

# ALONSOVILLE VOICE

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PHOTO TAKEN IN PARIS, ON 42ND ANNIVERSARY, TOM & ANN MCCRACKEN

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14



Valentine's Day



Who wants a kiss?

from THE HEART



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# Christine & Jack Carneal: Love across the Globe

By David Bolton

The boy started bashing the snare drum in kindergarten. Thanks to Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues," he caught the beat and could make the snare drum sound like a train, what Cash called the "boom chicka boom" sound. His teacher didn't really need anyone to play the snare, but she sure could use someone to make train noise for the play. Jack's hand shot up, leading to his first musical performance on stage.

In elementary school, he asked his parents for a drum kit like Ringo's. Though they loved rock and roll (Jack still has their 45 rpm records), they "hedged their bets," buying just a snare drum and forcing him to take lessons. Surely that would make the kid quit. Then he could take violin lessons. But the boy persisted, cobbling together an inexpensive kit. By the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, he and his friends had launched a band. Through middle school in the late 70s, his band flourished in Richmond's new wave scene, playing with bands like The Rage, The Good Guys, and Blind Boys. Not bad for a sixth grader.

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*"I was a burgeoning art weirdo."*

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In summer, when he was bored, he'd ride his bike to the Virginia Museum, lean it against the wall, and head inside to gaze at the art, "all sorts of art, just to pass the time," he remarked recently. Not unlike Alonsoville, his Richmond neighborhood was filled with artists and professors, architects and art patrons. "I was brought up to respect and admire these people." Often he would wander down the VCU campus and dumpster dive for an old pastel and watercolor sets while hearing "all kinds of music coming out of the windows of freaky art students."

He wanted to be a painter. As a high school jock (lacrosse & football), he'd won a number of awards for art. "I was a burgeoning art weirdo," yet he opted to attend Sewanee, The University of the South, a rather conservative Tennessee college not known for its art. But it had a strong tradition of nurturing writers. Good thing. That first semester he took a painting class and realized he wasn't very good. The young man now aspired to be a storyteller like his heroes, William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy, whom he discovered in Southern Lit.

After graduation, Jack landed an internship at a weekly in Richmond, "back when weeklies were still real newspapers with a full staff of writers, some of them real journalists. I did music reviews and short human interest stuff but sensed that journalism might not be my bag. After work I'd write short stories and send a few off to the English Department at UVA." To his utter surprise, he was offered a Henry Hoyns Fellowship. He was on his way to an MFA in Creative Writing... while being paid! Between a few local gigs in his band with his best friend, Ned Oldham, practicing music and teaching classes, the years in Charlottesville flew by.

During this period, Christine Capacci entered his life.

\* \* \*



**READY TO RIDE!**

As a little girl in Rochester, NY, Chris viewed herself as a “horse girl.” Her first goal in life was to be a jockey. In middle school, however, “let’s just say,” she remarked recently, “the cost of horseback riding, on top of hormones, led to different interests.” She wanted to “hang out with the cool kids” and be a jock (soccer, basketball & softball). She has fond memories of biking around Rochester, dealing with “tons of snow,” skiing, visiting friends and relatives in the Finger Lakes, “not trusting Lake Ontario” for swimming, choosing instead Buttermilk Falls. “It was a great place to grow up.”

She went to an all-girls Catholic high school. Always “looking for trouble” with her classmates, she felt “nerdy enough” to opt for school over “skipping classes” to get bagels and Tab at the local joint, a perfect place to smoke a *Getane*... went well with the black eyeliner, making her feel “hip.” Smoking was part of her attraction to the French language. You had to smoke watching a Truffaut movie. The class trips to Toronto and Quebec were an education. She wondered what life would be like if she were fluent in French, living in Quebec, *La ville cent clochers* (The City of a Hundred Steeples).

Her parents were second generation Americans. She’d heard a lot about Ireland, Germany and Italy. Europe beckoned, but she was also “rebellious enough” to want to pick her own path, bringing home brochures for the Sorbonne and McGill. “My parents laid down the law – college in the U.S., no more than eight hours from home.” Fine. She chose The American University in DC. Helped that the drinking age was still 18. She would major in business administration-international business, with minor concentrations in French and Psychology. “I always appreciated learning more about behavior and how people think. Back then, you could walk into any embassy and go to their library. I loved how each one was a microcosm of the country they represented.”

