway when Hugh Jackman played Peter Allen in The Boy from Oz.

But let me get to the subject at hand, Bleecker Street. I have lived on Bleecker Street (and on Perry Street) for the past 20 years. I witnessed Bleecker as a fun Village street with a variety of stores and restaurants over those years. Businesses such as Condoriana, August, and Miracle Grill (a favorite of mine) are now gone. As the neighborhood took off, with the advent of the Magnolia Bakery, brands such as Mark Jacobs and Ralph Lauren moved into the spaces vacated by quirky village haunts. Then about a year ago, maybe more, I was walking home one evening and realized that a large number of stores were vacant. It wasn’t long after my walk that the New York Times and other media outlets were telling the story of Bleecker Street’s demise. Well, around this past November while walking down the same street I noticed some new—and I must say, exciting—businesses were filling up those vacancies. Now, being the snob that I am, I started poking my nose into those new retail stores and asking questions. Well, did I get an earful. Since I am more a chronicler than a reporter I’m not going to do a column that the New York Times has done a lot better than I could do about “Better Bleecker,” but rather talk about something that will give anyone over 45 a smile on their face.

I won’t name the stores which I visited nor the people I spoke to, but all shared the same basic premise. All the stores/brands were about 10 years old and not from NYC. All had a remarkable online presence—some with blogs—rich websites that had driven the brands to real success. So now is where you 45-year-olds will begin to smile knowingly, maybe even giggle a bit. I was told at each and every store, proudly as could be, about why they had picked NYC—and, in particular, the West Village—and why Bleecker Street, to open (OMG) a store. Yes, a store! It was a kind of new concept for these young folks. Can you imagine that customers could be met at the door by young, bright, attractive servers with in-depth knowledge of the products being offered? They could, as we used to say in the dark ages, “feel the goods.” Shoppers could even try on the goods they were looking at. Can you imagine that? What a revelation to the 20-somethings. What would Mr. Macy or Mr. Bloomingdale or even Mr. Saks think of that concept? Today it’s called brick and mortar. Well, yes, that’s another way to say retail store. Well, I say who cares what you call it. I can tell you and them is, welcome to the West Village and welcome to Bleecker Street. You make the neighborhood look just as we hoped it would. You make the neighborhood look just as we hoped it would. In 50 years, when the 20-year-olds, these stores were just coming in for the holidays but now most, if not all, are looking at the Village for a long haul.

So, Peter Allen would be very happy, very happy indeed.
By Karen Rempel

On January 1, 2019, hundreds of patrons and performers from every decade of the Cornelia Street Café’s 41 years of creative explosion gathered for a final burst of celebration and communion.

Many took their chair on the final evening, including the luminary award-winning recording artist Suzanne Vega. She sang “Tom’s Diner,” which she wrote in 1981 and first performed at the CSC. The crowd sang along to “La Vie en rose,” and the café’s co-founder Robin Hirsch gave an emotional speech, lauding “the tangible physical community of being in the same space, of participating in the same communal event, that we participated in tonight and this afternoon. I am extremely grateful for all of you, and very proud of what we’ve collectively accomplished, and I hope that we will tiptoe off into some other physical space, but in the mean time, hold us in your hearts, and we will find each other.”

Author and ceaseless raconteur Robin Hirsch opened the café with actor Charles McKenna and artist Raphaela Pivotto on July 4, 1977. The rent was $450 per month. They ran the café together for about 20 years. Since then, Robin, the self-titled Minister of Culture, Wine Czar, and Dean of Faculty of the café, has been the cohesive glue and guiding force of nature of the café.

The café has been a part of every West Villager’s life, and every one of us has our own stories and memories of time well spent there, dining, drinking, and daring to descend into the pit of avant-garde weirdness going on in the basement. Personally, I’ve been there for jazz, experimental musical events, first dates, a job interview, a fashion photo shoot, and a memorable brunch on the café’s last day. Friends poured in to say farewell to Robin and the staff. Seated on either side of me were a cabaret singer and a performer in Toronto’s From Away. There was an excitement in the air about the café’s last day. Friends poured in to say farewell to Robin and the staff. Seated on either side of me were a cabaret singer and a performer in Toronto’s From Away. There was an excitement in the air about the café’s last day.

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In 2002, the café also won a world record for the longest ever solo piano performance (52 hours), which occurred downstairs in the aforementioned pit. Jon Conte played more than 1,000 musical pieces, from Bach to the Beatles, and on the morning of the third day, triumphed. Robin quips that the CSC should also have a world record for being the café with the most world records.

The café has won numerous awards for its food and entertainment, and received a mayoral proclamation from Ed Koch on the occasion of its 10th anniversary, in 1987. The mayor called the café “a culinary as well as a cultural landmark.” In his letter of proclamation, Koch joked that the fabled toaster oven caused the New York City blackout of 1977.

