

# ALONSOVILLE VOICE

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Welcome to Alonsoville, photo by John Dean

## Issue No. 20

Spring 2026

### Brought to you by:

David Bolton  
writer, editor, bon vivant

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design & layout

### In this Issue:

Featured Neighbors:  
John Dean, James Stevenson,  
Larry Grubb, Denise Bolton,  
Cyndy Serfas, Pat Gearhart

### News and Notes:

Memorial Day Picnic May 24; rain date May 25

Publication of David Bolton's Baltimore novel, *Whispering Pines*, June 9. Reading at Ivy Bookshop, June 17, 6pm

Time to update the telephone directory. Look for the flyer or contact Jerry Henger to make changes. [jhenger@msn.com](mailto:jhenger@msn.com)

Alonsoville Dues \$50 - via check to K.I.A (Keswick Improvement Association). Checks can be sent or dropped off at 500 or 501 Wingate Rd or Venmo to Alonsoville\_KIA.

## **KIA (Keswick Improvement Association) Meeting Notes, 4/5/26**

Treasurer's report: KIA general fund has \$2,861; the Tree fund has \$1,939, for a total of \$4,801.

We are still collecting dues but should be in OK shape for the picnic.

Our board President, Matt Mulcahy has reached out to a new insurance carrier and hopes to be able to save hundreds of dollars on our policy. More details forthcoming.

There was some discussion of the streetlights (aka residential lights): residents with concerns about lights on their street or near their houses are encouraged to use the template created by the president of the Lake-Walker neighborhood.

Picnic will be Sunday May 24. A flyer and email have gone out. Neetu is kindly working on the permit and has reached out to the fireman, so that should be all set.

Neetu has also kindly agreed to coordinate nominations for the soon-to-be vacant role of president of the KIA and maybe a seat or two on the board. More discussion of the June election forthcoming, but don't let that stop you from sending names to Neetu.

For the record, the current board is:

Matt Mulcahy, President - James Stephenson, VP

Louisa Peartree, Treasurer - Elizabeth Zack, Secretary

Mia Scharper, Board Member - Sondra Gutman, Board Member

Nick Sheridan, Board Member

## **Memorial Day Picnic Silent Auction- Donations Needed!**

The Silent Auction has always been an Alonsoville tradition. Originally it was a means to raise money for KIA, but now the proceeds are dedicated to the Tree fund.

Neighbors donated their time and services for other neighbors to bid on. For example, one of our past neighbors owned a hair salon and donated a free haircut.

Artists in the neighborhood have donate paintings. Several authors have donated signed copies of books they had written.

No services to donate? We'd love to also receive any home items that you feel would be of interest to your neighbors.

Raising money is great, and needed, but more important is the social connection and opportunity to learn and get to know some of your neighbors.

Plenty of new folks have moved into the neighborhood, and we are sure that they are talented and skilled in their work and hobbies.

**No services or products to donate? No worries... we need BIDDERS, and ones with deep pockets!**

Contact Jerry Henger to make a donation the silent auction. [jhenger@msn.com](mailto:jhenger@msn.com)

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## James Stevenson: Music Man

By David Bolton

Born and raised in Richmond, Virginia, James loved music from an early age. His parents played piano, "although not very well." As a kid, he mainly listened to classical music. When he reached his teens, he was also drawn toward jazz. "Oddly enough, I really didn't listen to rock until I was in my 20s." Today he describes himself as "a voracious listener" to all kinds of genres: "classical, jazz, rock, some country, some pop."

### Formative and magical music experiences

The Richmond Symphony performance of Leonard Bernstein's Second Symphony, *Age of Anxiety*, and classical concerts on the radio stirred the boy's wish to become a musician. "I remember hearing a performance of Gyorgi Ligeti's *Atmospheres* and John Corigliano's first symphony and just being blown away. It was like, oh, music can sound like this?"



