

ALONSOVILLE VOICE

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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Cherry blossoms in Druid Hill Park; photo by John Dean

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Nancy Romita: Dancer, Teacher & “Change Agent”

by David Bolton

Her first creative venture?... happened when Nancy Wanich was 6 or 7, spurred on by the delivery of a refrigerator. Claiming the cardboard box, she cut out a big door and penciled in her musical for “Romeo and Juliet.”

Sang Romeo: “I want a girl that’s just like the girl who married Dad.” Key the music box.... on with the play!

Nancy grew up in Bayville, a small town on Long Island Sound, 30 miles from NYC. Her Dad was a teacher and Mom a social worker. Their homes were fit for “middle class working families.” There was one exception, a weathered, gilded mansion that housed the non-profit Fiedel School of Creative Arts, home for two graduates from the Julliard Mannes School of Music. At the age of 8, Nancy joined the enterprise. Roslyn, a modern dance protégé of Martha Graham, and Ivan, a pianist composer, were “fabulous artists,” recalled Nancy. There she would learn movement in dance and master the piano.

In middle school, her focus shifted to athletics: softball, track and gymnastics. In the 11th grade, she was asked to be in a musical, “Brigadoon.” She danced to the funeral dirge. No big deal. As an athlete, Nancy knew all about the pressure to excel before an audience. The girl loved dancing and was drawn to modern dance and ballet. For “projects,” she created dances within the Fiedel musicals. There weren’t enough hours in the day.



Rainstick shot, photo by Kanji Takeno

In '72, she was a junior at Locust Valley High when she met Vic, a freshman engineering student in Cooper Union in New York City. Working at his old high school as a lab assistant, he came to see some of his students play at a basketball game at Locust Valley. Afterwards, he and his buddies went looking for girls. Vic’s pickup line was a classic: “How do I get back to the Long Island Expressway?” Though she did not drive, she gave him directions anyway. The boy was cute. She told him to go past Friendly’s Ice Cream.

“Do you want to go there?” How could she resist? So three girls and four boys squished into Vic’s 1963 Corvair. “And that was that!,” said Nancy.

They dated through college and were engaged to be married in ’77. Three months before the wedding, “with gowns, invites, wedding hall, all bought and paid for, we called it off.” Two years later the wedding bells rang. In ’99, Baltimore Magazine did a spread on Vic and Nancy for its Valentine issue. “He’s the best. The magic is still there.”

At Connecticut College, she earned in ’76 a BA Cum Laude in Dance, Child Development, and an Elementary Education Certificate. Along the way, she participated in the American Dance Festival, which involved six weeks of intensive training in modern dance. “The beauty of the 6-week program was that we lived, worked, and danced among the founders/pioneers of modern dance, greats such as Martha Graham and Jose Limon.”

Nancy also spent summers learning “dance therapy, how the mind and body could blend.” By integrating different forms, she searched for ways to teach and heal herself. As a high school gymnast, she had fallen off uneven parallel bars and hurt her back. “On and off through college, I was in pain.”



*Dancing the Lindy at their wedding reception,
Manhattan, August 25, 1979*

Full of hopes and dreams, Nancy moved to Greenwich Village in ’77, joining the Schulkind Dance Company. The company director, Marcus Schulkind, focused on “the relationship between dance, health, and movement.” Dancing at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park could lead to a bit of drama. Rain could be a real downer, So could dew on a steamy September night. Picture a full moon over the Dakota, place is packed... “Marcus and I danced and improvised our way through the piece as if on a slip and slide.” Nevertheless, the tour company pulled it off without injury. “Dance,” Nancy explained, “is not all dazzle, magic, and lights. Sometimes it’s about surviving.”

By ’79, Nancy was performing, dancing, and teaching at the 92nd StY and doing a summer gig as a teaching assistant at the American Dance Festival at Duke University. At a party, she overheard Marcus saying that “her gifts would be choreography.” It was a significant moment for the young dancer. Someone she admired had seen her potential, something she had sensed about herself from a young age. After that, he recommended her for teaching positions and choreography, helping launch her career in dance, Nancy started her own company, NanDance. She performed in NYC and gained choreographic recognition.

