

# Village Voices

## In Our Own Words

Volume 18 Number 161

March 2024

### A TALE OF TWO COW SUITS

by Bob Anderson

At The Fair, I served as the master raffle ticket picker and wore my cow suit to entice residents to join the festivities. Where on earth did I get the suit? The answer entails two tales.

#### Cow Suit Number One

For the 15 years preceding Halloween in 2006, I wore a cow suit for a variety of occasions—most often as an auctioneer for Heifer Project fundraisers and at office soirées. On Halloween that year, I was reading comfortably in our library when I realized that trick-or-treaters would descend upon us any minute. I rushed to put on my cow suit over my heavy clothing and over Peggy’s vehement protests that I would surely rip the suit to shreds. To my prideful delight, I got the suit on just in time. All was well.

All was well, that is until it was time to take the suit off. Then I got myself into a straightjacket pretzel. I asked Peggy to

help. She responded, “You got yourself into it, you get yourself out.”

So I persisted and tore the suit to shreds. Alas and alack, the cow suit had to be cream-mated.

#### Cow Suit Number Two

The following Sunday, my boss was a volunteer at the New York City Marathon. Stationed at the starting line,



he picked up warmup suits discarded by the runners just before the race. He then took the suits to the sidelines where friends of the runners reclaimed them.

One runner pulled up to the starting line mooing and wearing a cow suit. He stripped off the suit, and my boss took it to the sidelines. No one recovered it, so the suit was fair game. My boss claimed it, saying, "I know who will wear this."

He was right. It's a tighter fit now, but I have worn it gleefully ever since.

Joy to the World. And Moo too!

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## MY FOLKS

by Alice Warshaw

Just before Pennswood opened in 1980, Mom had her first of many strokes. It took away some of her inhibitions, but unless you knew her, you wouldn't notice.

My folks, Del and Donna Botts, living in Minnesota near their siblings, had close ties to the Pennington area where they had lived for 30 years. When they visited Pennington after her stroke, the buzz at the Presbyterian Church was about the new retirement community about to open just across the river. A place called Pennswood Village.

This utopia had the promise of independent living and two levels of health care and also promised that if you came upon hard times through no fault of your own, Pennswood would not make you leave.

After Donna's first stroke, Del took on a pinched and worried look. This disappeared the minute they moved into Pennswood in 1980. At last, he knew she would be well cared for if something happened to him. And it did—three years later.

Mom carried on alone in their apartment for several months, but she realized she was incapable of writing checks. She was so sad about that, but I was just 20 minutes away at a job in Pennington. With gentle coaching from various Pennswood departments, the bank, and a financial advisor, we did just fine.

Eventually, however, she settled into Barclay. I watched the sweet attention she got, as she transitioned back and forth between Barclay and Woolman. After a stroke, she would seem a bit "off," and so be sent to Woolman for a while. After recovering, she returned to Barclay until the next stroke. She did spend her final months in Woolman.

It was heartwarming to drop in unannounced and find an aide teasing and giggling with her. I witnessed this over and over, particularly in Woolman. Thank goodness, as her dementia pro-

gressed, so did her uninhibited childlike pleasure. That was a blessing.

As I approached 75, by then widowed, I remembered the loving care my folks got at Pennswood. I thought, "That's for me! I hope I get accepted." With lots of help from friends, family, and Pennswood, I moved in.

When I was finally settled, one of Mom's nurse's aides from the old days approached me and re-introduced herself. Though 22 years had passed, she still looked like a teenager. She giggled up to me saying, "I used to tease Mrs. Botts about breaking the toilet. Remember when her toilet fell off the wall? I was assisting her, and the whole thing detached!" (The toilets were mounted on the wall.) "I'm trying not to drop her, while holding up the toilet and yelling for help. Mrs. Botts is giggling and holding on to me for dear life. We laughed about that for years."

That's an example of the cheerful, loving attention both my folks got in their declining years at Pennswood.

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## RETURN TO LION ROCK

by John Pollock

The heat of August and the call of the outdoors in the East remind me of other Augusts growing up in the foothills of the Rockies west of Denver. I remember

especially my family's attachment to an outcropping on the side of our 8,000-foot elevation dwelling place, a resting point on the Beaver Brook trail from Golden to Idaho Springs we called "Lion Rock."

When he was five and I was 10, my younger brother Craig and I discovered the rocky promontory squatting like a lion on the side of the mountain. We built pine-bough forts alongside Lion Rock, listening to cattle lowing in the valley far below.

Lion Rock faced north, looking down to Clear Creek canyon, where the stream flowed into the city of Golden and Coors Brewery. But across the canyon we could see further north about 30 miles, almost to the red sandstone Flat-iron formations just west of Boulder.