The café has launched and nurtured the careers of hundreds of songwriters, including Cliff Eberhardt and David Massengill (both who returned for the last concert), as well as musicians and performers of every genre. Eve Ensler debuted several of her one-woman shows at the café, including the politically ground-breaking play The Vagina Monologues. The café has hosted poets speaking in 14 languages and renowned actors including members of Monty Python and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Entertaining Science began in 2001, when author and neurologist Oliver Sacks joined Roald Hoffmann, a Nobel-laureate chemist, and K. C. Cole, a science writer, to launch her book A Hole in the Universe. The evening of readings and talks about “the concept of nothing, the void, the Buddhist idea of emptiness, in art, science, physics,” was so wildly popular that the café’s Entertaining Science monthly program was born. The program continued until the café’s dying breath, with speakers as varied as Channel’s chief parfumier and fractal geometrist Benoit Mandelbrot.

Pat Duffy, author, leading expert on synesthesia, NYU professor, and UN trainer, recalls bringing her students to the café to attend the Artists Salon. “I feel so bad about the Cornelia Street Café! It was a Village icon and we are losing too many of them...” CSC was always up for artists to be who they were. Last summer, I took my Exploring NYC class to the Artists Salon where regular performers at the café get to try out new work for their peers and whoever else wanders in to listen. It was such a great experience for my students, newcomers to New York, to watch the poets, musicians, and also mix and chat with them... Robin even stopped the proceedings to welcome our group and explain how the Salon worked! I remember he also told everyone how he hoped the café could stay aloft as the rent had increased exponentially since the CSC had first opened. At the time I thought, of course the café will go on, as I just couldn’t imagine the Village without it! I still can’t!”

Comedian, author, podcaster (The Naked Novelist), and writing coach Nelise Spencer recalls co-hosting the Imperfect Perfect Show with Terry Moore. “I felt so lucky to be able to perform in this iconic, NYC venue! And introduce the charming and legendary place to others who might not have been aware of it. Robin was always there, always checking in on us. And always up for a drink after the show. MC-ing a show that supports emerging writers and performers to a full house at The Cornelia Street Café is something I’ll cherish. It’s heartbreaking that it’s gone. I kept thinking the cavalry would arrive and the café would somehow stay open. But alas, no cavalry can beat New York City landlords.

The café is indeed closing due to the hostile actions of the landlords, who charged an enormous monthly rent of $33,000 and burdened the café with trumped-up lawsuits in an effort to drive the owner out. Robin finally gave up fighting the landlords, Mitchell Rothken and Mark Scharfman, after spending thousands of dollars in legal fees. “They have threatened to evict me five times in recent years on spurious grounds,” he told Tablet Magazine in December. According to an August 2018 Village Voice article, “Scharfman... landed a spot on the New York Press ’50 Most Loathsome New Yorkers’ in 2003 for his Dickensian tales of tenant abuse.” The Housing Rights Initiative filed a class action suit against the Scharfman Organization in October 2018 for allegedly defrauding tenants. Rothken is even worse. He was jailed in 2001 for embezzling 2.6 million from his clients’ escrow accounts.

The café’s former space at 29 Cornelia Street is listed on LoogNet for $27,400 per month, which is considerably less than the $33,000 Robin was paying. Perhaps the landlords’ rapaciousness outran the market, and they had to lower the rent after forcing Robin to leave.

A week after the closing, Robin said “I’m exhausted, because in addition to the emotional toll, the last 5 days were spent cleaning out everything from the store, everything we’ve put in from 41 years, the intense sweat equity. The bars had to be destroyed, the kitchens had to be destroyed, the walk-in refrigerators had to be destroyed, everything had to go... I kept the tables. The tables were unique, hand-made from wine crates... And my sign I saved.” He added that they were crying on the final day, but it’s been even harder since then, “As we’ve smashed the walls, throwing out two entire kitchens – people are weeping.”

In the midst of the wreckage, there’s still a glimmer of hope. Robin is exploring other potential locations, and considering opening a performance space and bar with the more humble fare of the café’s early days.

In closing, Robin said “I will spend some time coming to terms with this. I’m very proud of what we collectively accomplished over a very long period, of the number of people whose careers began here, and of the legends who came to call this place home.” Much more than bricks and mortar, wherever it might be located, it will always be the Cornelia Street Café. May the café’s extraordinary creative fire continue to inspire us even as we mourn this loss.
Villagers Speak as Cornelia Street Café Curtain Comes Down

Gone But Not Forgotten: A Tearful Farewell to a Venerated West Village Institution

Bittersweet though it was, I’m deeply grateful for the experience of participating in one of the two final shows at Cornelia Street Café, whose legacy includes 41 years of presenting world class songwriters, spoken word, poetry, theatrical readings, storytelling, adventurous jazz, contemporary classical programming and great cuisine.

