

# ALONSOVILLE VOICE

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## IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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### Issue No. 14

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### Brought to you by:

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David Bolton  
writer, editor, bon vivant

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design & layout

### In this Issue:

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Featured Neighbors:

Charlene Couch:  
Grit and Compassion

Regina DeLuise

Nick Sheridan

L. Tom Stosur

Timothy App

John Dean



Notre Dame campus, photo by Denise Bolton

### News and Notes:

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The next **Keswick Improvement Association** (KIA) meeting will take place on Monday December 2nd.

**Make Studio** will host an opening reception Thursday, Nov. 21st for **VERSIONING** an exhibition that highlights artists who make multiple versions of the same subject. The show runs Nov 21st - Dec 19th. More info [www.make-studio.org/](http://www.make-studio.org/)

**VERSIONING**, November 21st, 5-8pm  
at Make Studio, 3326 Keswick Road, Baltimore 21211

Theater group **Rapid Lemon Productions** is holding the 21st annual kickoff party for Baltimore's 10-minute play festival on Saturday, January 18th, 2025. The yearly Variations Party is free and fun! We welcome writers and non-writers alike, to enjoy good company and to talk about the theme that won our 2024 audience vote. **VARIATIONS ON NIGHT** will appear on stage next July, and we're encouraging the community to join in the creative excitement. More info [www.rapidlemon.com/variations](http://www.rapidlemon.com/variations)

**THE 21st ANNUAL VARIATIONS PARTY**, 2pm - 5pm - SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 2025.

at STRAND THEATER, 5426 HARFORD ROAD, BALTO 21214 (News and Notes continues pg. 11)

## Charlene Couch: Grit and Compassion

~ by David Bolton

In the summer of '65, in a Pittsburgh working-class neighborhood, nine-year-old Charlene Couch was seeking a way to make some steady cash. Couldn't ask her Mom. The electricity had been cut off again. Charlene didn't want to open a lemonade stand. Too boring . . . how would she buy the lemons? She liked being on the move. Selling TV Guide subscriptions was more her style. She knocked on doors up and down the neighborhood. As shadows lengthened, she signed up five customers. The numbers would grow. The kid was persistent. Every Friday the postman dropped off TV Guides for the following week. She delivered them on Saturday morning, the best time to catch people at home. She collected 50 cents, half of which would go to the company. Back then, a quarter could get you in the movies. Sometimes she forgot to send their cut. The TV Guides kept coming.

As the third of four girls, Nadine, Sandra and Annette, Charlene understood that her family was poor. Her Mom was a heavy drinker. Looking back, Charlene understood why. "My mother was biracial," she said in a recent interview. Her father, who went by the name of Wan Govindas Yanas, was a black University of Pittsburgh student. "I think her mother, Mary Jane Porter, who was white, was on the University maintenance staff." When Mary Jane became pregnant, she had to leave Pittsburgh. "Her family would have killed her."

At an early age, Charlene's grandfather, whose given name was Frank Thurman, joined the great migration and ventured north in search of humane treatment and a better life. Due to the racially hostile atmosphere at that time, when he reached Pittsburgh he changed his name and assumed the life of an East Indian. Hence, Frank Thurman became Wan Govindas Yanas, the title under which he lived until the end of his life. He married and in 1934 his wife Agnes Danzak gave birth to Charlene's Aunt Jivani. Interestingly, his birth family honored his transformation and addressed him by the name of "Uncle Yanas".

Since he was the first one to venture out of their small Georgia town, his family revered and respected him, often calling on him for advice and



Charlene's grandfather, Wan Govindas Yanas, previously Frank Thurman

counsel. Eventually he brought several of his siblings to Pittsburgh. Only in recent years, did Charlene and her family discover that her grandfather started out as Frank Thurman. In some ways they are still processing this revelation.

In 1926, in Manhattan, NY, Charlene's mother Avanti, came into the world. The baby had golden skin. Within days, she was shuffled off to her father's sister in Georgia. When social workers turned up at the door, they hid the baby so she could not be taken. Letters reveal that Mary Jane was trying to locate her baby. The child would be "passed around" to her father's relatives and later to her father and his new family (a wife and daughter) in Pittsburgh. In a solemn letter she sent to Avanti's father, Mary Jane lamented: "I can't keep her because she looks like you." Avanti saw her mother a handful of times, but her father and mother never did get back together.