When we turned 90 degrees to the west we saw, even in summer, the snowcapped peaks of the Arapahoe range some 50 miles away on the Continental Divide. When Craig and I returned to tell our parents about our secret spot, they began to accompany us on treks down the mountain to our magical overlook.

Over several decades, even after our family moved to Atlanta so that my father could become a civil rights lawyer to help enforce Lyndon Johnson's 1964 Civil Rights Act, Lion Rock became, even more, a family talisman. Our par-

ents often said they wished their ashes to be scattered there.

By 2017, both parents had died, my father when he was 93 and my mother, five years his junior, when she was 95. Craig had died at 24 while mountain climbing in South America, where he was serving in the Peace Corps. Peace Corps buddies had scattered his ashes on a mountain peak in Colombia. “You became the mountain,” my siblings and I would say of Craig.

In October 2017, my younger sister Mary and I took our parents’ ashes to scatter at Lion Rock.

As we descended the mountain through the underbrush just before sunrise, we anticipated the normal forest sounds of chickadees and Steller’s jays, crickets, scurrying black tufted-eared squirrels and, chipmunks. But the surrounding woodland was strangely silent, as though anticipating our somber task. The quiet continued until after we cast the last ashes. Suddenly, two magpies cawed out over Lion Rock, rupturing the silence, flying single file west to east on a journey together into the rising sun.

As we ascended the mountain, the familiar forest sounds resumed their reassuring murmur. Nature had paused to witness our sacred ritual.

Lion Rock welcomed us home.

## THE ARBITERS OF SPRING

by Pete Jaques

Round about the equinox  
When sugar maples pour  
Mud takes root in frosty soil  
And boots stay by the door

Fragile and ephemeral  
Sun-warmed hope appears  
Threatened yet by Arctic air  
We keep our parkas near

Lambs turn out in meadows then  
The parts where ice met sun  
Some claim winter’s finished when  
The snow banks start to run

Grizzled ones among us, though,  
Know well such overreach:  
A winter’s end is truly told  
By leaves of the grey beech

Through the gloom and through the  
white  
While others’ leaves decay  
Pale and dun they decorate  
The woods day after day

It is these November ghosts  
Who lightly seem to bend  
Spectral wispy lingering leaves  
They state when winter ends

Delicate they float away  
Yielding only to their young  
Denying winter ever reigned—  
The bell of spring is rung

## **ECLIPSE 1999**

**by Jim McClellan**

At first, Jackie didn't want to leave Paris, saying that 99.4% of totality was good enough. I had heard that those extra tenths of a percent made a difference, so—the day before—we bought tickets for Chantilly, 50 miles or so north of Paris. The ticket lady said everyone who was headed that direction would have already left and that the trains would be empty.

We set the alarm for 7 a.m. and awoke to completely overcast skies. This time, it was my resolve that weakened, especially after the TV weather report. Jackie proved steadfast, however, and off we went to the Gare du Nord—and a mob scene. The news later said that 20,000 people invaded the station: the TV showed clips; I thought I caught sight of us.

We still lacked “lunettes,” protective eye glasses. Thirty million and more had been distributed in France alone, but none were to be had. Kiosks and stores everywhere posted signs saying “Pas de lunettes,” no glasses. I had taken to the game of asking for them anyway and was regularly met with bemusement. Less comic was the riot over glasses by senior citizens the day before at a suburban Social Security office; cops and barricades were required to restore order.

At the Gare du Nord, Jackie and I invited ourselves to share a stand-up table with its solo occupant while we finished our coffee, coke, and pastry. Luis Miguel was a very pleasant Portuguese fellow in his 30s. Jackie asked offhandedly whether he had his “lunettes,” and he replied that in fact he happened to have three pairs; he wouldn't hear of us paying him but simply gave us the two we lacked. Certified by the Observatorio Astronomico de Lisboa and other Portuguese scientific and medical organizations, they are tangible souvenirs of our incredible karma.

When officials finally posted the platform for our train, the three of us ran with everybody else to find a seat—that was the TV clip. The train, a double-decker, seemed endlessly long and must have held several thousand passengers. Train personnel pushed people in as if it were the Tokyo subway. We got seats, but many didn't. Still, the atmosphere was festive, and those with seats in turn gave them up to standees. We met a nice fellow from the Spanish embassy in Paris. Jackie spotted a small patch of blue sky as we neared Chantilly.

The train and Luis Miguel continued north; Jackie and I followed the herd for a mile or so across the wet grass of the Chantilly race course. Then, she needed to pee. I was pissed. We asked some cops, but they were no help. We spotted a crowded bar/cafe and wedged our way

into two seats outside, intending only to stay for a coffee which would entitle her to go, which she did.