Over 20 songwriters gathered on the first day of 2019 to perform their last songs at Cornelia. The lovely Suzanne Vega and her colleagues David Masengill and Cliff Eberhardt, who were part of the Songwriter's Exchange at Cornelia in the early 1980s, began the afternoon recounting stories and singing songs, some very memorable and famous (Vega’s “Tom’s Restaurant”), some more recent (“Washington Square” by Masengill) and some that Eberhardt tours with regularly. The Songwriter's Exchange grew out of a songwriter's workshop created by songwriter Carolyn Mas, who was a waitress at the café when it first opened in 1977.

Robin Hirsch, the highly respected, personable owner and curator at the café, is an artist and director with a far-reaching vision. He invited these artists to perform decades ago. Over the years, they fostered a tradition of my artistic friends of many years and my new journalistic collaborators at WestView News.

Last July 1 was introduced to Father Graeme Napier, an Episcopal rector at St. John’s in the Village on 11th Street and Waverly Place. Father Graeme is a gifted concert producer and art gallery director. We had a fundraiser and bought a professional sound system for songwriters and amplified acts like mine and my colleagues’. I hired engineers and administrative assistants to be available for shows. We decided to put my Steinway 7-foot-4-inch grand piano in the Revelation Gallery at St. John’s to complement the Yamaha grand piano that is used in the sanctuary.

We are planning a St. John’s Songwriters Exchange at the gallery, a private event that we'll share more about and that, hopefully, will expand on the excellent example of Mr. Hirsch and his community.

We’ll keep you posted about other future events and hope you’ll support local arts in the Village. And if anyone knows of a new home for Cornelia Street Café, please reach out to us and we’ll connect you to Robin Hirsch.

—Hannah Reimann

Hannah Reimann is a singer-songwriter, pianist, composer, actor and music educator whose concerts of her original music and the early music of Jenni Mitchell have been presented at Cornelia Street Café, The Bitter End, The Cutting Room and other such venues, and whose songs have been in radio rotation for over 15 years. She was the Sunday house pianist at Café Vivaldi from 2003 to 2005, and has produced concerts for 25 years in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Reimann Music is located on Charles Street where she teaches and rehearses. www.hannahreimann.com

Ghost City Cabaret

Friday night, December 21, 2018, 50 or so poetry and Cornelia Street Café lovers turned to the light for winter solstice and a final evening at the café, due to close in several days. Years ago, when I wrote poetry regularly, I attended and read at open mics at the Cornelia Street Café. It was a wonderful space for people to gather, express opinions and make friends. In her introduction to this solstice evening, Ghost City Cabaret’s Katherine Adamsman (“K”), verbalized the concerns of many in attendance about the closings of reasonably-priced gathering spaces in Manhattan.

Once inside after a wait in the bar/restaurant at street level, and finding a seat downstairs, I passed two tiny gender-neutral restrooms at right angles to each other, painted red. I remembered these, as well as the long, narrow room with tables and chairs and a bar at its entrance. Sitting comfortably was easier if one were small or thin. The cement walls were blue, and a red curtain hung behind the stage in front.

A capacity audience of about 50 filled the room. Several writers/performers gave presentations. My favorites: Mindy Matijasovcic’s “Comedy for Grown Folks” and drummer Fred Simon’s musical offerings entitled “Kindness” and “Goodbye, CSC” a tribute to the café. Su Polo gave an outstanding performance of her essay, “A Walk into Christmas” about a possibly lonely pre-holiday evening, walking her dog uptown from 27th Street to Rockefeller Center, and being suddenly surrounded by carolers (her dog in the center of their circle) and then being invited to sing carols: a festive, inclusive evening after all.

After an intermission, open mic performers raced the clock to give everyone a chance to perform, as the café was hosting another event shortly. Ghost City Cabaret has been at Cornelia St. Café for four years. It will re- vive, K said. “To be continued … in another dimension” the evening’s flyer assured.

—Sarah Dowson

The Last Bohemian Enclave

The Cornelia Street Café shut its doors for the last time on January 1 after decades in business. The performance space in the basement became legendary, attracting folk singers, poets, comedians, singers, musicians like David Amran and other entertainers. The Obie Award winning producing team Peculiar Works Project led by Barry Rowell, Catherine Porter and Ralph Lewis staged play readings including my play Moon which was originally performed at the groundbreaking Caffe Cino in the mid-60s. Last year I was on a panel held there with the Playwrights John Guare and Jean Claude Van Italie hosted by Times critic Charles Isherwood.

