

ALONSOVILLE VOICE

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Issue No. 18

Brought to you by:

David Bolton
writer, editor, bon vivant

Eric Gordon
design & layout

In this Issue:

Featured Neighbors:
Denise Bolton
John Dean
Amos Irwin
Tyler Tyce
Eric Gordon
Rapid Lemon Productions



Gunpowder River, photo by Denise Bolton

News and Notes:

Twitchy Fingers, the neighborhood band, will now be called Stony Run.

Rare Bird's publication of the Towson novel, *Whispering Pines*, is due now for June. Simon and Shuster will be doing the distribution. I plan on having a big party at Union Brewery and you are invited.

Congrats to John Dean, winner of the best B&W photo in Baltimore Sun's *Aubrey Bodine Photo Contest*.

We also owe a special thanks to John for his band, John Dean and the Big Hearts, that entertained us at the circle on a lovely Sunday afternoon. The band consists of musicians he enlists from the vast well of talent in Baltimore. "I've been lucky to play with quite a few great players over the years, starting with Mel Spears, who used to play at the now-closed Society Hill Cafe, (a little bar behind the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall).

"Mel and his bass player Monte Paulson used to play with Billie Holiday! I still get goosebumps thinking about that. Jimmy Wells was a famous vibes player that joined us for a couple of gigs at the Walters. He was blind - but once he was directed to his spot on stage, you'd never have known it - he set up his instrument and took off.

"We started in the 90's playing at The Walters for the February party/opening and kept that going for 17 years. The latest guys were Ed Hrybyk on bass, <https://www.edhrybyk.com>, Derrick Thompson on piano, and Michael Ryczek on guitar."

Here's the link to the latest performance:

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQCQxSODDxZ/?igsh=b3U3bXY2YmoyY3Ux>

Alonsoville's own indie theater company, **Rapid Lemon Productions**, will open its 2026 season with another world premiere play. This one is *From East, Like the Sun* by Baltimore playwright Karen Li.

How can we break the cycle that compels immigrants and their children to leave homes and families in search of security? *From East, Like the Sun* follows two generations in two families (and one 19th century ghost) searching for the mother lode—whether it's gold, or a stable way of life. Jalice Ortiz-Corral directs. *From East, Like the Sun* runs January 9th -25th at Strand Theater.

Info is available at www.rapidlemon.com/tickets.

Search and Enjoy at Hampden's own **Make Studio** for their Big Holiday Shop! Friday December 5th, 5pm-8pm and Saturday the 6th, from 2pm - 5pm. Shop for great gifts, brand new merch, and most artwork will be at 30% off. Enjoy music, holiday treats, and Make Studio style merriment.

Info at https://www.make-studio.org/search_and_enjoy.html



Amos Irwin: Creating a Safer Baltimore, one call at a time

By David Bolton

He hails from a family of PhD's in Palo Alto, CA, a suburban paradise back in the 80s and 90s. His Mom was an English professor who gave up tenure so his Dad, a physicist, could work at SLAC, the two-mile linear accelerator at Stanford, where "tiny particles get smashed." Ben, the older brother, earned a PhD in music composition while Amos got an M.A. in international affairs at the Fletcher School.

All four had a passion for bicycling. His parents, who spent the 1960s in Berkeley, refused to drive anywhere within biking distance. When Amos broke his leg playing soccer in high school, Mom did not drive him to school. Instead, she said, "I'll just remove the dirt from the wheelbarrow and push your there." He rode his bike, pedaling carefully with his cast and



balancing his crutches on the handlebars.

"Mom always denied the wheelbarrow story," Amos said in a recent interview. He never did make the varsity soccer team, joining instead the cross-country team, "a wonderful group of people" that he still sees.

The Irwin family in the Sierras, Ben in front.

The war on drugs

In the 7th and 8th grades, he started learning French and German. "I really loved it." In high school and Amherst College, all his electives became language classes. He took Spanish classes in college and wrote his thesis on land reform in Mexico. On Facebook, he kept up with friends in the city of Torreon. (please add a mark above the "o") The daily posts about people disappearing and avoiding the street cartels were horrifying. United States drug policy was having a terrible impact on northern Mexico.