It was almost 11, and the gray began to break up a bit. A very handsome French trio—two guys and a gal, also in their 30s—took the seats next to us. With our glasses and through a light cloud we could see the slightest nip taken from the Sun's upper right rim.

We stayed at the cafe, positioned perfectly with a southeast view and a wall to lean our chairs and heads against. The tension built over the next hour and a half. Dark clouds regularly passed overhead, but increasing clear intervals allowed us to monitor the progress of the eclipse. My gestalt alternated between seeing the great celestial body of the Moon slowly pass in front of the Sun versus seeing the Sun become more and more crescent shaped. The enthusiasm of one of our French companions enhanced everyone's excitement and pleasure. An otherwise sober-seeming civil servant, he continually expressed his marvel as might a child. "This is the best day of my life," he kept repeating. The air took on a chill. It slowly grew dark as totality approached. The birds went to roost.

With only a sliver of the Sun visible, our anxiety mounted as we tracked the moving clouds. With just moments to go, a limb of cloud obscured everything, and we thought we were doomed. Our friend

made to blow the cloud away, and then, amazingly, seconds before totality, the tandem of Sun and Moon broke free into clear sky.

How can I describe the next 60 or 70 seconds? I remember an extraordinary blackness created by the disk of the Moon. I remember a gorgeous deep blue sky illuminated by the corona, itself revealed at the moment of totality as an extraordinary new entity shimmering brightly in the heavens. I remember being overwhelmed by the reality of it all—that this incredible cosmic phenomenon was actually occurring here, now . . . or, rather, before us, out there, now. Maybe it was only later that I thought how beautiful and magnificent the sight before us was, compared to the phony celestial alignments depicted in Kubrick's film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In any event, we were all outside ourselves, and I'm embarrassed to report that I spewed coarse expletives uncontrollably until Jackie elbowed me sharply. We saw the "diamond necklace," and just as the tiniest bit of the true Sun poked out—that crucial .6%—we saw stars.

For the next hour and a half, we watched the reverse of the process, as the Moon retreated from in front of the Sun . . . as the Sun went from crescent to full again . . . as day returned from night . . . as it became warm and now, ironically, fully sunny.

We had salads for lunch. We chatted with our neighbors. The world returned to normal, but we were all shaking inside with the recollection that we had witnessed something extraordinary, that for a moment the cosmic frame we ordinarily ignore had dramatically and unavoidably imposed itself upon us. Despite all we know of the science involved—humdrum celestial mechanics—we experienced awe. For a brief while we were in tune not only with the cosmos but also with people throughout the ages likewise privileged to experience such an event.

*A total solar eclipse will cross North America on Monday, April 8, 2024. Its closest approach to Pennswood will occur near Buffalo, NY. at 3:20 p.m.*



## **REMEMBERING THE 1968 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES** by Norval Reece

Bobby Kennedy was one of the most charismatic people I ever met. Piercing blue eyes, riveting, looking right at you, fully concentrated on what you're saying. Right up there in charisma with the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Muhammad Ali.

Back in the '60s, thousands of young people took to the streets to protest national policies on civil rights and the

Vietnam War. I was among them. I marched with Martin Luther King in Washington, D.C., and Selma-Montgomery, campaigned with Senator Eugene McCarthy for President all over the country, was on the floor of the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and was a member of a four-person Quaker delegation that met with Henry Kissinger twice in the Situation Room in the White House about ending the Vietnam War after Nixon became President.

It was also in the '60s that Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated.

I'm haunted by the memory of a conversation I had with Bobby Kennedy in the backseat of a car en route to the Philadelphia Airport in October 1967. He had just spoken in Philadelphia at the Annual Dinner of the Southeast Pennsylvania Americans for Democratic Action for which I was the Executive Director. Bobby's press secretary, Frank Mankiewicz, was in front with the driver.

I was urging Bobby Kennedy to run for President as an anti-Vietnam War candidate against President Lyndon Johnson in the 1968 primaries. Bobby kept saying he couldn't because it would only be perceived as a personal fight between LBJ and him, and they would never get to the issues. I persisted. Finally, Bobby said, "Look, Norval, none of us even knows if he is going to be here next year." I said nothing more. His brother

had been assassinated only four years earlier.

I then joined Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign as Pennsylvania Campaign Manager and National Director of Schedule and Advance. Bobby later entered the race after McCarthy did well and LBJ dropped out. After months of bruising primaries, several of us McCarthy staff planned to meet with Bobby Kennedy the morning after the June 4 California Primary to talk about a common strategy for the Democratic Convention in Chicago. He never made it.