The panel focused on the Caffe Cino years (1958-1968) which was two doors away at 31 Cornelia Street. Sam Shepard, Lanford Wilson, Tom Eyen, Robert Patrick, Billy Hoffman and H. M. Kou toxicas found a home where they could work freely and develop new plays. Paul Foster who founded LaMama ETC with Ellen Stewart had his works done there as did many, many others. For several years on a monthly basis Foster with myself, John Gilman and the Obie Award winning Actress Mari-Clare Charba had ‘round-table’ brunch discussions in the excellent restaurant with the owner/proprietor Robin Hirsch joining in usually serving us a glass of his best wine. Alas, as the rent insanely jumped to over $30,000 a month what might be called the last Bohemian enclave in the Village had to close. All who were there were filled with sadness after the final curtain shows on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day.

—Robert Heide
West Village Images

Art Illusions and Fantasies

Photographic series of digital computer art, illusions or fantasy featuring close up details taken from architecture and design elements of buildings.

The Motivation for Political Paintings

By Phil Levine

When I turned 40 years old (34 years ago) and living in Denver, I had this conversation with myself. “Philip, you think you’ve been given the gifts of music and art but you haven’t yet opened those gifts.” From that day on I committed myself to doing just that and began taking local art classes. Soon after, it occurred to me that maybe Denver could have a version of the renowned Art Students League of New York, and maybe, just maybe, I could be the catalyst to bring that to Denver. My background was in fundraising and organizing so why not me?

I spent a week in NY at the League working with Rosina Florio—then League Executive Director gathering information about starting a League in Denver. One year after returning to Colorado, the Art Students League of Denver opened its doors and is now celebrating its 32nd year. They even have a bronze bust of me there!

My own journey into art was just beginning. It became apparent that the figure was of greatest interest to me. I tried landscape painting but that never worked. One time I got on a flight to Phoenix, put 1000 miles on a rented car driving around the great Southwest and still couldn’t find one thing I wanted to paint. At the same time I saw artists tripping over each other to find the newest and latest ‘gimmick’ that would get them fame and fortune—or recognition. I wondered what the hell was going on here? What is this crap that people are calling art? What happened to the figure? Was it dead in art? Hell no!

Because I’ve spent well over a thousand hours painting the figure from life, it’s enabled me to create more interesting canvases with multiple figures using the camera. But if I was going to be painting the figure I damn well wanted the figures to be convincing.

When there was a weakness in my art I dove head first into overcoming those weaknesses. I read books and experimented with color theory. I went to museums and sketched the paintings to understand concepts of composition. I studied anatomy for artists and threw myself into instructed life drawing. And kept painting.

Early on, I thought the only valid art was representational. That changed when I happened to see a Joan Mitchell exhibition in Paris and was moved emotionally by her paintings. I even tried my own hand at abstract expressionism. It didn’t satisfy me and just pulled me back once again to the figure.

I’ve painted New York City street scenes, boxing (I boxed years ago), the Civil War, the Indian Wars and a series of imaginary scenes inside museums. The Civil War paintings were particularly challenging because I wanted to get a sense of physical movement in those paintings.

All that was a prelude to what I’m painting now—political commentary. I see how our country is being destroyed from within by a corrupt administration and my inspiration for these paintings comes from what I see happening. Making these paintings is better than throwing a brick through the TV when I see Trump lying and bloviating. I started this series of “anti-Trump” paintings six months ago and have about 20 of them completed.

To view more of the artist’s works, visit www.phillevine.com
WestView Concert
Saturday February 23, 3:00 pm

Jack Kulowitsch and the Strathmore Ensemble Performing
Mendelssohn: String Quartet #2 Op 13 in A minor
Mozart: Sonata for Violin and Pianor
Musicians: Mitsuru Tsubota, Mayuki Fukuhara, Louise Schulman, Daire Fitzgerald, John Kulowitsch

Tickets $20
Free to Seniors and Children
Booking is essential at: stjvny.org or (212) 243-6192