In '85, she and Vic moved to Baltimore. Vic had landed a new job working for IBM. It was too good to pass up. Nancy had to rearrange her life. They moved into an apartment on Northway in Guilford. Vic missed the Chinese laundry in New York and went on a quest to find another for his shirts. Dry cleaning wouldn't do. The discovery of Tsao C Wing on Schenley led them to check out houses on Wickford and Wingate. The Tudor architecture reminded them of parts of Queens and Forest Hills. Could they afford it? When interest rates dipped below 10 percent, they pounced on a three-bedroom on Wickford.

Nancy started teaching at Towson University, ranked nationwide as one of the top 25 colleges for dance. As keynote speaker, dance educator, and somatic practitioner, she's still there as senior lecturer (<http://towson.edu/dance/fac-wanich-romita.asp>). "I love Towson. The university provides a setting for dance research of motor skills, with the goal of helping people achieve "ease of action."

In '93, she started a new Baltimore-based company, The Moving Company, and choreographed over 50 professional works at DTW/New York Live Arts, the 92ndStY, The Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Kennedy Center. In 2000 at Towson, she was awarded an MFA in Interdisciplinary Theater, thanks to a 4.0 GPA. For over 20 years, Nancy has been teaching at Towson a yearlong course in experimental anatomy and kinesiology, "Scientific Bases of Movement." This course integrates anatomy, cross training, and somatic practices for "dancer wellness." Over time, her focus has shifted, creating opportunities to grow as an artist. That said, if she learned tomorrow that she could not dance or create art, she'd be fine. "The essence of everything is teaching."

"... Between the semifinal and final rounds of the audition my shoulder was starting to act up and, somehow, I was able to take 20 minutes and assess things. I realized my right back heel was losing contact... I thought about it throughout the 40-minute round and it worked! I got the job!"

~ Violinist Madeline Adkins, Concert Master, Utah Symphony (former Associate Concert Master, Baltimore Symphony)

The Alexander Technique

While teaching at the American Dance Festival, she took a course in the Alexander Technique, a world-wide method and a required course for music theater and dance students at the Julliard Mannes School of Music and in many performing arts schools around the world. "It teaches you how small, unconscious body actions have deeply profound consequences. Often we are unaware of habits that compromise systems. The technique facilitates the student to move out of habit and into awareness. The key to everything is developing efficiency in action, ease in posture and use of the body."

By moving out of habit and into awareness, Nancy changed her life. She trained to become an Alexander Technique teacher. "Taking care of my body and helping others to do the same dovetails with a career in dance. I've had no significant back pain for 30 years." At the 92nd Street Y in New York, she initiated the first courses in the Alexander Technique.

As a Senior Certified Teacher of the Alexander Technique, Nancy has maintained a private practice for over 35 years. She considers herself a "change agent" rather than a healer. "The Alexander Technique is not a healing method. It facilitates a way to release tension in the body." She has worked with stroke patients after PT "to stimulate potential for movement." She's worked with golfers and musicians, "people just

trying to be fit in their own body by using the least amount of effort for action.” Before action comes the pause “to free the way”; one becomes “aware” of what he or she is about to do: move with “instruction and guidance toward balance, not the position of balance.”

Sometimes it’s a matter of life and death.

“I had a dear friend. Her daughter was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis.” Nancy had worked with Bethany to relieve “the unnecessary tension” around the vocal cords, but now she was in Johns Hopkins Hospital, and her lungs were filling up. Bethany was losing the capacity to breathe. Near the end, the parents took her off the ventilator, her life support.

Nancy looked at the x-rays, which indicated lung capacity in the upper chest. If Bethany could breathe into this space... Nancy placed Bethany’s thumbs under the armpits and told her to breathe in and out. Two days passed; she was breathing on her own, with the help of oxygen tanks. Bethany went home and was able to go to her high school prom before passing away. She owed that time to achieving what Nancy called “movement potential.”



A gentle way to good posture, photo by Jim Burger

Over the past 9 years, Nancy and her daughter, Allegra, have been developing their own method for helping dancers and yogis “to release unnecessary tension and discover ease of action. She has collaborated with her daughter, Allegra Romita, to produce two books: *Functional Awareness ® Anatomy in Action for Dancers* and *Functional Awareness and Yoga: An anatomical Guide in Reflective Practice* (Oxford University Press). They often crisscross the country and globe, giving workshops for the mind, body and well-being.