In the senior year of college, she wasn’t sure what to do. “I loved the ‘international’ part of my degree, but not the business part.” She toyed with the idea of teaching English in Japan (JET program). On a whim, she went to a talk at the Peace Corps headquarters with some returned Volunteers. She appreciated their frankness and humor when they talked about “how horrible” some of their illnesses were. Chris was intrigued. They made it seem fun. “I loved that they were so passionate about what

“I did have a cement floor, a well for water and an outhouse.”

they'd experienced." When she received a PC offer to work in the Central African Republic (CAR), she had to turn to the encyclopedia to learn more. What the heck. Beats waiting tables and doing temp work in Boston. She signed up.

After three months of language training (Sango and French) in Cameroon, she was assigned to Grimari, a tiny village that served as a way station for passing trucks. "My house was mud brick, with a straw roof, but I did have a cement floor, a well for water and an outhouse. I rode a mountain bike to 10 schools up to 10 miles away. I was on the road two nights a week to reach some of the faraway schools."



**IN THE PEACE CORPS, GRIMARI, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

During her first year, the country declared an "*annee blanche*," a white year, meaning that teachers hadn't taught enough in the classroom. Everyone had to return to school in the fall at the same grade as before. It was an adjustment for Chris. Sometimes she showed up with no one there. Without a phone or internet, with a radio on battery power that often did not work, how could she know they had gone on strike again? When it rained, classes were cancelled. Nevertheless, she savored riding her bike everywhere. As an elementary school health educator and teacher trainer, she performed a variety of roles. At the time, HIV/AIDS was running its course; some of the teachers she worked with were beginning to die; then she'd see their wives getting sick. "I did a lot of training on how to prevent HIV/AIDS." She also did some "myth-busting." The disease did not come from American cowboys and their horses.

Chris made her mark those two years: new teaching methods for classes on health care; nutrition and STD prevention; a curriculum for health education for ten rural elementary schools. She also had a say in the creation of national guidelines to teach elementary-level health. Perhaps Chris is most proud of the funding she secured for a well at a school. She managed its logistical organization and construction.

On her return to the States, Chris secured a position as program assistant at the African-American Institute in New York. Just a matter of time before she would meet Jack Carneal.

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*I really like that guy. Too bad I will never hear from him again.*

Chris and Jack met at Ned and Jennie's wedding in Baltimore. When she saw Jack at the Brass Elephant, where the rehearsal dinner was held, she whispered to Liz: "That guy is mine." Liz, a dear friend from the Peace Corps, went into action, setting up the two at a table with others.

"We did pretty much get along from the get-go," said Jack. "I reckon you could call it love at first sight."

Said Chris: "We hung out that night, took a group walk the next day, and hung out at the wedding at the Peabody." When he offered to take her to the train station the next day so she could get back to NYC; of course she said yes. Then she gave him that fateful 1-800 number. On the ride home, she thought, "I really like that guy. Too bad I will never hear from him again."

As a graduate student at UVA, Jack did not have cash to spare. Back then, long-distance phone calls cost "real money." After the weekend, he called that 1-800 number "just to say hello." That winter Amtrak had some specials to promote their eastern seaboard business. There were "really cheap trains" between Charlottesville and New York. Jack went up a couple of times, and she came down to Charlottesville, where Ned and Jennie also lived. "Things just kept being fun and interesting," said Jack... lots of hiking, cooking great meals, lots of music, "we both would admit that we kept waiting for things to go south... but they never did." Six months later, after many more Amtrak rides between NYC and Charlottesville, Chris quit her job and moved in with Jack.

In June of '93, Jack completed his MFA in fiction. He continued to work as a clerk at Plan 9 Records on the UVA campus. He called it "Dickensian drudgery." He also toiled as a short-order cook at HotCakes, under the dominion of a "brassy, splay-footed chef who stormed around the kitchen." Meanwhile, he was struggling as a writer. The stories he solicited were falling on deaf ears. Deep in the night he would lie in bed next to Chris, pondering his future. Maybe he wasn't the next Faulkner.

A phone call from Ned Oldham the following spring changed his life. Ned's brother Will, a singer on the rise in the music world, wanted Jack and Ned's band to join him for "the next incarnation" of Palace Brothers, a band Will had founded. They would play in the Lollapalooza shows that summer. There also was the possibility that there would be in the fall a month-long tour in Europe.