St. John’s in the Village
at the corner of West 11th and Waverly Place

St. John’s in the Village is fully heated and ADA accessible.
“Baby, it’s cold outside.”
I’ve used that as a title before, but it’s apropos this morning. I’m holding the front door open to the street and Millie is standing on the landing, procrastinating, glancing back at the now closed inner door, feeling the chill, damp air on her nose. After repeated encouragement her foreshortened corgi legs brave the two-step “ba-dum, ba-dum” plummet down to sidewalk level.
“Good girl.” We’re out! At least it’s not raining. Yet.
Once again, Millie just stops. She squints into the wind toward Greenwich Street, then scans her domain toward Washington Street. What goes on in her head during these lengthy pauses, and what logic guides her decision to venture left or right?
The cheerful scolding chatter of a Tufted Titmouse pulls me (instead) forward to the center of the street for a better look. Winter birds tend to move quickly, which keeps their body temperatures up. They are also frequently small, which seems counterintuitive to me in comparison to mammals that increase the thickness of their fur in winter to keep warm—look at Millie. Fast and tiny makes them difficult to find even among bare winter branches. Ah, there are one, two, three of the gray-crested marauders stripping the Chinese scholar tree beans high above my head. I wonder—does eating the beans make them smarter or make their head tufts stand up perkier? Suddenly, as if on a silent cue, the trio bounds into the air, and wings east.
Now the street is quiet. Wintering Robins have long since gleaned the last of the freeze-dried Callery pear fruits on the block, so they must have moved on to other neighborhoods.
Most mornings, I’ll usually hear a Blue Jay argument somewhere within a few streets away, or a Cardinal’s “chewie chewie chewie” call. There are no mournful Mourning Doves cooing, and no pigeon battalions circling. There is not even a warm-up orchestration of Starlings and Sparrows to be heard clicking, whistling, chirping, and wheezing. Something’s up.
As we head west, Millie paces out every inch of cobblestone real estate along the way while I survey every inch of rooftop real estate. There, on the pinnacle corner of that pink bombshell, Palazzo Chupi, sits the source of the neighborhood’s sudden silence: a young Red-tailed Hawk. (It’s breakfast time and the avian fellowship of these streets knows it.)
I know it’s a young hawk, not an adult, because it hasn’t yet molted into its namesake reddish orange tail feathers. But this one is likely hungry, nonetheless. Having to catch one’s morning meal rather than glean it from a tree requires a different strategy from the hyperactivity of Titmice, Juncos, Chickadees, or Kinglets. The phrase “hawk-eyed” can be discerned even from this distance. It looks intensely in one direction, then swivels its gaze to another. Other than the wind ruffling the dark V of feathers on its chest, it is completely still.
I’ve seen this adolescent hawk on various other perches for weeks now: the cornice of Westbeth, a lamppost in Hudson River Park, the edge of a Richard Meier tower, a tree in Abingdon Square, an upper railing of the Liberty Storage & Moving building on Hudson Street. Up high is the key: “The better to see you with, my dear.”
Something wet touches my face (the only part of me not bundled against the wind). A few snowflakes linger in the air, not certain whether they’ll gather enough friends together to make a flurry. Millie gives her entire coat a shake.
I look back up just as the hawk plummeted to take cover or look for breakfast elsewhere. A few wing flaps and it’s gone.
“Millie, show’s over. Let’s go home.”

Visit keithmichaelnyc.com for the latest schedule of New York City WILD! urban-adventure-in-nature outings throughout the five boroughs, and visit his Instagram @newyork-citywild for photos from around NYC.
Life on Earth in Perspective

By Josef Eisinger ©

In 1930, during the early days of radio broadcasting, Albert Einstein admonished a radio audience in Berlin not to consume the fruits of science with as little intellectual curiosity as a cow chewing its cud devotes to botany. Since that time almost a century of astonishing scientific and technological advances have come to pass and I wonder if a comment similar to Einstein’s could not be made today regarding the general public’s attitude toward science and its achievements.

I, however, am one of those who relish belonging to the first generation that knows the age of our universe and its history—even the physical laws that govern it—though gaps remain; and I am thrilled to belong to one of the earliest generations that can be aware of the checkered past of our planet and, specifically, of how life evolved on it. It is a story that was sketched with remarkable insight by Charles Darwin; but subsequent scientific advances, particularly radioactivity-based dating of fossils and sophisticated DNA sequence analysis, have provided us with a far more detailed account of the heritage of Earth’s species, including our own.

To envisage a vast span of time like the 4.54 billion years of our planet’s existence it is helpful to suppose that Earth was created just one year ago, on January 1st, and to look back on the year’s events from the vantage point of midnight on December 31. This allows the evolution of life to be displayed in its proper perspective. In that make-believe time domain, it took until the middle of January (or about 200 million years) for the newly formed planet to cool sufficiently for its surface to retain liquid water—the essential solvent of all life as we know it. There exists strong fossil evidence that by the beginning of February single-celled life forms (prokaryotes, e.g. bacteria) were already thriving in Earth’s oceans, although the antecedents of these early denizens of the ocean are not known and are subject to various hypotheses. They had plenty of time (some two billion years) to evolve in complexity.

The DNA analysis of a large number of today’s species suggests that LUCA (last universal common ancestor) was alive in March. The genome of this hypothetical organism included the 355 genes that every living thing on Earth has in common with it, be it a microbe, a tree, a flower, or an elephant. Knowing the functions of the proteins that these 355 genes encode, we can even paint a crude portrait of LUCA: it was a single-cell anaerobic microbe whose DNA, composed of the same four bases as ours, floated freely in its cytoplasm—which was enclosed in a lipid bilayer membrane, as in a bacterium. Some of LUCA’s genes suggest that it lived in a high temperature environment, not unlike those near deep sea vents.