Both Allegra, a NYU faculty member, and older daughter Krista, a research scientist for the Rand Corporation, are grateful for having been raised in Alonsoville. “I love this neighborhood,” said their mother, “it’s the heart and soul of Baltimore,” with writers, photographers, artists, musicians, and teachers sprinkled up and down the blocks. Walk into Nancy and Vic’s house, and you’ll find on the walls works by Christine Neill, Timothy App, Ellen Burchenal, and Jim Burger. “What a wonderful village!”

In 2000, Nancy created a labyrinth, collaborating with the Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center to design and build a labyrinth to support “a reflective movement process” for wellness and healing. She considers this project the culmination of her effort to integrate dance, art, and somatic practices into community life. Through the ritual of walking a labyrinth, in silence and prayer, a “profound healing process” takes place.

Amen, Nancy.

FEATURED DOG IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Perhaps you've seen her ambling along?

JELLYBEAN

Is part of the Tri-PAW Community!

She's 13 years old and a cancer survivor. It started with a small tumor on her right front leg which grew to the size of a small orange in a matter of months. The prognosis was not good and she seemed to only have weeks to live. Her leg was amputated in November 2021.

She's still going on strong!



Send us a story of your amazing pet to be featured here in the AlonzoVille Voice!

Once Upon a Time

In 1888, the St. Mary's Female Orphan Asylum moved from downtown to the southeast corner of Cold Spring Lane near Roland Avenue. Thomas H. Hanson had deeded seven acres of his property to the trustees of the asylum. His small estate, "Wilton Villa," was originally part of a vast colonial tract owned by Colonel Charles Ridgely. By 1920, thanks to gifts of land, St. Mary's had expanded into a 20-acre asylum, serving the needs of 200 children between 6 and 14 years for over a half century. The asylum lawn became a "liberty garden" during the second world war.

~ Keswick History Notebook

Climbing: Mind Over Matter

Recently on a soggy Saturday morning, I had the pleasure of hosting four Alonsoville climbers, three from Upper Wingate and one on Sedgewick. They have become friends through their passion for this intricate sport.



Long shot: Svea in white, belaying ¼ way up; Matt in orange and red, at top

Sam Mulcahy, 17, is into difficult challenges on the climbing wall, especially those requiring perseverance. Climbing is not about getting to the top. It's all about the way. The Friends junior prefers moves that appear impossible... took Sam 100 tries over a span of months before he mastered that particular climb.

Matt Luck, 53, once spent 5 days climbing El Capitan, requiring "a lot of gear, a lot of food, and a lot of water." The NOAA research scientist discovered climbing in his first year at Cal Poly. "The school had one of the first climbing walls." Climbing, he says, is an "underrated skill."

Svea Closser, 45, Matt's partner, was introduced to climbing in Vermont, when she was teaching at Middlebury College. "During my 15 years of practice, you can't climb just on brute strength. I can't do pullups, but I have other strengths. I climb hard routes because of technique built over the years. I've cultivated balance and

flexibility. It's very much a mental sport, learning to deal with the fear of climbing. You assess the risk and manage it... good for life in general."

Ryan Simmons, 16, says he's "not great with fear. I do what I can to mitigate the situation." Like Sam, the Boys Latin sophomore participates in climbing competitions. "It's not time to be scared." He tries to focus fully on the climb and "tune out" any distractions.

Sam started climbing a local rock wall when he was 8. He introduced Ryan to the sport when Ryan was in the sixth grade. Sam admits to being “scared of heights,” preferring “bouldering” to belaying the side of a mountain. Rather than leading a climb, “it’s just me and the rock,” no ropes. In team competitions, he has risen from introductory to intermediate and now advanced... “fun being on a team... not working for or against them.” The sole focus is oneself. “All of us are trying the same thing. It’s noncompetitive.”

Svea, a professor at the School for Public Health, views climbing as a break from parenting and work responsibilities, where she must do everything “really well.” But the rock doesn’t care. “I can push myself. Each climb is a puzzle. To get to the top, you have to figure it out with your body.”