Charlene laments: "I do believe this awful early experience shaped my mother's life. She drank to soothe herself." In her later years she was not physically well and seemed to be in a depression. But she made sure that the girls were off to school every day. It was clear that she valued education, praised academic achievement and made the girls promise that they would complete high school. "All in all, she loved us and did the best she could."

In October of '68, at the age of 42, she passed away. Charlene was 12 and in the 8th grade. The grandparents took in the three sisters. "I knew if they didn't, we'd be split up. In their 70s, they made a big sacrifice for us. My grandparents saved my life. Living with Mother was chaos. In a very sad way, her death was a blessing." The sisters were given "a degree of normalcy" that Charlene craved. "Grandfather wasn't sweet; he didn't hug you, but you knew you were loved and valued." They lived by "a non-verbal set of rules" with regard to expectations, school, homework, meals, etc. For the first time, they had a daily routine, including sit-down family meals. Her father lived on the other side of Pittsburgh. "I saw him during the holidays. It's a nice memory. He'd come to get us during the Christmas holiday. They rode the streetcar. He would take us to the back seat of the streetcar where we'd kneel and look out the back window. In those days it would almost always snow around the Christmas holidays, so it was like looking and daydreaming into a snow globe. As I look back on those holiday streetcar rides, I wonder if we were taken to the back of the streetcar because at that point the streetcars were (if not legally, for all practical purposes) still segregated. After we got off of the streetcar, we would walk in my father's footsteps through the snow. It still gives me a warm feeling when I think about it."

### **The Turning Point**

From the age of eight, Charlene desired a life "where people did not scratch for money," a place where electricity wasn't shut off three or four times a year. In the 6th



Charlene's Mother

grade, still with her mother, she and sister Sandy were chosen to attend a summer program at Allegheny Community College. Classes were on Saturday mornings. "It was geared for indigent elementary school kids." The program enriched and changed her life. Classes from different departments were presented each week. They wanted us to think of college as a real possibility. From the professors, in addition to the subject matter, they learned self-discipline. One Saturday class was taught by a professor from the psychology department. In the middle of the lecture, a young man in a weird costume rushed in and ran around the room. Afterwards, there was a discussion on what the students recalled about the incident. It was prof's way of getting the students to think about "how different experiences can shape how you think about life." Charlene told Sandy that she was going to be a psych major in college.

And so it went. Unlike most people, her high school experience was "pretty wonderful." She excelled in the classroom and enjoyed intramural sports. "I had a lot of friends, was pretty busy, working hard and playing hard in that stable environment with my grandparents." Come Sunday, Grandpa sent the girls off to a mixed-race church. He made it clear that it was 'not to find God, but for social reasons.' In her senior year, she served as homeroom class officer. Charlene liked organizing events. She had a way with people.

She followed her boyfriend to the University of Pittsburgh but left after her sophomore year. "It wasn't for me. Hundreds of students were in my intro-psych class." She applied for and was accepted into Chatham College, 500 students, all female. First thing she did on campus was pay the bill. She was late transferring, but the greeting in the admin office pleasantly surprised her. "We've been waiting for you, You're our new girl...." Our new girl. Charlene smiled, so pleased to be in the right

place, a place devoted to educating women. Between fifteen and twenty of them were African American.

### **A Force for Change**

Charlene had a double major, psychology and education. She graduated in '78 and became a certified teacher. She taught at the elementary level in Pittsburgh Public Schools for 10 years. "I was good with children. I showed them respect and loved them without judgement." At the same time, she could see that "the system wasn't working well for many children of color." Becoming proficient in reading was difficult for many children; Charlene believes there was a great need for reading specialists. As in other public-school systems, "children of color were over-represented in special education and under-represented in gifted and talented programs." That was then; it still remains a pressing problem in school systems around the country. "It's a complicated problem that will take smart, caring, open-minded people to remedy." Later on, this specific issue would become the subject of one of Charlene's first cases as an attorney.