Sometime in August an event occurred that eventually altered all future life in a dramatic fashion: certain bacteria incorporated, within their cell walls, a pigmented protein complex (now known as the photosynthetic reaction center or PRC) which was capable of converting radiant energy into useful chemical energy and, in the process, generated oxygen molecules. Sustained by the abundant sunlight on Earth these photosynthesizing bacteria flourished and, in time, generated enough oxygen to constitute one fifth of Earth’s atmosphere. Since oxygen was poisonous to most of the then-existing life forms the so-called Great Oxygenation Event (also called the Oxygen Catastrophe) led to the extinction of numerous species. The bacterial PRC that accomplished this remarkable feat is, apart from cosmetic differences, identical to the PRCs that inhabit green leaves and sustain plants.

Early in September another development took place that had far-reaching consequences for life on Earth. Some of the single-cell organisms acquired a membrane-enclosed nucleus in which its genetic information was conveniently packaged. This innovation of eukaryotes, as these nucleated cells are called, provided many advantages, the most important one being that it facilitated the emergence of multi-cellular life forms whose individual cells shared a common genetic master plan. All through the fall a vast number of multi-cellular species proliferated in what is known as the Cambrian explosion and by December 1st the first vertebrates had evolved; fishes and tetrapods populated the oceans, and the first land plants made their appearance.

Then, on December 10th (251.4 million years ago) disaster struck. The so-called Permian-Triassic extinction event caused the demise of some 90 percent of the species dwelling in the oceans, possibly because something caused Earth’s temperature to rise and thereby deprived its ocean-dwelling creatures of their life-sustaining dissolved oxygen.

But life went on. Beginning in mid-December, numerous species of dinosaurs evolved and roamed over Earth’s land and seas for some two hundred million years—until disaster struck once again. On December 26th (66 million years ago) another extinction event occurred, possibly because of the impact of a large meteorite. It wiped out 50 percent of all species including all the dinosaurs except the avian ones whose descendants—we call them birds—remain with us still.

During the last five quiescent days of our retrospective year a great array of new species evolved, including mammals—those warm-blooded animals that had acquired the knack of bearing live offspring. The fossil record tells us that by December 29th (20 million years ago) many familiar mammals—bears, giraffes, hyenas, and apes—populated Earth’s forests while Homo habilis and several other humanoid species were living some four hours ago. And about half an hour ago modern humans, optimistically named Homo sapiens, made the scene in Africa and, before long, populated all the continents.

Earth’s most recent catastrophic event was the last ice age during which a kilometer-thick sheet of ice covered large areas of the Northern Hemisphere. When the ice melted, a mere 90 seconds ago (i.e. 12,000 years ago) it caused the oceans to rise dramatically and ushered in Earth’s present Holocene period. This is the era in which humans invented agriculture and viculture, discovered how to smelt metals, invented the art of writing, built great cities, and forged vast empires; Julius Caesar was assassinated just fifteen seconds ago. Modern science began to bloom about two seconds ago (ca. 18th century) and, in time, allowed humans to discover the bumpy history of our planet and the astonishing story of how life evolved on it. That is unquestionably an intellectual achievement that deserves to be celebrated—if Earth was not, even now, careening toward another extinction event. This one, unlike the many that preceded it, is of our own making and must be attributed to the inability of humans to co-operate in curbing climate change—while there is still time.

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**FEBRUARY EVENTS**

by Stephanie Phelan of westviewlegend.org

for WestView News

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**CITYWIDE SPECIAL EVENTS**

- **Saturday February 3, 12-3 pm: Stop ‘N Swap** Bring clean, reusable, portable items such as clothing, books, toys, electronics, household appliances to Westbeth Community Room, 155 Bank Street. You don’t have to bring something to take something.

- **Monday and Tuesday February 11-February 12: Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show** Root for your favorites! The breeds are judged during the day, at Piers 92-94 at 55th Street and the West Side Highway from 8 am-6:30 pm, and the Best in Show is judged at Madison Square Garden from 7-11:30 pm on Tuesday February 12. For details on all the events, go to www.westminsterkennelclub.org.

- **Sunday February 17, 1 pm: Chinese New Year Parade and Festival** Celebrate the Year of the Pig with the colorful parade starting at Mott and Hester Streets. Suggested viewing locations: East Broadway or by Grand Street / Sara Roosevelt Park.

**SCREENINGS**

- **Thursday February 7, 2 pm: Skyscraper** A 2018 movie about a security expert who has to rescue his family, who are being held by criminals, from a building. A double bill at Greenwich House Music, 46 Barrow Street. Free.

- **Friday February 8, 7 pm: Isle of Dogs** An animated sci-fi film about a boy who tries to rescue his dog after the species is becoming extinct. Dogs will be screened at Westbeth Community Center on February 8.