“There’s so many variables,” says Matt, certain holds one is good at... hate the smaller holes, the crimps, the tiny little ledges. At times one can do a hard climb but fail at an easy one. Everybody has “a different body type.” Then there’s the mind. Sometimes it can get in the way. “A fall can occur when you doubt yourself.”



Matt halfway up El Capitan, Zodiac route, early 2000



Climbing the face of a Montana mountain

Ryan enjoys the experience of competing. He’s learning about himself. In his first year with his age group, Youth A, he plans to enter as many competitions as possible and “make it to the regionals.”

What about injuries? “Depends on what you are doing,” says Svea, who sprained her ankle while bouldering. Could be a dangerous climb without ropes or multitasking with ropes. “Everything goes back to risk management.”

When Sam competes, he says the competition isn’t about “small holes and hard moves,” rather it’s about “coordination and explosive power” through jumps and swings, which is exciting for spectators. He compares the movement to gymnastics.

“A different set of risks,” adds Svea.

Sam says he “feels lucky” he hasn’t gotten hurt. “I’m not the safest climber.” He’s had his share of “hard falls” doing “dumb stuff.”

Ryan has avoided injuries except for “weird muscle imbalance.” He always tries to continue.

“There are going to be good days and bad days,” says Matt. “Some days you can’t do something. Sometimes things feel out of control... holds you back.”

While Ryan strives for the regionals, Sam plans to continue competing, help “friends from school get into it,” but scale back on the training. “It’s more fun doing easier climbs. Don’t have to try so hard instead of devoting hours to difficult moves.”

Maryland is not known for outdoor climbing; most of the action occurs in climbing gyms. Within two hours of Alonsoville, there are seven gyms. Sam has been to them all, often with Ryan. For the most part, he finds “people in gyms friendly.”

Here, Matt and Svea mostly climb indoors, though they’ve been known to drive eight hours to the New River Gorge. Says Svea: “I’m climbing better now at age 45 than at any other point. It’s a healthy part of my life, a place to challenge myself, good for the body and mind.” . Looks like there’s a lot of climbing trips ahead. The two just bought a second home in Montana.



In the Red Rocks of Nevada



Walk This Way

“The footpaths of Roland Park are a unique dimension of this turn-of-the-century planned community. Most are concrete walks about two feet wide complete with drain ditches alongside, well-bult steps, and heavy iron pipe railings.”

~ Bobbie Siebens, Roland Park Community Foundation

Like to hike? May I suggest what I call “The Steps.” It’s quite aerobic.

Let’s chart the trek from the northwest side of Oakdale and Roland. Past St. David’s Church, make a right on Long Lane. (in Roland Park, we have “lanes,” not alleys). Past the playground, Long Lane narrows and becomes a narrow path between big houses. Make a left at the road. At Club Road, make a right. Walk past the country club and continue on Club up the hill to Elmhurst. Make a left and walk down to where you make a right onto a macadam lane.

You’ll walk past some massive homes. At the end of a steep slope, you come to the road. Across, slightly to the right, the 55 steps of **Hilltop Path** await. Take your time. It’s a beautiful climb; at the top, enjoy the back yards and fantastic architecture of a mansion at least a century old. Continue on down the hill.

At the bottom, make a left and then a right onto **Squirrel Path**. 43 more steps follow. At the top, you’ll have a nice view of a mansion lording over the crest. If the conditions merit, you’ll hear what sounds like the ocean as the breeze rolls in from the west, brushing the tops of towering sycamores and oaks. There are more steps leading to the road.

At the bottom of the path, cross the road and you’ll be on **Laurel Path**. No steps this time, just a narrow path taking you upward. You might hear wind chimes. Along the top, follow the black railing as it bends to the right, taking you higher on the path. You’ll arrive at the end of Longwood Road, which takes you to Roland Avenue. We came back on Stony Run. Length of hike from Wingate circle and back? 4.2 miles, 9,400 steps.

The Footpaths of Roland Park, courtesy of the Roland Park Civic League on next page.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Baseball is 90 percent physical.
The other half is mental.”