This revelation came as no surprise. As a freshman, he caught a talk by a retired narcotics detective from the Law Enforcement Against Prohibition who said the war on drugs did not actually reduce drug use. It actually meant to lock up black people, creating immense violence and drug overdoses. "That blew my mind," said Amos. He joined a national organization, Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) and became president of the chapter. Amos organized talks, spreading the word that the war on drugs was a failure. He wore a T-shirt that said, "Cops say legalize drugs, ask me why."

The hardest job

Along the way, he met the love of life. He and Emmy played on the Amherst frisbee team. "We were married nine years later. We were together the whole time. My parents did the same, it seemed normal." After graduation in 2007, 21-year-old Amos signed up for two years with Teach for America. He was assigned to Warren New Tech High School in Warrenton, North Carolina, "an old tobacco growing area" that had known better times. The largest employer in Warren County was the school; second was the prison.

"It was an incredible experience, the hardest job I've ever had. I struggled with classroom management. Once when I turned my back, a student threw a chocolate milk carton across the room where it exploded against the wall." Teaching 9th and 10th grade math posed the greatest challenge. "Students had been split into two different levels the previous year, but they put them all together in my class. Half the class was lost, the others were bored." Nevertheless, the young man felt like he was "providing something helpful." Warren County was desperate for teachers.

Next up for Emmy and Amos was teaching English in Kunming, China, a city of five million people. "I had such a sense of freedom exploring." Amos gained "a professional working proficiency" in Mandarin.



Excited for Easter, Amos with Ben and mother.



Exploring a cave in Cuba, 2014

Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

In graduate school, he researched the environmental impact of Chinese mining companies in Peru. While he enjoyed the challenge and the people he met, his work didn't feel like it made a difference. He asked himself a hard question: What is my own country doing in Latin America? Amos was more interested in fighting back against the war on drugs.

Ten years removed, he returned as a volunteer for Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP), the organization that had sent the narcotics detective to speak at Amherst. "I was just doing data entry for their roster of law enforcement, but I was so excited about the mission." His volunteer work turned part-time, recruiting and training new law enforcement.

***"Six Baltimore natives I got to know
in those meetings are no longer alive."***

He became Chief of Staff for the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation. He published two "cost-benefit analyses" of overdose prevention sites and analyzed drug sentencing disparities. "I wrote eight Huffington Post articles, but only one took off. It was about what Orange is the

New Black got wrong about women's federal prison." In 2016, Amos was offered a full-time job at LEAP and helped the organization "re-brand" as the Law Enforcement Action Partnership so that they could weigh in on issues beyond the war on drugs.

In 2017, Emmy finished her post-doc work in geology and began a full-time position in Baltimore. Time to move from DC. "We biked around the city trying to get a feel for the area and found Alonsoville." They bought a house on Atwick, a perfect fit for the growing family. "We love the picnic, crab drop, and Linkwood Park, especially the playground, and biking along the path." Now fluent in Spanish, Amos speaks it to his two daughters, Joanie and Florence.

For the next five years, he was a volunteer for the BRIDGES Overdose Prevention Site Coalition, led by people of color with a direct experience of addiction. "Six Baltimore natives I got to know in those meetings are no longer alive. I believe Baltimore is finally close to creating a place where people, who are going to use drugs, can do so without dying of overdose."

In his full-time role at LEAP, he chanced upon the idea of cities establishing community responder programs—unarmed two-person teams dispatched to handle 911 calls, "common situations: mental health crises, public disturbances, noise complaints, suspicious persons, parent-child disputes, unhoused people, business complaints and customer disputes." Police would rather not deal with these issues. The goal is to connect people to services to find a longer-term solution or at least handle the immediate situation without using force. "People might call 911 because they can't get their kids to go to school, or they say they want their roommate to leave the house, and they even tell the call-taker that they don't want the police, but in most cities there is no other option."

Establishing a community responder program in Baltimore

On a typical day Amos drops Joanie and Florence off at school. "Then I get in front of the computer in the attic. Morning is my focus time. I might analyze 911 calls for service data or write a call plan for one of our police leaders who is trying to persuade city officials to establish a community responder program. I supervise three staffers, so the rest of the day is usually meetings."