- **Sunday February 3, 3 pm: Dvorak Romances** Acclaimed pianist Margarita Rovenskaya and friends perform romantic works for piano quintet at St. John’s in the Village, corner of West 11th and Waverly Place. Admission $10-$20. For information and booking, go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Thursday February 7, 7:30 pm: Mackenzie Melemed** The young pianist will perform as part of the Stecher & Horovitz Young Artist Series, a competition featuring prize winners and finalists of the New York International Piano Competition. Greenwich House Music, 46 Barrow Street. Free.

**MUSIC**

- **Friday February 8, 7:30 pm: Concerts-Pop Songs—Art Songs** Reimagined James Dagan, baritone, and Amir Farid, piano, play some of the tunes of Gabriel Fauré and Franz Schubert. The concert also features some Dagan arrangements of popular current classics. St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. Admission from $20. For information and booking go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Friday February 9, 7:30 pm: Frank Kimbrough & Masa Kamaguchi** The pianist and double bass artist will perform at Greenwich House Music, 46 Barrow Street, as part of the Sound it Out series. Tickets $20 at the door.


- **Thursday February 14, 7:30 pm: The Music of Love** A Valentine’s Jazz Concert featuring the Charu Suri Trio at St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. Admission $25. For information and booking go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Friday February 16, 7:30 pm: Caroline Davis’s Alula w/ Matt Mitchell & Dan Weiss** A double bill at Greenwich House Music, 46 Barrow Street. Tickets at the door $20, $15 for students and seniors.

- **Saturday February 16, 7:30 pm: Black History Month** A concert of diverse music featuring three African-American vocalists with a repertoire of the American spiritual along with opera favorites and songs of Frank Foster, St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. Admission $20. For information and booking go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Sunday February 17, 3 pm: Francesca Khalifa** The Italian pianist will play the music of Domenico Scarlatti, J. S. Bach, L. van Beethoven, and J. Brahms. Admission $10 - $20. St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. For information and booking go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Friday February 22, 7:30 pm: Baroque Piano Concert** The Ferrara International Piano Festival presents pianist Sohyun Ahn in a concert of baroque and classical works for solo piano. St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. For details, go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Saturday February 23, 3 pm: Strings in the Afternoon** Jack Kulovitsch and the Strathmere Ensemble present some of the best-loved repertoire of the string quartet along with opera favorites. St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. Admission $20, but free to seniors. For information and booking go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Saturday February 23, 7 pm: A Winter Night at the Opera** 4 singers + 1 pianist = an evening of operatic arias, duets and ensembles—Verdi, Rossini, Strauss, Mozart... at St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. For information and booking go to www.stjvny.org.

- **Sunday February 24, 3 pm: Chamber Music** Pianist Jonathan DePeri and friends will perform at St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. For details, go to www.stjvny.org.

**KIDS**

- **Saturday February 2, 4 pm: Mozart for Munchkins—Jazz for Juniors** Matthew Rybicki and his swinging band will entertain in this interactive program for families.

- **Friday February 8, 3:30 pm: Knit a Heart** Kids 9-12 years old can learn how to knit a heart ornament at Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Pre-registration required, by phone (212) 243-4334 or in-person. All materials provided. Free.

**LITERATURE**

- **Saturday February 9, 10:30 am: A Really Good Day** Aydelet Waldman’s book will be discussed at Hudson Park Library, 66 Leroy Street.

- **Saturday February 9, 3 pm: Black History Month Poetry Reading** Bernard Block and three prominent poets: Erica Mapp, Barbara Newsome and Terry Edmonds will be presenting their own poetry at this Spoken Word Event. Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Free.

- **Thursday February 14, 6 pm:** The Boni Salon — François Proust, Caroline Szylowicz, and François Leriche$ Spend the evening exploring Proust’s letters and learning about the new, open-access digital edition of Proust’s correspondence. The Proust Center at Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Free, but online registration required.

- **Wednesday February 20, 6 pm:** Meet the Agent Let agent Ber nadette Baker-Baughman of the Victoria Sanders Agency give you the scoop on what it takes to sell your work. Bring your questions and find out what she looks for. Jefferson Market Library, 425
TALKS

Saturday February 9, 1 pm: Artist Talk—Robert Bunkin
Mr. Bunkin will give a short, illustrated presentation about his paintings at 1pm, before the opening reception of his exhibition. The talk will contextualize the Sculpture Series within the framework of his other figurative paintings. Hudson Park Library, 66 Leroy Street. Free.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Wednesdays February 13 and 27, 6 pm: Artists Anonymous
Based on the 13-step program, this is an open meeting for artists to discuss the troubles of maintaining a creative life and career and other issues they face as artists. Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Free.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Wednesday February 13, 6:30-8:30 pm: Community Resource Fair
A five-session course where students will learn about environmental justice from the perspective of race and gender, and study the role of community action in achieving environmental justice. Registration required—online or in person, or by calling 212-243-4334. Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Free.