Frustrated by the bureaucratic inertia, she decided to go to law school, taking night classes at the Duquesne School of Law and teaching during the day. It was a four-year grind, "intellectually challenging and physically demanding." She had to learn what she called "an entirely new language, unique terms of art, many of which are in Latin." Blacks Law Dictionary was her constant companion. "It became my security . . . I felt lonely without it." The professors used the "Socratic Method", which could sometimes look like a verbal battle between the students and professors, reminiscent of a popular 1970's television show, "The Paper Chase". It required development of one's critical thinking skills. Charlene was one step ahead. She had taught critical thinking skills to children as young as kindergarten age. She read a scenario to the class and had them work together to solve the problem in 10 minutes. No reason she couldn't use critical thinking here in the adult world.

Determined to be a force for change, she graduated in '86, passed the bar and moved to Harrisburg. She now worked for the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission as Assistant Chief Counsel, performing legal work in education and employment. One of her first cases was against the school district where she had taught. She worked with several groups filing and resolving lawsuits. Charlene stayed with the Commission for 14 years. In 2003 she joined the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General as Chief Deputy Attorney General, Civil Rights Enforcement Section. She performed legal work pertaining to cases alleging discrimination in education, employment and public accommodation. "It really helped me that I have a compulsive personality, like a bulldog." One thing she took from college was self-

motivation. "The work I did in employment and education discrimination was pretty fact specific. It was perfect for me. Once assigned a case, I would know it inside and out. At one point my supervisor expressed her concern that opposing counsel would try to steal me." Charlene also trained police departments on identifying and prosecuting ethnic intimidation, which she found very rewarding.

In 2005, she joined the Governor's Office of Administration as Director of the Bureau of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), responsible for the creation, implementation and enforcement of EEO policy governing 75,000 Commonwealth employees. As the years passed, Charlene made her mark on many levels. Here's what two colleagues had to say:

If want to get to know Charlene, information will tell you a lot about her work as an educator, as a civil rights attorney and as a wise, level-headed and compassionate voice in the PA Governor's office. But there's more, and those of us who have known and loved her for decades are a good source of "more." No matter where you look in her personal history, you will find her being a rock for her large extended family, reaching out to and guiding alienated young people, encouraging people who have failed and fallen and given up, as well as spreading a spirit of joy. Charlene traffics in acceptance. People who are struggling sense that and migrate to her. She is wise and kind and fun. Certainly, there can be no greater characteristics on earth!

~ Dorothy  
Fulton & Ann Van  
Dyke

### **Finding Love**

Along the way, she had a couple of serious relationships, but they didn't last. "I don't suffer fools well. But at some point I had to look at the 'common denominator' . . . me. I had to take a serious look at my part in the struggle." At 55, she would



Charlene and Nick on a London double-decker bus in 2013

have preferred sharing her life, but she also accepted being by herself. She tried her hand at Match.com, putting up a profile. Based on algorithms derived from the writer's profile, Match sends you a "daily five" that the system matches to you. You have to reject them to get the next five. One of those was Nick Sheridan. When he turned up a second time, she took a closer look. "He seemed a person of quality. He described himself as 'a productive member of the human race.'" So he was white. Charlene had written on her Match profile: "If race is your thing, then I'm not your person." At first she didn't know that he was from England. He chuckled when she told him, "I seem to be a magnet for crazy foreign men!" She would learn that he trained as a chef and previously owned a catering company. This was especially good. By her own admission, Charlene was NEVER a cook.

She communicated with him through the Match system. When Nick showed Charlene's (and two other) profiles to his best friend, Jane, she told Nick, "You'd be a fool not to pick her." In December of 2010, Charlene and Nick officially became a match. One problem: "He was here in Baltimore, and I was in Harrisburg." On weekends, she'd pick him up at the Harrisburg bus station. On one of the bus trips, the AC went out so she came to get him in York, PA. When she drove to Baltimore, Nick would meet her at the light rail station in Hunt Valley. Going back and forth, they had to accommodate one another. It quickly became clear that they wanted to spend the remainder of their lives together. On a trip to South Dakota, at Wounded Knee, Nick asked if he was "too messy to live with." Ever the organizer, Charlene said they would work it out. At the end of 2012, she moved to Baltimore, commuted to Harrisburg for work and retired a year later.