Amos found community responders at the right time. "When I started advocating for them in 2020, there were three teams in the country, and few people knew about them. Now most people have heard of CAHOOTS, and there are 90 Community Responder Teams across 30 states. We did not start all these programs, just a small number. We did create a national map of community programs to show that this isn't a fledgling idea: community responders handle over 200,000 911 calls each year."

In October, LEAP signed a contract to help the City of Baltimore design a community responders program. "We had been banging on their door for four years." Working with MONSE (the Mayor's Office on Neighborhood Safety and Engagement), they will analyze 911 calls in Baltimore and gather input from city and community stakeholders on what type of calls unarmed responders should handle. "We translate the jargon of the 911 system into plain English, so people know what a 'Disorderly' call actually means on the ground. We will listen to people and then design a plan that is concrete and based on existing programs in other cities, so nobody can say it isn't practical."

His years of conversations with people in the mayor's office, the city council and city agencies have paid off. Judging from the results elsewhere, this should lead to a better Baltimore, a safer Baltimore.



Looking down on the caldera and smoking volcano of Mount Rinjani in Indonesia, 2016.



Wilde Lake, Columbia, MD, by Denise Bolton, gouache painting

Once Upon a Time

The land that became Roland Park has a well-documented history. In 1703 Charles Merryman received a patent for a 246-acre tract called "Merryman's Beginnings," which was somewhat inappropriately named since that gentleman received tracts called "Merryman's Lott" and "Merryman's Addition." The 1703 grant included land now bordered by Wyndhurst Avenue, Charles Street, University Parkway and Roland Avenue.

~ Keswick History Notebook

John Dean Recognition in England

Bonington Gallery presents A Semester in Nottingham, 1976, an exhibition of photographs by Baltimore-based John Dean. Captured during his time as a visiting student to Nottingham Trent University (NTU) in 1976, these photographs offer a powerful glimpse into Nottingham life during a transformative era.

This exhibition marks a poignant return to the institution – formerly Trent Polytechnic – where John studied as a visiting student nearly fifty years ago.

Armed with a camera and a quiet curiosity, John immersed himself in the rhythms of Nottingham life. Over the course of a single semester, he wandered the city's streets and parks – Hyson Green, Market Square, the Arboretum – capturing striking black-and-white portraits of residents going about their daily lives. The resulting images are both documentary and deeply personal, offering a rare and intimate glimpse into the everyday lives of Nottingham's people during a transformative era.

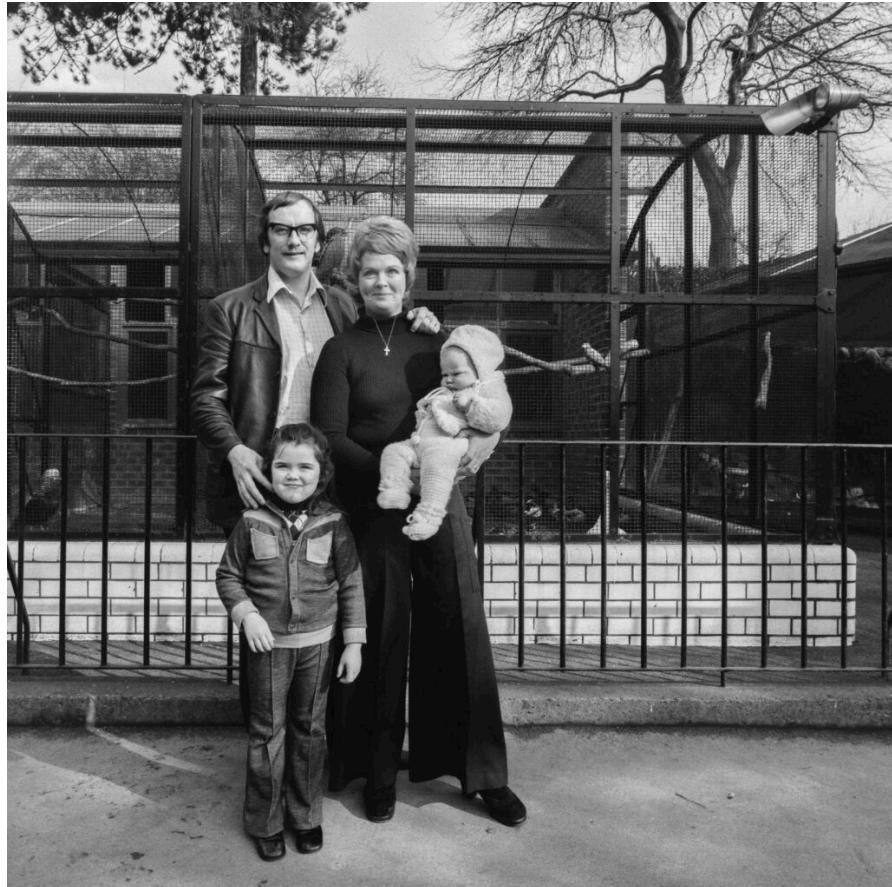
Selection of photographs by John Dean taken in Nottingham in 1976