James describes himself as a "pretty typical 90s kid. I remember going to the mall and hanging out with my friends a lot." He was on the soccer team in middle school and Mills E. Godwin High School in Henrico County, VA. The teachers he remembered most fondly were all music teachers, in particular his piano teacher, "whom I studied

with from the age of five until I was eighteen." His composition teacher, whom he studied with for a much shorter period of time, introduced him to a "whole world of classical music that I wasn't familiar with."

### **"James still enjoyed music, but he wanted more..."**

He was accepted at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore. A conservatory degree is still a typical four-year degree, leading to a Bachelor of Music. "I really loved music as a high school student, but music at that point was something I did part time. At the conservatory, it's basically all you do all day." James continued taking piano lessons and playing through college, "although I was never even close to being as good as the real pianists at Peabody." He also sang in the chorus. "I loved that. I was in some really amazing performances. I still remember very well Beethoven Symphony 9, Mozart's Requiem, and Bach's Magnificent."

After two years at Peabody, he found it a bit "stultifying." James still enjoyed music, but he wanted more than just his academic experience in music. James started taking classes at Johns Hopkins, which owned Peabody. "After two classes, Hopkins took me in, accepting a double-degree program in music composition and English literature." It was a perfect fit.

### **"Poetry always inspired me as a composer."**

"I don't think there's any one writer that changed me more than others or that I loved more than others." His list of his favorites back then is impressive: Vladimir Nabokov, Federico Garcia Lorca, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Georg Trakl, and Umberto Eco. "Poetry always inspired me as a composer. I set some of Lorca's work for soprano and chamber ensemble and wrote a suite of piano pieces based on some of Traki's poems.

James enjoyed "gearing up to graduate. I was thinking of a PhD for musicology." The academic market awaited. As the big day approached, however, the young man experienced a crisis. "Did I love this enough to go for a master's and PhD?... not a lot of jobs in the field. The more I learned, the less I wanted this life."

Fortunately, James had an alternative. He had taken a few computer classes at Hopkins, "I fell into software engineering, programming." That led to a job at a healthcare company after graduation. It was mostly clerical, organizing data. Filling in the gaps of computer science, he started writing software "to get things done. I found that I was enjoying this more and more. I felt lucky. The work was very challenging, changing all the time in so many areas."

He said he worked more jobs “basically as a software engineer.” From 2009 to 2013, he worked for Tech Lead, Threespot, in Washington, DC. Clients included the Knight Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation, The Chronicle of Higher Education and the National Academy of Science. In 2018, he joined Nuna, based in San Francisco. As a data engineer, he worked as a contractor on the Medicare Quality Payments Program, which processes billions of medical claims. In 2019, he transferred to the commercial side of the business as a “tech lead” for major projects. He enjoyed creating the architecture for new data-processing systems.

He feels lucky because he has had the opportunity “to do something good” throughout his career. “I got my start in software engineering at Chase Brexton, which provides healthcare to typically underserved populations (homeless, LGBTQ+ etc,) in Baltimore City. “Everyone deserves access to healthcare.” Many years later he worked at a startup called Nuna, which was trying to solve the problem of how healthcare gets paid at the national level. He would like to change how we pay for healthcare and make it more reasonable. “The value-based fee for service as a line-item is terrible. The system doesn’t encourage smart resources.” In the United States, it’s all but impossible to make changes because of politics.

For the past five and half years, he has worked for a mineral exploration company, KoBold Metals (<https://koboldmetals.com/>). “It’s pretty challenging. It requires us to bring together vast quantities of data about the earth:

- remote sensing data like satellite imagery, hyper-special imagery
- geophysical data like gravity and electromagnetic surveys
- geochemical data
- geological data: mineralogy, lithology, stratigraphy (what’s under ground at a macro and micro level)

“The geoscientists use tools I build to interpret this data and make hypotheses. Is there a deposit of a particular mineral down there? How deep is it? How is it shaped? How large is it? What would be entailed in getting it out of the ground?”