My wife, Ann, and I had left Eugene McCarthy in his suite after McCarthy spoke to his supporters in his hotel in L.A., walked through the kitchen, and took the freight elevator up to his suite. We went next door to our hotel room and watched on TV as Bobby did the same thing in his hotel—make a speech to supporters in the ballroom, walk through the kitchen to the freight elevator, and get fatally shot on the way.

There is a quote at Bobby Kennedy's graveside at Arlington National Cemetery from his speech in Indianapolis April 4, 1968, when he announced Martin Luther King's assassination to a crowd at a campaign stop: "What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness,

but is love, and wisdom, and compassion toward one another; and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black."

Indianapolis was one of the few cities that did not have riots in the aftermath of King's assassination. Bobby Kennedy's words were a shout out in 1968. They still are.



## **GREAT-AUNT DOROTHY'S GHOST** by Lorna Stuart

Soft steps in the hall next to my room.

A light cool breeze on my face.

A sense of someone watching me.

I looked at my wristwatch. It was just after two in the morning and I rapidly fell back to sleep, thinking nothing more about it. In the morning, though, I asked the other four or five people in the house that night who had walked down that hall in the middle of the night. NO ONE. Everyone claimed to have slept soundly. No one heard footsteps. No one felt any breezes.

It was Christmas 1973, and I was staying in the home of my future husband's family. This was a big old house, built on a



hillside in 1841, filled with a drawing room, 10 bedrooms, and long curving staircases. There were curious round doorknobs that opened with a lever rather than by rotation. There were noisy oil-fired radiators and a dumbwaiter made into shelves, to the delight of more than one generation of children growing up there. There were attics and, under the front porch, a hidden room I discovered in the 1980s. The house was built by a Quaker founder of the local steel mill and was near the known underground railroad; I suspect it can only have been a stopping place for those trying to go north.

My husband was the sixth (and my children the seventh) generation to live in that house. The bedroom I had been given on that visit in 1973 was large with tall windows on two sides. It had been the long-time bedroom of a maiden aunt who had died sometime in the 1940s. I was an unknown quantity. I'd never even been to Pennsylvania before this trip.

Never being given to flights of fancy, I have no explanation for these sounds and sensations. I can only presume Great Aunt Dorothy was checking on the new occupant of HER room.

A friendly visitor.



## OUT AND ABOUT KNITTING GROUP by Mea Kaemmerlen

If you go by the Bistro on a Wednesday morning and peek over the wall, you might feel the need to fetch your knitting needles.

Why? Because here, in a cozy corner, is a little band of knitters whose needles are busily creating hats, scarves, blankets, and all such. It's an informal group that meets from about 8:45 to 10:00 every week.

"A few of us came together just for fun a couple of years ago," says Sally Burkman who is knitting a soft, delicate baby blanket of white and pale blue. "It's for my great granddaughter who lives in Alaska, at least she will live there when she's born at the end of March."

Paula Goldberg is knitting a blue shawl for herself. "When we moved here two years ago, I got rid of so much and now find I don't have anything pretty to put over my shoulders at a wedding, or bar mitzvah, or whatever."

Betty Vosskaemper is finishing a bright red scarf. "I don't know who this is for, but I'll find someone to give it to." She adds: "This little group has moved around a bit. We tried Passmore and then the hall outside the administrative

offices. But we like this corner in the Bistro—the light is great.”

Paula adds, “When we were out in the hall, it was actually sort of interesting to keep an eye on who was in and out of Transportation.”

“We welcome new folks,” says Maiken Nielsen. “We are very informal and would love others to join us.” She’s knitting a hat of purple and white. “My granddaughter works in hospital,” she says, “and her patients have cancer and appreciate knitted hats.” Recently, Maiken sent off 15 of her hats.

Conversation continues and soon lands on crocheting—Betty started at five, Paula at 12. Betty says her mother learned to sew in school—the students had to make their own graduation dresses or they wouldn’t graduate. Maiken, who is Danish, remembers lots of knitting and sewing in school. They then discuss the Russian word *babushka*, which, it turns out, means both “grandmother” and “headscarf.” The knitting needles keep clicking.

Around 10 they leave, one by one, for other Pennswood doings. It has been a lovely morning.

*Mea Kaemmerlen, former columnist for The Trenton Times, brings fresh eyes to Pennswood in a “whenever” OUT AND ABOUT column.*



## Poetry & Prose

7:15 p.m., Wednesday, May 1  
Penn Hall

A chance to read a favorite piece  
or one of your own.

Contact Anne Baber to sign up.



Publication of  
**Pennswood Village  
Residents Association**

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