First developed in Trent's own darkrooms (situated next door to the gallery), these photographs have remained largely unseen for decades. Now, they return to the place of their origin, standing as a testament to the power of observational storytelling, told through the eyes of a visitor to the city.

John has since built a distinguished career as a producer and videographer, creating historical and educational media for museums and non-profit organizations across the United States and beyond. Yet photography remains his first and most enduring creative language – a medium through which he continues to explore the intersections of memory, environment, and human experience.



Source: <https://boningtongallery.co.uk/event/bonington-vitrines-30-a-semester-in-nottingham-1976/>

Quote of the Day

"What we want from stories is to have eternal passion revealed in that heart where, before, all seemed known and discovered."

~ Richard Ford, novelist.

Chronic Low Back Pain - Using Up to Date Research

By Tyler Tice of Physical Therapy First

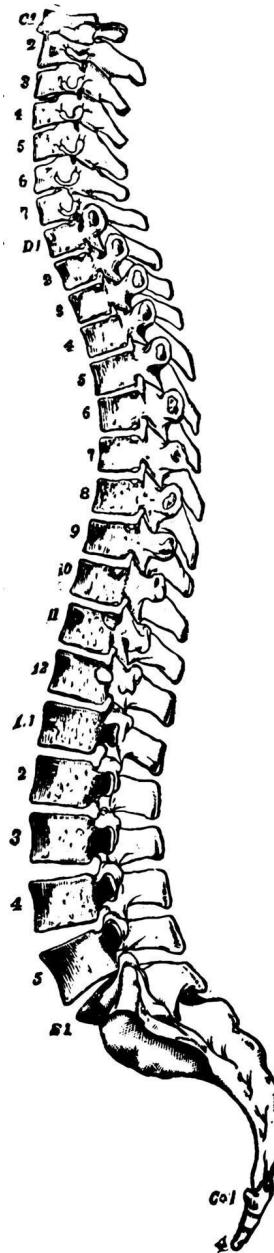
Low back pain is a major burden with up to 84% of the general population experiencing an episode of low back pain during their lifetime. In general medicine, acute low back pain is the second highest reason individuals will consult their doctor and chronic low back is the eighth highest reason. Non-specific low back pain is a term commonly used to describe pain in the lower back region without radiating pain and no signs of serious underlying condition. A diagnosis of non-specific low back pain means no known pathoanatomical cause, however low back pain is a symptom, not a diagnosis. This makes it challenging to manage and treat non-specific low back pain.

In 2023, an article was published reviewing international guidelines for diagnosis and treatment for chronic, non-specific low back pain (see article reference below). Here is a summary of the findings and helpful information:

Diagnosis:

When someone has chronic low back pain, health care providers are advised to do more than only examine the spine.

- Rule out "red flags." These are warning signs of serious conditions like infections, cancer, or damage to nerves. If red flags are present, imaging (like MRI) or more specialized care may be needed.
- Check for risks that might make the pain worse or more likely to persist. These include psychological or social factors like fear of movement, anxiety or depression, problems at work, or lack of social support. The idea is that the way someone feels about their pain, how they cope, and their life circumstances matter.
- Physical exam and history. Understanding where it hurts, how it started, what makes it better or worse, what movements are painful, whether nerves are affected. But no single physical test reliably pinpoints all causes.



- Imaging (Xray, MRI) is not usually firstline. Unless there are red flags, major neurological signs, or if imaging results would change what treatment is done. Imaging often shows findings that may not relate to your pain.