Life together has been one adventure after another, including honeymooning in South Africa, travels to Europe, trips to S.E. Asia, a cruise on the Mekong, the Outback of Australia to visit Uluru, and then to New Zealand to learn about the fate of the Māori people. At one point during a volunteer trip in a primary school in St Lucia, the school principal had them teach the class for the entire day. Charlene immediately redonned her teacher's cap, and Nick effortlessly charmed the students.

### **The Brother She Always Wanted**

On Ancestry.com, she found genetic matches with her sisters as well as a man, Jeff, who turned out to be her half-brother. So, who was the father? She wrote to him and hired a genealogist who uncovered Curtis Nared, who died in 2005. After getting over the shock, Jeff told her that Curtis was a good friend of his parents. He took the boy fishing, camping, to baseball games and all of a sudden just disappeared. Turns out that Jeff and Charlene have the same father. Charlene has since learned that she and Jeff have striking similarities. Both have three siblings, three brothers for Jeff;

Charlene, three sisters. One of each of their siblings died an untimely early death. Each are the only college graduates in their immediate family; They both have invested considerable time and treasure in the care of their siblings' children; and they do resemble each other. Charlene believes he is a fine person. He lives just down the road in Laurel, so they talk regularly and see each other often. He's the brother that she's always wanted.

Charlene and Nick's first home together was in the Cheswold neighborhood. It was hard to get to know the neighbors, so they felt isolated. A couple of years later, they moved to Charles Village and found a very fulfilling life with engaging neighbors and an active community association.

They were married in 2016 surrounded by Charlene's extended family from Pittsburgh, Nick's two daughters and his sister from London. It was a different kind of ceremony. Nick carried his own bouquet; they tossed rose petals on the guests as James Taylor sang "Shower the People with Love". They passed their wedding rings through the guests on a long roll of yarn, so all would feel included and could add a blessing to the union. As the marriage officiant put it, "people say they want a non-traditional ceremony, but this really is one." Charlene dawned a seriously grateful expression when she said, "I believe he is one of, if not the finest person that I've ever known."



Charlene and her newly found half-brother, Jeff

## Welcome to Alonsoville

During the pandemic, they took walks through the Baltimore communities including Alonsoville. On Wickford, they noticed a path between houses off the circle. Charlene told Nick, "I could see myself living here." This led to a conversation with Cyndy in her garden, who told them that the house on the other side of the path was going up for sale. They made an offer before it was listed; Marge accepted it. They



moved in December 2020. Charlene describes life on the circle in Alonsoville as “magical.” The neighbors are kind, caring people. A couple of months after moving in they had to move out for renovations to be completed. They posted on the Alonsoville email requesting to borrow a shopping cart. Within fifteen minutes, courtesy of John Dean, a shopping cart magically appeared on their porch. Several weeks later, a Taharka ice cream truck parked in front of their house ---- what more could you ask for!

### **Charlene’s Heartfelt Philosophy**

“It may sound cliché, but I do believe that we are all part of one human family, and if one of us suffers, we are all diminished by it. So it’s incumbent upon all of us to find ways, large or small to take care of each other as much as possible.”



Charlene with her mother and her sister Sandy, circa 1960



People in My Dreams, Nick Sheridan

## Quote of the Day

Heavy thoughts bring on physical maladies;  
when the soul is oppressed, so is the body.

~ Martin Luther



Here's a picture of the Alonsoville crew after the 10K in the Baltimore Running Festival. Pictured: Sondra Guttman (front), our esteemed KIA president Matt Mulcahy, Matt Luck, Svea Closser, and Brigid Baroody (subbing for Louisa Peartree).