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*"One of the wives back home was convinced that we were attending orgies."*

*~ Jack Carneal, Destroy Your Safe and Happy Lives*

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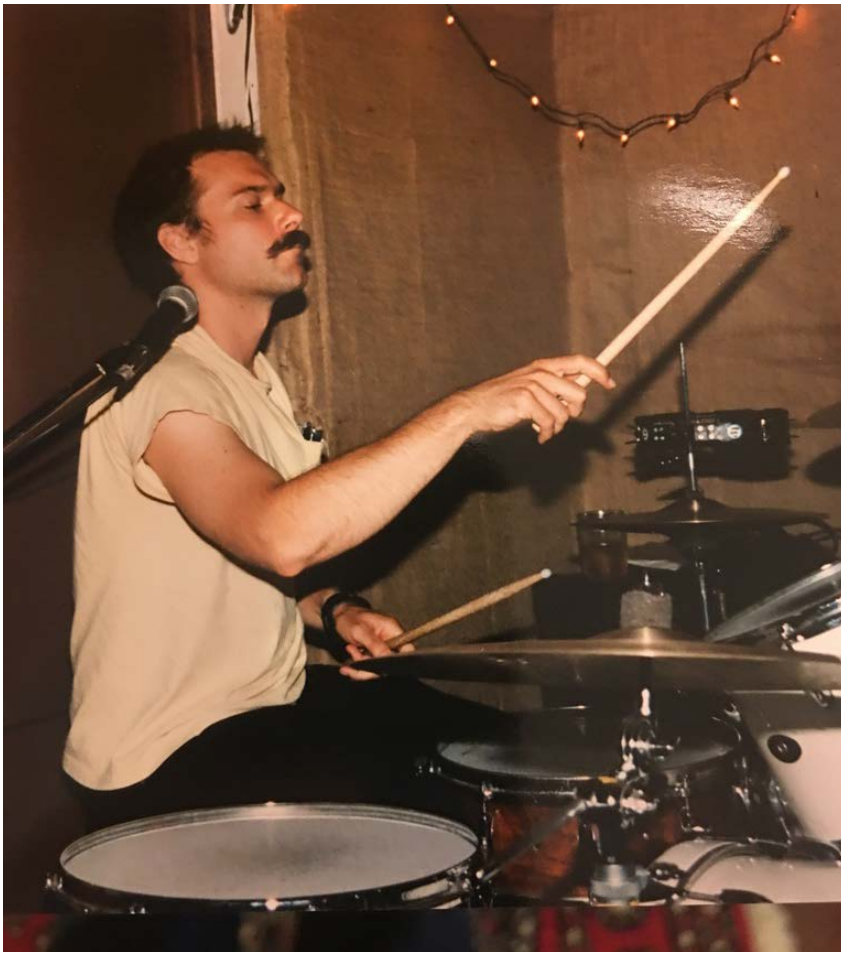
Learning of his plans, she surmised, “Well, it’s been a fun ride, but obviously, he’s not going to come back to boring ol’ me while I’m in boring ol’ grad school in DC.” After his departure, rather than feel “left behind,” she moved in with her pal in Birmingham, AL. She waited tables before heading to DC “to set up shop” in her new apartment.



**THE PALACE BROTHERS, TAKING A BREAK AT THE LOLLAPALOOZA FESTIVAL. FROM LEFT: WILL OLDHAM, ARAM STITH, JASON STITH, NED OLDHAM, AND JACK.**

As a lifelong “basher,” who knelt at the “altar of classic rock,” Jack loved nothing more than “sitting on his throne and driving the chariot into the breach.” Across the U.S., Canada and Europe, he was living the dream of playing in a rock and roll band. It was all about the music. “We started later in life than many bands, so we’d gotten a lot of wildness out of our systems.” Two of his mates were already married. “Being around married people was actually a great lesson. They were no different than before; they still had fun. As band members, we did just about everything together we possibly could, except hook up with any wayward gals. We realized very quickly that we’d be idiots to screw up what we had at home.”

He assumed Chris and he were on the path to marriage, though they hadn’t mentioned that word a single time to one another. He decided to move in with her in DC.; then he’d be off again on “a post-Lollapalooza romp” through Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Austria. The possibility of breaking up still existed.



RIDING THE CHARIOT!

In 60 days they played 48 shows. He began to struggle with tinnitus. He plugged his ears with whatever he could find, even toilet paper or cigarette butts. Jack felt distant from the band. At times, a song he had played 50 times suddenly became unfamiliar. He missed Chris terribly. She wondered what kind of job Jack might get when he got to DC. The thought of working a 40-hour week could put him in a state of panic.