Treatment (non-medication approach):

Most guidelines agree that non-medication treatments are central. Medications can be used, but selectively and not always first line. Recommended treatments include:

- Stay active and exercise. This is one of the most consistently recommended treatments and can include exercise therapy, general physical activity, movement, stretching, strength work. It is advised to return to performing normal daily activities as much as possible. Find ways to move and stay active while keeping low pain levels.
- Education and reassurance. Helping people understand their condition (what it is and isn't), reducing fear, giving confidence that movement is safe, and teaching ways to self manage. Continue to perform daily or work activities as tolerated.
- Physiotherapy / physical therapy. Hands on help, guidance in exercises, possibly manual techniques, stretching, movement retraining.
- Multidisciplinary rehabilitation in certain cases. When pain is severe or has been going on a long time, combining physical therapy with psychological and social support tends to be more helpful.
- Other non-drug options. Examples include acupuncture and manual therapy (spinal manipulation, mobilization). These may help some people, especially when combined with exercise, but evidence is mixed.

Treatment (Medication Approach):

The guidelines are more cautious here. Medication is an option, but with caveats:

- NSAIDs (nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs): Often recommended first when needed, but only at the lowest effective dose and for the shortest possible time because of side effects.
- Weaker pain medications / secondline agents: These might be used if NSAIDs don't work or aren't tolerated. But there's no uniform agreement.
- Other types (like antidepressants, anticonvulsants, muscle relaxants): Less agreement. Some guidelines allow their use in certain patients, others don't, often depending on the patient's specific pattern of symptoms and psychosocial factors.

Guidelines that are still unclear:

- Which exact combination of treatments works best for which person. Because chronic low back pain has many different causes and features, a treatment that works for one person may not be as helpful for another.
- How to determine subgroups of people with chronic low back pain in which treatments can be more precisely matched.
- When imaging is really needed, how early, and which types are most useful. Also, many imaging findings are normal for people without pain, so results must be interpreted carefully.
- The effectiveness of some treatments (manual therapy, acupuncture, etc.) is modest or mixed.

In Conclusion:

- Try to stay active; avoid long periods of bed rest or avoiding all movement. Light exercise, stretching, walking, moving in ways that are safe often help.
- Seek care that addresses both the physical aspects (strength, flexibility, movement) and the psychological / social aspects (thoughts, fears, mood, support at home/work).
- Before jumping into imaging or strong medications, make sure red flags are checked and that simpler, lower risk options (exercise, physiotherapy, education) have been tried.
- Work with a healthcare provider to develop a plan that's tailored to you: what your pain is like, what your daily life is like, what your fears are, what your goals are.
- Be patient: chronic pain often improves slowly, and the goal is often improving function and quality of life, not immediately eliminating all pain.

Reference:

Nicol V, Verdaguer C, Daste C, et al. Chronic low back pain: A narrative review of recent international guidelines for diagnosis and conservative treatment. *J Clin Med.* 2023;12(4):1685. doi:10.3390/jcm12041685

Physical therapy and exercise are recommended as a first line treatment approach to help with chronic low back pain. Physical therapists are trained to rule out red flags, recognize other psychosocial concerns, and develop a treatment program that is individualized to be beneficial for each person. The physical therapists at Physical Therapy First go on for further education to specialize in orthopedic conditions, receive additional training in manual therapy techniques, and are certified in dry needling which can be a helpful adjunct for treating chronic low back pain. Physical Therapy First is located close to your neighborhood

at 200 W Cold Spring Lane. I have enjoyed working with many of you so far and happy to help as one of your neighborhood PTs!

Tyler Tice DPT, OCS, FAAOMPT, ATC

Board Certified Orthopedic Clinical Specialist

Fellow of the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapy

Certified Athletic Trainer



Glad October/Sad November photo collage by Eric Gordon

One Last Word

Reading about Albert Einstein's journey to "Cosmic Religion" inspired these words:

Infinity Rules

Pythagoras had it right.

Pure thought reveals reality,

mathematical simplicity.

God is One.

The moon does not lie.

Have faith in natural law.

Inner harmony touches all.

Remember the words on the wall.

You are a child of the universe.

~ David Bolton