Wednesday February 14, 21 and 28, March 7, at 6 pm: The Political Economy of Gender
This course will present economic concepts from a feminist perspective and allow students to assess some economic statements and understand the gender bias that they carry. Space Limited, so registration required—in person or by phone. Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Free.

Friday February 15, 2 pm: Introduction to Ancestry Database
A genealogy class at Hudson Park Library, 66 Leroy Street. Free.

Saturdays February 16 and 23, March 2 and 9 at 3 pm: New York City Food History
This course covers the stories of the edible goods produced, consumed, and venerated in homes and restaurants within the five boroughs. Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Free, but online registration is required.

Mondays February 18 and 25, 7 pm: Chant Workshop
Ideal for choir directors, choral scholars, and music students. Previous knowledge of chant notation is not necessary. A 7 pm preliminary session helps those less experienced in preparation for the workshop. Free, but registration is advised. Email chantproject@stjvny.org stating attendance from either 7pm or 7:30 pm. St. John’s in the Village, 11th Street and Waverly Place. Free.

Monday February 25, 2 pm: Ancestry Database Open Lab
If you’ve attended an ancestry database lecture and now want to spend some time searching for your ancestors, this is your chance. Hudson Park Library, 66 Leroy Street. Free.

MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, EXHIBITS

Through February 2: Self Portraits
A self-portrait exhibition of nine artists working in different media at Westbeth, 55 Bethune Street.

Through February 8: Souvenir
Sculpture by Lindsay Pichaske, of animals that blur the line between real and fantasy, the animal and the human. Made out of clay and found materials like string, sticks, nails, sequins or feathers. Jane Hartsook Gallery, 16 Jones Street.

Through February 14: The Moon, the Earth and Us
Children’s book artist and author Oliver Jeffers’ inspiration is inspired by the first photo of our planet in its entirety taken 50 years ago during the Apollo 8 mission, which showed the earth in its entirety, without the manmade borders seen on maps. The High Line between 15th and 16th Streets.

WHAT A DOLL!!

Through February 23: The Big Easy
New work by New Orleans based artist Keith Duncan at Fort Gansevoort, 5 Ninth Avenue.

Through March 3: Angels
The paintings of Margrit Lewczuk are being shown at New York Studio School, 8 West 8th Street.

Through April 6: Fritz Ascher—Expressionist
An exhibit of the German-Jewish artist wo lived through the Weimar Republic and the Nazi Regime, will be on exhibit at Grey Gallery, 100 Washington Square East.

February 6-February 28: A Stitch in Time
Quilts by Greenwich Village artist Cindy Beale will be shown at Revelation Gallery, St. John’s in the Village, West 11th and Waverly Place.

February 2-February 23: Is How We Walk Who We Are?
An exhibit of Marilyn Grant Barr’s exhibit features life-sized ceramic shoes that merge utility, history, and creativity, at Westbeth Gallery, 55 Bethune Street.

February 5-March 5: Endolennations
An exhibit of Thedra Cullar-Ledford’s works. These are photographs of models posing like dolls, then she paints on the prists to make them doll-like as possible. Ivy Brown Gallery, 675 Hudson Street, 4th floor.

February 26, 7 pm: Opening Night of Carnival of the Animals
Join artist Lisa Kaiser in an evening of music and drinks in the presence of many animals! St. John’s in the Village, West 11th and Waverly Place. Free but registration is essential—go to www.stjvny.org.

ONGOING EVENTS

Kids Mondays, 11 am: Toddler Story Time
A baby’s introduction to books with songs, rhymes and playtime, for ages 18-36 months. Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue.

Kids Mondays at 4 pm: Family Storytime and Craft
Children 4 and up get to make simple crafts and hear favorite stories at Hudson Park Library, 425 Sixth Avenue.

Kids Tuesdays at 11:15 am: Baby Storytime

Kids Tuesdays, 3:30 pm: Arts and Crafts
Simple crafts for ages 3 and up. Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue.

Kids Fridays, 11 am: Art Time
Simple arts and crafts for babies, toddlers and preschoolers at Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue. Free.

Kids Fridays at 3:30 pm: Board Games
For ages 4 and up at Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Avenue.

Music Fridays 4:30-5:30: Sing Time
Sessions Eve Zanni, Somatic Voice teacher will help you to sing out with live piano accompaniment, rhythmic body movement and more. No Experience Necessary. Westbeth Community Room, 55 Bethune Street.

Trade-Ins Book Swap Saturdays at 11 am, Hudson Park Library, 66 Leroy Street.

Please contact Stephanie Phelan at stephelan@earthlink.net if you have any new events or have further information on something I’ve listed here or on westvillageword.com.
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