Back in DC, he worked for a time in construction, “a blue-collar experiment” that came close to “crushing his body and brain.” The temp job at NPR suited him better. He discovered the internet... plenty of mention of Will Oldham but no mention of the band. One night on the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia, Jack said something along the lines of “We might as well go ahead and get married.” They married in Rochester; two weeks later they moved Tallahassee, FL where Chris began her PhD in International Development Education at FSU.

“I WAS MAKING SIX DOLLARS AN HOUR AT A RECORD STORE, WE WERE STRUGGLING TO PAY OUR \$450-PER-MONTH RENT, MY WIFE WAS IN THE SECOND YEAR OF A PHD PROGRAM, WE’D BEEN MARRIED BARELY OVER A YEAR, AND SHE WAS PREGNANT.” ~ IBID

Said Chris: “Jack was touring on/off during the whole first half of our being together.” When Tabb was a one-plus-year-old toddler, she moved to Mali to finish her doctorate coursework. Jack and Tabb would follow. Along the way they stopped in Amsterdam, where he played with his band, Anomoanon, at the VPRO Amstel Fest. The band had recently released an album. Aside from being a touring musician, he acted as songwriter and assistant producer. He was also a recording and touring musician for Will Oldham, aka Bonnie “Prince” Willie. He was leaving all that behind.





WITH HIS ANOMOANON MATES

Mali had one of highest infant mortality rates in the world. They lived on a “tiny stipend” meant for a single graduate student. Their home was made of cinder block, the roof was a single sheet of corrugated tin, and they slept under mosquito nets. During the hot season, the temperature spiked to 115 degrees. Often they were without electricity and sick. They had to crush the half- antimalaria pill in Tabb’s syrup-saturated pancakes.

As Chris did field research on the community schools program, Jack and Tabb had their share of adventures. The people in Bougouni, a town of 10,000, were very friendly. Wherever Jack and Tabb went, they were greeted with smiles and invitations to have tea. Meanwhile, back in the States, Anomoanon was touring with new drummers; Johnny Cash had recorded one of Will Oldham’s songs, “I see a darkness.” A lot was going on without him.

One evening he and Chris saw a Ghanaian drum and dance troupe. He was enveloped in a whirlwind of sound and movement so intense that he felt a surge of adrenaline. The players repeatedly broke thick drumsticks on a massive instrument. “In the darkened furnace of that theater I was reborn.” Once home, he would dedicate himself to being in a rock band, to making other people feel like he did during that transformative show.

## LOVE COMES QUIETLY

Love comes quietly,  
finally, drops  
about me, on me,  
in the old ways.  
What did I know  
thinking myself  
able to go  
alone all the way.

~ Robert Creeley

After 10 months, the family returned to the U.S. Two months later Chris learned she was pregnant again. Chris landed a position as a technical advisor in education at Catholic Relief Services. They chose Baltimore to live, buying a house on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in Hampden; Ned and Jennie and their daughter lived there, as well as Will and Diane, making it the perfect place to jump-start his rock-and-roll career. Soon he was touring again and recording music with his bandmates. When they weren't touring, he and Ned were full-time caregivers. Said Chris: "We did what all young parents do without even thinking. You just go with the flow and make it all work." In August 2001, Maxwell Carneal came into the world. Jack and Chris realized they needed more space.



IN THE RECORDING STUDIO DOING BACKUP VOCALS FOR A TRACK.

## Quote of the Day

Be yourself. Everybody else is taken.

~ Oscar Wilde

## Alonsoville

One day Chris and Jack and the boys took a walk through Linkwood Park, turned the corner onto Cold Spring and Wickford, and saw a handwritten sign on the fence. Chris said they had no idea what Alonsoville was like. The street looked fun (saw Dennis and Seth throwing the football in the circle). Jack called the number, the owner answered and gave an affordable price. In April 2003, the family moved in.

One could write a book about their careers (Jack already has). Eventually, Jack gave up touring. In 2006, he became a full-time lecturer in the English Department at Towson University. As a freelance writer and editor, he has applied his talents in many venues, even working as an actor in *I Used to Be Darker*, a Matt Porterfield film, much of which was filmed in their Alonsoville house. He also has a presence in the Baltimore music scene.