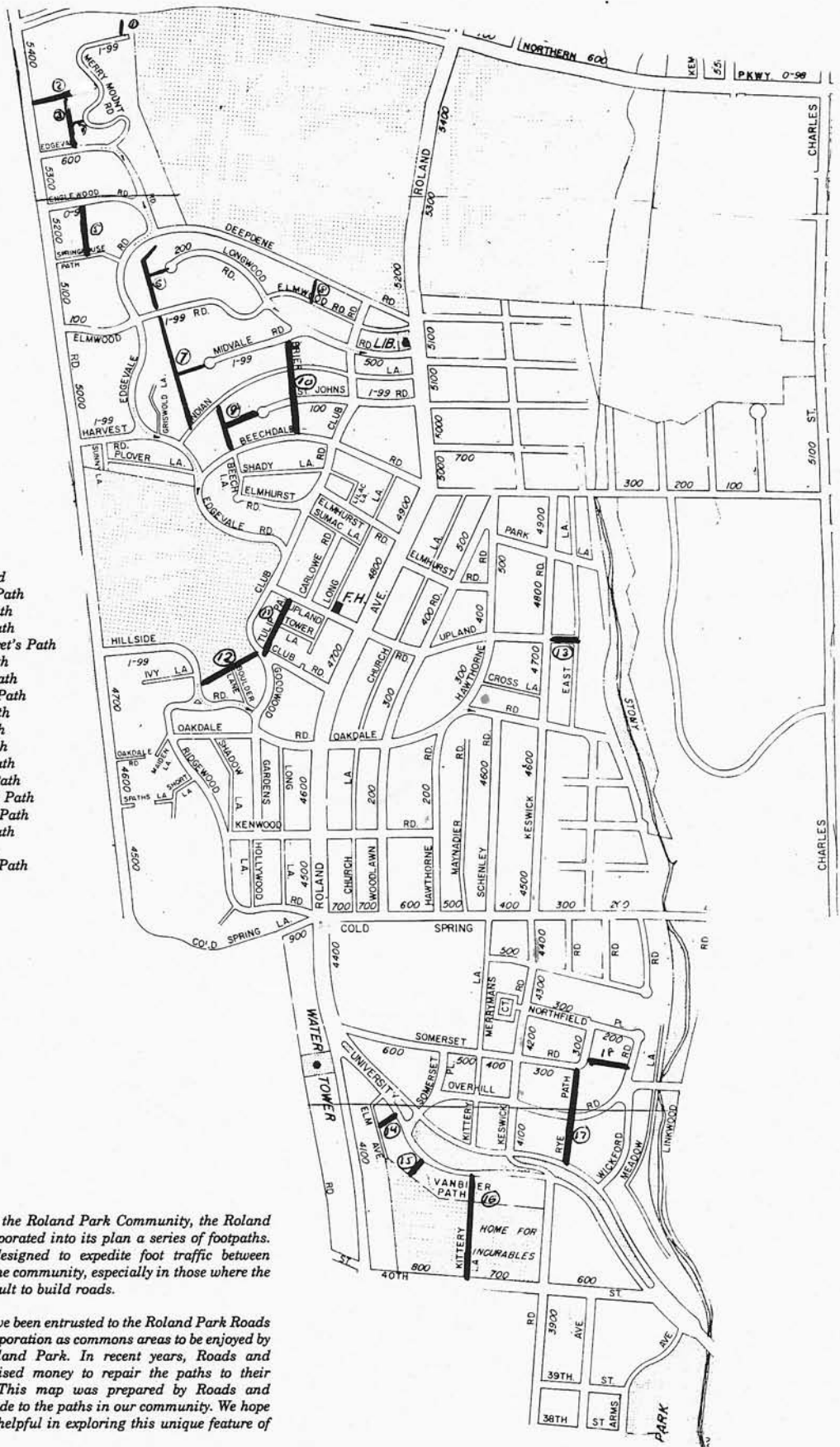
~ Yogi Berra

THE FOOTPATHS OF ROLAND PARK

1. Audley End
2. Climbing Path
3. Tintern Path
4. Shipton Path
5. St. Margaret's Path
6. Laural Path
7. Squirrel Path
8. Litchfield Path
9. Hilltop Path
10. Brier Path
11. Tulip Path
12. Sunset Path
13. Upland Path
14. Ten Oaks Path
15. Vanbiber Path
16. Kittery Path
17. Rye Path
18. Hepburn Path

In designing the Roland Park Community, the Roland Park Company incorporated into its plan a series of footpaths. These paths were designed to expedite foot traffic between different sections of the community, especially in those where the terrain made it difficult to build roads.