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## News and Notes (continued):

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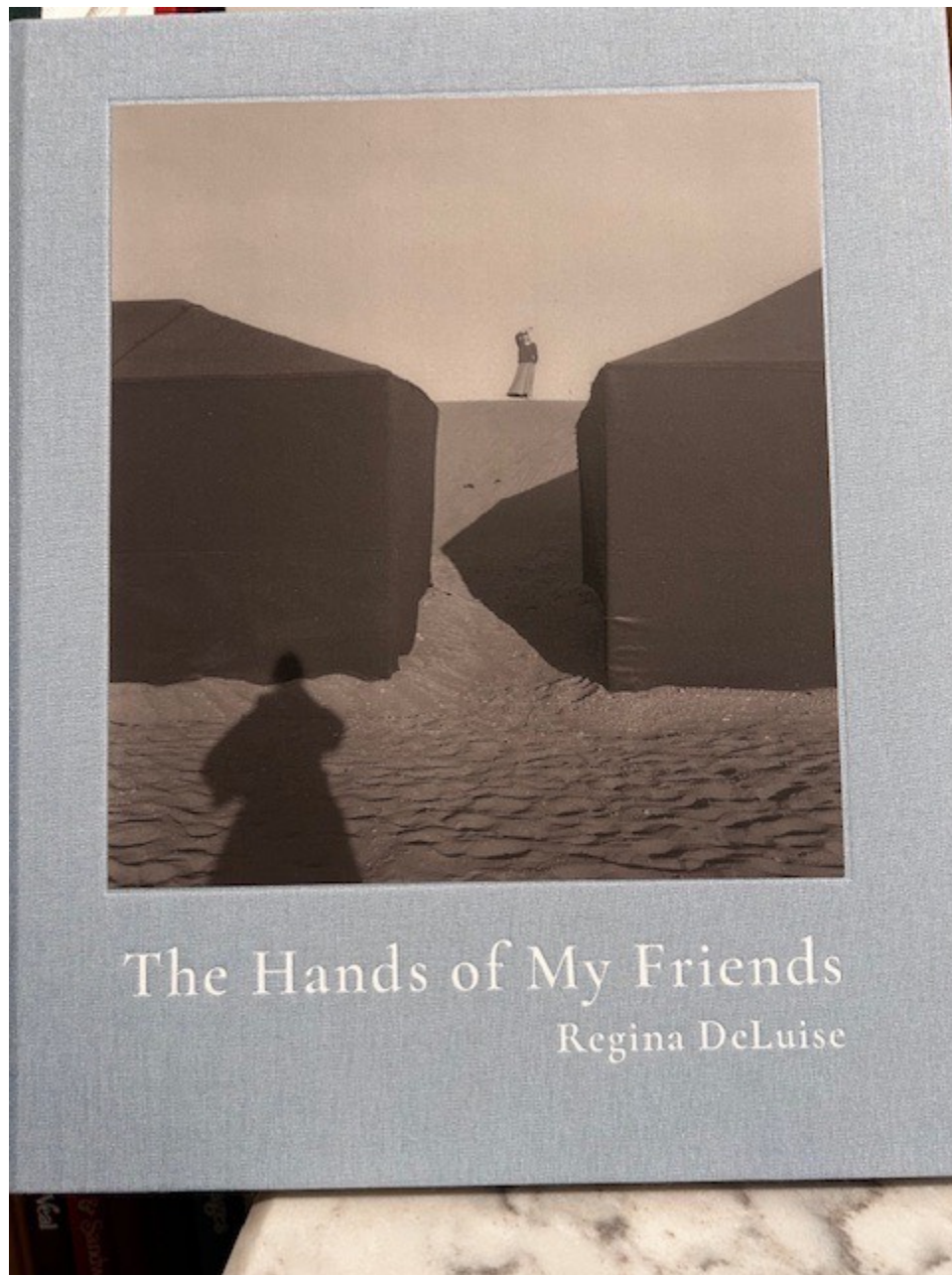
Denise Bolton's landscape, "Out of the Blue" is showing in the Peale Museum. The exhibition, "Of the Web," hosted by the Baker Artists Portfolios, ends on January 19.

Goya Contemporary is featuring Timothy App's paintings, "Equipoise," until December 31.

Regina Deluise's works are displayed in MICA's Decker Gallery, (Fox Building, Floor 1), until December 10.

## Recently Published, Stunning Photography

Self Portrait, Chigaga, Morocco 2023



Neighbors can buy the book from Regina to avoid shipping costs;  
reginadeluise@gmail.com

<https://www.saintlucybooks.com/> will ship



Vase in Bag, Cloud Farm, WV



Arms on Wall, Florence, Italy



Ann Purchase, NY



Coat on Easel, Florence



**Life in the City**

Thankfully, no one was hurt on Sedgwick. Photos by L. Tom Stosur, August 3





## **Baseball is the Greatest Sport on Earth**

by Timothy App

As a very young boy in the early 1950s, I remember my father listening to Cleveland Indians baseball games on the radio in Akron, Ohio, where I grew up. He would listen while doing chores around the house. At the time, I didn't understand the game, let alone get why he listened to games so intently on the radio, and I had no particular interest in playing baseball.