### Come and Be My Baby

The highway is full of big cars  
going nowhere fast

Some people wrap their lives  
around a cocktail glass

And you sit wondering

Where you're going to turn

I got it

Come. And be my baby.

~ Maya Angelou



JACK, TABB, CHRIS & MAXWELL



CHRIS, TABB AND MAXWELL

*Know a neighbor not on the  
listserv?*

*Let that person know what he or  
she is missing.*

*To get on, contact:  
[james.m.stevenson@gmail.com](mailto:james.m.stevenson@gmail.com)*

As for Chris, since 2004 she has worked for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). She has published many papers about her research and work, given many presentations via the Internet, and won several awards. Not only has she lived and worked in France, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Mali, she has also worked and traveled in 31 other countries.

Through it all, Alonsoville has been their anchor. Unless they were sick or it was pouring rain, Jack says he would bet “good money” that their kids played at Linkwood Park every single day for five years.



THE BOYS “GRADUATING” FROM ALONSOVILLE’S  
SPRING 2020 GRAD CELEBRATION.

## One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII

I don't love you as if you were a rose of salt, topaz,  
or arrow of carnations that propagate fire:  
I love you as one loves certain obscure things,  
secretly, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that doesn't bloom but carries  
the light of those flowers, hidden, within itself,  
and thanks to your love the tight aroma that arose  
from the earth lives dimly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where,  
I love you directly without problems or pride:  
I love you like this because I don't know any other way to love,  
except in this form in which I am not nor are you,  
so close that your hand upon my chest is mine,  
so close that your eyes close with my dreams.

~ Pablo Neruda, translated by Mark Eisner



## Featured Dog in the Neighborhood

### Ralph Edward

Cyndy Serfas and Larry Grubb's adopted  
"Grandpuppy."

Cyndy wishes she could sleep as well as  
Ralph!

# News & Notes

The Keswick Improvement Association (KIA) has shifted **dues** to the beginning of the year. They remain at **\$30** (\$31 to offset Venmo fee). Louisa has set up a Venmo account at KESWICK\_BMORE. Or you can drop off a check at 500 Wingate.

Your dues will go toward insurance and planning for the spring picnic around or on Memorial Day.

With four current vacancies in our business district, KIA has adopted “The Larry Principle,” to rate possible new businesses on Cold Spring:

good +1, neutral, 0, bad -1

Local ownership good, chain bad

Trash producer bad, no trash good, some trash neutral

Parking/traffic increase bad, no measurable effect on parking/traffic good

Noise bad, no noise good

New service for neighborhood good, yet another restaurant neutral

March 12, Daylight Saving Time

Last May, a middle school student was hit by a car at the Keswick & Cold Spring intersection. That has led to a “site assessment” by the Department of Transportation. On February 6, DOT representatives met via Zoom with the KIA Board and neighbors. Samuel Hammond, DOT Traffic Division, proposed three recommendations for “traffic calming”:

- A. Speed cameras on Cold Spring Lane
- B. Red-light cameras on both approaches
- C. Flex posts at the intersection

After the DOT presentation, there was discussion on the proposals. Everyone agreed with the proposals for speed cameras and red-light cameras. However, installation of the flex posts could lead to “unintended consequences,” such as traffic blockage when someone was turning off Cold Spring onto Keswick. KIA will revisit the issue if the need arises.