The paths have been entrusted to the Roland Park Roads and Maintenance Corporation as commons areas to be enjoyed by the residents of Roland Park. In recent years, Roads and Maintenance has raised money to repair the paths to their original condition. This map was prepared by Roads and Maintenance as a guide to the paths in our community. We hope that you will find it helpful in exploring this unique feature of our community.



Squash: the Fountain of Youth



Forbes Magazine calls squash one of the “top 10 healthiest sports.” Consider these benefits: increased cardio and muscular endurance, increased strength and flexibility, and increased capacity for burning calories. There’s also a pretty low risk of injuries. Just make sure to wear those protective glasses.

Jerry Henger started playing when he moved to Baltimore in the 1980s. “My landlord needed a 4th for his regular weekly game of doubles.”

Some people associate the game with racquetball. Skill-wise, squash, a 19th century British invention, is much more difficult. You play with a smaller ball and the racket requires more skill to hit.

Jerry says the best thing about squash is the enjoyment, “a nice break from the daily grind. When I was working, my weekly squash game brought a smile to my face, regardless of how bad the day was at the office. Like the bumper sticker, a bad day fishing is better than a good day at the office. Just substitute squash for fishing.”

The rule of play is simple: keep hitting the ball against the front wall until your opponent can’t return it successfully. That said, it’s not just a game of power; it’s also a game of strategy. Says Jerry: “Right position at right time; eye on the ball; hit it where they are not.”

One summer he raised his game at a “squash camp,” a week of instruction at Amherst College in Massachusetts. As a member of Meadow Mills Athletics Club, he played there regularly until it closed in 2021, about the time of his retirement when he was “planning to work seriously” on his game. It all worked out. As community members, he and his fellow players at Meadow Mills were able to join the fitness and aquatic center (FAC) at Loyola University.



“Now I strictly play singles, two people in a small room, banging a small rubber ball against the walls and sides.” Asked if he could cite any memorable matches, he said: “All my matches with Eric are memorable. We are pretty evenly matched. Each game is like running a mile or two.”

News & Notes

Alonsoville Picnic

Sunday, May 28

Bike & baby parades, water balloon contests, limbo limbo, John Dean crooning, Twitchy Fingers riffing, grilled hamburgers and hotdogs, potluck galore, firetruck on Wingate, raffles, silent auction and... don't forget the Cake contest!

Below are some winning entries, photos by Cyndy Serfas.



Next Issue of the Voice: The Art Issue, August

One More Word

I took up golf in my forties. Like a virus, it gets into your blood. Two years in a row, I traveled from DC to St. George, Utah, to give a short speech on behalf of the telecom association I worked for and play in the golf tournament as the “D” player in a 4-man scramble. Two years in a row at the banquet I was branded the “World’s Worst Golfer.” I deserved the citation the first year; the second, not so sure. Then again, dear daughter Stephanie did say I was “wretched” after accompanying me for nine holes at Pine Ridge.

Why I Hate Golf

This swing, this stroke of stick
 reflecting a quest for rhythm & flow,
 the “slot,” elusive as the grail.
 a perplexing test of character:
 the harder one tries
 the greater the chance
 shots go awry
 enough to
 make a grown man cry
 toss a club into a pond
 or maim a goose with a finicky iron.

This devious game, so simple are its tricks,
 it calls for a soft grip
 a touch of Zen from tee to green
 a mind not cluttered with negativity
 no what ifs
 but movement of the hips
 a wrist flick, the crack of the whip
 simple physics gives that sphere a ride
 a soaring arc into the sky.
 as sure as butterflies in spring
 that sweet spot will lure this sucker back.

3/23/11

From *A Mind Full of Nothing*