Once, my dad took the family to a game at Lakefront Stadium in Cleveland, the largest venue of its kind in the country at the time. (It accommodated 81,000 spectators!) All I remember about that game is the spicy hot brown mustard on the hot dogs that made them nearly inedible. From high in the upper deck, it was hard to see the game that I didn't understand.

Despite my father's passion for baseball, a passion fueled by his caustic impatience with the Indians, I really wasn't very interested.

One summer, when I was about 10 years old, my mother was eager to get me out of the house, urging me to try out for little league baseball. I was very reluctant, as I was much more interested in wandering endlessly in the nearby woods, building forts and daydreaming about Civil War battles. I wasn't really a joiner and wanted nothing to do with surrendering my summertime freedom to a scheduled team sport. Nevertheless, I tried out for a team that summer of 1957 and began what would become an intense involvement with the sport. My natural athletic ability stood out, and my coach that year took full advantage.

The city little league team I remember best was named the White Sox, coached by the father of one of my neighborhood buddies, John Eckert. During that summer of 1958, I started to play ball seriously as a pitcher, a first baseman, or an outfielder. Being the only south paw on that team with a strong arm, I played a key role. Plus, with a good eye, I could bat better than most. The team did very well that summer, ranking among the best in Akron.

While most of my neighborhood friends attended public school, I went to Saint Sebastian Catholic School, a fact I greatly lamented at the time. But Saint Sebastian had a very good athletic program as part of the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) which provided kids--boys anyway--with the opportunity to play well-coached sports. So, from 1959 through 1961 when I graduated from eighth grade, I played CYO team sports, with baseball being my favorite. I continued to play in that baseball league during the summers of my high school years.

Unfortunately, near the end of the summer of 1961, I herniated a disc in my lower back while pitching, and had to leave the game. This was a medical anomaly, as I was only fourteen years old and was prematurely suffering a back injury that caused intensely painful sciatica.

To make matters worse, I was scheduled that August to leave for boarding school in Wisconsin. Desperate for help, I sought the aid of a sports doctor, and armed with a rigorous strengthening program, I trudged off to boarding school, still suffering with severe sciatica that lasted for another few months. But because of the well-designed exercise regimen, I was well enough by the spring of 1962 to try out for the baseball team at Campion Jesuit High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, where I spent the next four years. After playing briefly with the freshman team, I made the varsity team and continued to pitch, perfecting my slider and curve ball while working to control my moderate fastball (a whopping 70 mph!) and learning to throw a change-up. From then on, I was able to continue playing baseball as well as other team sports.



Young Timothy App, back row, second from left - West Akron Baseball Team

During the summer of 1963, while I was home from boarding school, my Akron baseball buddies and I decided to sign up for two teams in two different leagues, a practice that was, of course, prohibited. One league was the CYO League, and other was the West Akron City League. This teenage prank made it possible for me and my cohorts to play ball upwards to four times a week. Fortunately, this renegade band of baseball brothers never got caught with our caper. Playing that often made us feel like pros! And, indeed, we entertained professional aspirations for the game, however unrealistic that might have been.

Back at Campion, after a winning season in 1964, our varsity baseball team made it to the state finals, where we lost to our opponents in a three-game set. That defeat did not deter me from my aspiration to continue playing at a higher level. Small college scouts had been tracking our team at Campion with their eyes on a couple of players, including me. My winning record and performance as a finesse pitcher was attractive to the scouts.

In my freshman year at Kent State University in Ohio, I succumbed to springtime baseball fever. I attended a meeting for baseball walk ons. The first words out of the coach's mouth were, "If you want to play baseball for me, then your studies must come second." That was the deal-breaker. Not only did I want my studies to come first, but I was convinced, as I am to this day as a professor emeritus, that in college, one's studies should come first. And truthfully, while I could claim to be naturally athletic, I was not really an athlete. I simply did not have a true athlete's mentality. My great interest in art, as well as the intellectually broadening experience of the humanities, superseded any further involvement in playing baseball seriously.