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## ONCE UPON A TIME

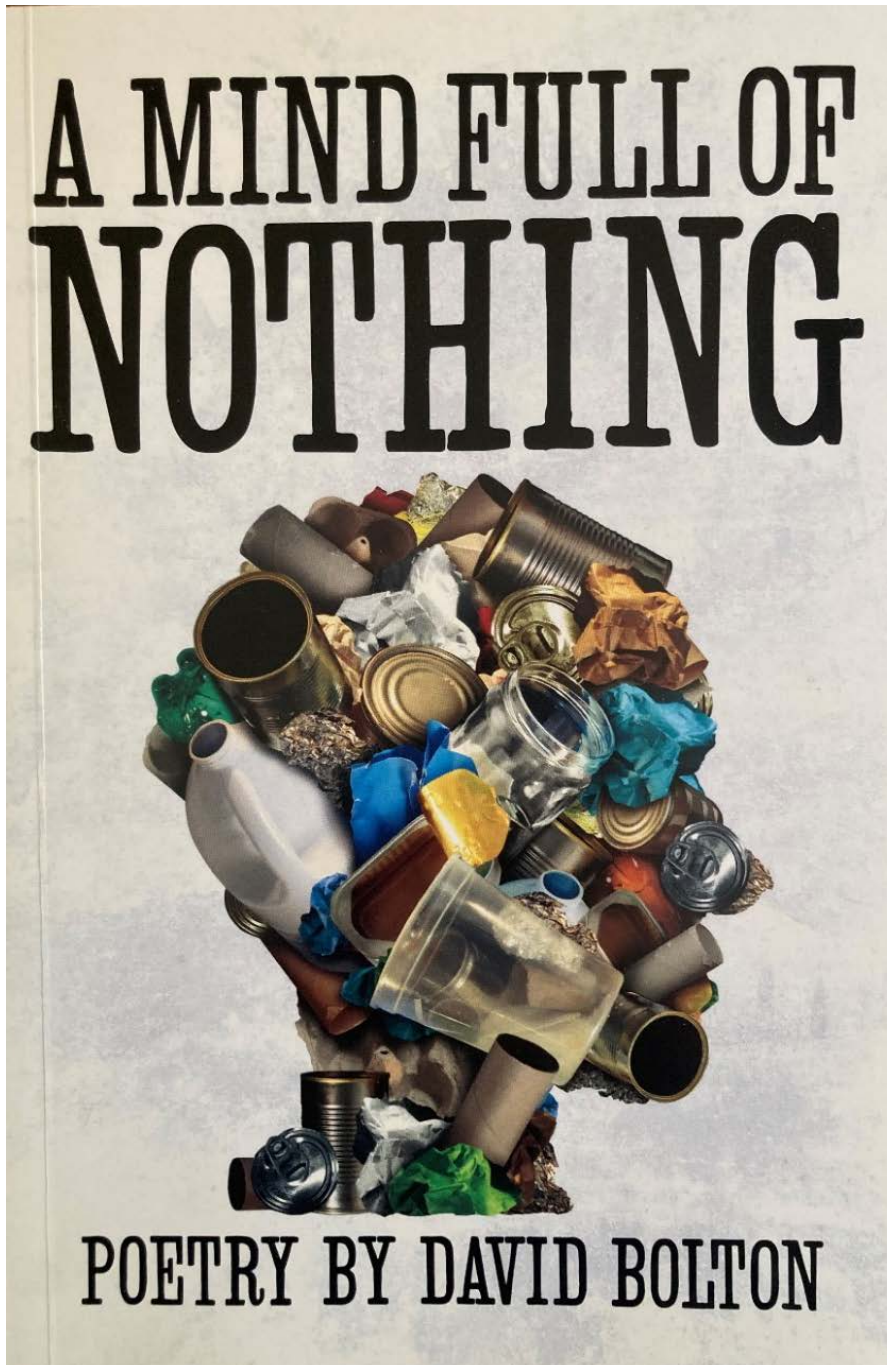
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I remember the gas street lights and the man with his ladder whose job was to wind the clock inside the lamp. One of my fondest memories was fall in the neighborhood; people would rake their leaves into the gutter and burn them.

~ David R. Stoll, *Keswick's History Notebook*

## One More Word

The poem below is from my latest poetry book. If you would like a hard copy, let me know. For the electronic version, go to: [poetscoop.org/free.htm#MFON\\_DAVIDB](http://poetscoop.org/free.htm#MFON_DAVIDB)  
Click on the title for the free download.



### Easy Space

You ask for a poem  
to mark this valentine  
a bit of simile and rhyme  
a lyric or two saluting  
lines of symmetry.  
Bogie & Bacall  
Tracy & Hepburn  
Fred & Ginger  
Though our love is not of the  
silver screen  
I'll say this:

There's magic between us  
It begins with a kiss  
not just any  
but one that sizzles  
from the soles to the scalp.  
Always the touch  
the flutter of tongues  
fingers on flesh  
feet doing a duet  
spirits that celebrate  
our bodies  
our appetites  
our humor.  
We create a movable feast  
to coin an Ernest phrase  
laughter by candlelight  
swaying to a jazz beat  
hugs by the sink  
conversations over caviar and  
chocolate  
caresses on the sheet  
we share an easy space  
a canvas most sweet.

– *Valentine's Day, 2005,  
Dedicated to Denise Becker,  
part of the Marriage Ceremony,  
5/19/07*