He still writes music and plays the piano. “It’s a big part of my life. There is always something very magical about being able to write music that would (hopefully) move the listener in some way. For me it was this desire to take the enjoyment and emotional experience I had listening to other composers’ music and doing the same thing for my own audience.”



## Life in Alonsoville

For a stretch, James lived in the Mount Vernon neighborhood. On weekends, he would hang out in places near his apartment: Brewer's Art, the Owl Bar, the Hippo, and the Mount Royal Tavern. In 2004, at Central Station, a club in Mount

Ian and James with their dog Freya as a puppy.

Vernon, James asked a young man to dance. "Well, I asked him to dance for the most superficial of reasons. That he was handsome and by himself that night. That man would become my husband Ian."

The bond between James and Ian was meant to be. "We stayed together because he had a lot of qualities that matter to me. He's kind, one of the most hard-working people I know, and he makes me laugh. We share many of the same hobbies and interests: travel, gardening, the outdoors and cooking."

They moved into a two-bedroom house in Hampden with two dogs and stayed for ten years. In 2012, they were married. Though it was fun in Hampden, by 2016, they were ready to move. Looking around, they found a house on Wickford. They saw it the day before "open house." They made an offer that the owner, Bob Steffen, accepted.

"We have no intention of moving from Alonsoville." His family still lives in the



Hiking with their dogs, Parker and Freya



Riding horses with Ian and James's cousins

Richmond suburbs. He's not "a suburban guy." James and Ian are active in the Alonsoville neighborhood. They are there stringing lights at the circle and removing them in the spring. They also help out at the Memorial Day picnic. James is on the board of the Friends of Stony Run ([www.stonyrun.org](http://www.stonyrun.org)).

"I feel like we're incredibly lucky to have this beautiful strip of nature winding its way through the center of the city. I spend a fair amount of time trying to keep the little piece that runs through Alonsoville in good shape. I organize volunteer weed warrior events and other volunteer events through the friends of Stony Run, such as trash pickups, planting new trees, native understory plants and wildflowers.

In the meantime, he's learning to play the accordion that he inherited from his stepfather. "I need a teacher. There are a lot of buttons on that thing."

Well done, Music Man.



Owlets in Larry Grubb's three-by-two owl house. The size of the owl house is 2 feet in diameter and 3 feet tall. A birder, photo by Ya Hua Li



1800.—Virginia Horned Owl.

### **Quote of the Day**

"Each of us makes his own weather, determines the color of the skies in the emotional universe which he inhabits."

~ Fulton J. Sheen, *The Way to Happiness*



**Cylburn  
Arboretum  
Paintings by  
Denise Bolton,**  
watercolor above,  
gouache to left



This is Rocky, who was born in Wales. He is 6 years old. He moved to the US in 2021 when his family accepted a post at the British Embassy in DC. On school and summer holidays, his family visits US National Parks and vibrant US cities. That's when Rocky comes to stay with us. We enjoy looking after him. He loves chasing rabbits in our garden, snuggling on the couch and charming us with cute antics. He's a perfect house guest.

~ Cyndy Serfas & Larry Grubb

### **Once Upon a Time**

In the 1870s the Swan Lake Narrow Gauge Railroad was built along Stony Run. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a popular tavern, known as Bidly Rice's Saloon, operated along the tracks opposite Bottle Hill, upon which sits the present-day Tutor Arms Apartments.

~ Keswick History Notebook

## One More Word

By David Bolton

Here's a salute to spring, written on the very first day.

## The Goddess Has Arrived

Ratta tap tap on the branch  
A big woodpecker, red and yellow crown.  
Dogwood loaded with buds  
Green shoots rising  
Ah, this touch of spring, heavenly  
Bands of light cutting through fog  
Winter blues dissipating  
Robins galore, cardinals leading the chorus  
Mother Nature, *Chicomecoatl*, Demeter  
Call this cycle of life what you like...  
For this soul,  
a source of sanity  
A cup of joy.  
Drink deep.

~ David Bolton



"Gotta get the squeaker out." Winston, Boston Terrier,  
photo by Patricia Gearhart