During college, I remember playing a few pick-up softball games. And there was always the occasional game of catch played with a buddy. I always took my glove wherever I went. Later, during my long teaching career, I initiated a grade school boys baseball team in the private school where I taught. Years later, there was a softball team formed among my colleagues in the Art Department at the University of New Mexico, and we played other departmental teams. When I arrived at MICA in the early nineties, I organized a couple of coed pick-up softball games. But beyond these occasional endeavors, my involvement with the game has been pretty much as a fan. In my teaching, I was known for using baseball analogies in painting critiques. One quote that stays with me is, "You can fool the fans, but you can't fool the players." This is a useful quote for all of life. There is much about the creative life that runs parallel to the game of baseball.

As a kid growing up near Cleveland, I was, like my father, a fan of the Indians (now the Guardians.) But because I moved around a lot in my early studio art and teaching

career, my tenuous allegiances moved with me. Graduate school at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia prompted me to halfheartedly root for the Phillies for two seasons. Teaching at Pomona College in Southern California during the 1970s led me to root for the Dodgers. When they made it to the World Series in '77, that obligatory allegiance paid off, even though they lost the series to the Yankees. In New Mexico, where I taught for twelve years during the 1980s, I rooted for the Albuquerque Dukes, the Dodgers' excellent Triple A team. Minor league baseball is great because the play is nearly as good as the majors, and the seats at the ball parks are cheap and up close. Moving to Baltimore in 1990 sealed the deal with me and the Orioles. I've been a die-hard fan ever since. Go Os!

As much as I have played the game, and as steadfast fan, there is still much about baseball that I don't fully comprehend. Unlike other sports, baseball is so much like life itself, a mysterious mix of knowledge, skill, and luck. From baseball's early days in the 1830s, many players, as well as fans and team owners, have understood that this game, with all of its complexities and subtleties, constitutes a dynamic and colorful analogy for life. From its early beginnings, people recognized this game as a truly American game, embodying all that it means to be American. And I would agree.



Alonsoville Annual Pumpkin Carving Gang - Photo by John Dean

**One More Word** ~ by David Bolton

From the age of 10 to 40, I played baseball. Little league, pony league, Babe Ruth league, I was there with my glove, ready to play. I even played in Japan for two years when I was working for an ad agency. I wasn't very good, but I had my moments. In my forties I played softball in the media league. We were the Dawgs. Our logo was a fire hydrant. It was a blast. We led the league in beer.

Around 50, I took up the Devil's game, golf. Anyone who plays knows it is a cruel sport. It can make a man cry. On the links, I was known for a time as "Easy Dave," perhaps for my propensity to throw a club or two.

No wonder. I was awful in the early years. I did it partially for business reasons. Two years in a row, after a scramble in St. George, Utah, I was given at the banquet the "World's Worst Golfer" plaque. Nevertheless, I persisted. At 60 I had a 13 handicap. There are moments of magic that keep you coming back. Here's mine:

**The Ace**

The golfer placed the two-buck ball on  
the tee and looked out at the green.  
Below lay treachery, Loch Raven's finger, an aquatic tomb.  
Removing the two-buck ball from its perch,  
he rummaged for a weathered piece,  
one at its best when dogwood bloomed,  
a sphere bearing scarred dimples, the residue of a bet or two,  
a better choice for sacrifice,  
but what of this? thought the duffer in a scan at the cavity,  
this, on the fourth day of the New Year,  
every bit of length needed to reach the green.

To its proper place returned the two-buck ball,  
an eight-iron clasped in hand,  
an empty head, no intent, save the swing.

The 8 hit the spere clean.  
He lingered over the tee till  
lo and behold, an arc magnificent,  
toward the flag floated the ball,  
puncturing the soft green a few feet east,  
a pause, then gravity's pull.

Down the slope rolled the white magic,  
vanishing like Houdini into the cup.

*8th hole at Pine Ridge, 122 yards, 8 iron*

*Witnessed by Rick Bogdan & Darrell Holloman; January 4, 2017*