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COVID-19

## *Stories*

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## HIDDEN HISTORIES

# A Belated Valentine's Day A Brief History of Syphilis

by JACK R JOHNSON

**W**HEN I WAS IN third grade, they gave out these little boxes of candies on Valentine's Day. The candies were shaped like hearts and because the hearts were so small they could not spell out the long phrase "Valentine's Day", so they just shortened it to two letters. VD.

I thought that was kind of a cool short hand. So I took to wishing everyone Happy VD day. My teacher didn't like that. She wouldn't explain why. She just looked miserable and said, "Jack, please, just stop calling it VD day. Okay?"

Ever since that time, venereal disease and Valentine's Day have been—for me—inextricably linked. I blame the candy.

From the very beginning, VD has gotten a bad rap. Especially syphilis. According to the Journal of Medicine, "In 1495, every country whose population was affected by syphilis blamed neighboring countries for the outbreak." Nobody wanted to own this thing.

So, the inhabitants of Italy, Germany and United Kingdom named syphilis 'the French disease', the French named it 'the Neapolitan disease', the Russians assigned the name of 'Polish disease', the Polish called it 'the German disease', The Danish, the Portuguese and the inhabitants of Northern Africa named it 'the Spanish/Castilian disease' and the Turks coined the term 'Christian disease'. Moreover, in Northern India, the Muslims blamed the Hindus for the outbreak of the affliction. And, of course, the Hindus blamed the Muslims, and in the end everyone blamed the Europeans."

The original name "syphilis" comes from an Italian book by Girolamo Fracastoro, a poet and medical personality in Verona, Italy. His work was entitled "Syphilis, sive Morbus Gallicus" which loosely translates to "Syphilis, or the French Disease."

In his story, Syphilus is a shepherd who gets torqued at Apollo for burning off all the water that feeds his flock. He vows not to worship Apollo. Bad

move. Apollo curses him with a disease named Syphilis after the shepherd's own name and the affliction spreads to the whole population including the King! A nymph counsels the inhabitants to offer Apollo sacrifices, one of which was Syphilus himself, and to try some herbal cures including something called Guaiac.

Now, it just so happens that Fracastoro was a doctor himself who also treated local cases of syphilis with—you got it -- Guaiac.

These treatments were relatively ineffective, but the use of Guaiac was interesting. Guaiac was only recently available, because it came from the same place that syphilis came from—according to the popular theory of origin: Hispaniola, or The New World.

There are two popular theories for the origin of the disease. One is long and complicated and basically unproven. The other, called the Columbian theory, has some decent evidence to support it. The Columbian theory in a nutshell: Columbus brought syphilis back from his travels in the New World.

There's significant skeletal evidence to back the theory up, and it's further confirmed by two physicians who were present at the moment when Christopher Columbus returned from America.

One of them, a doctor named Ruy Diaz de Isla wrote that syphilis was "unknown disease, so far not seen and never described." He apparently witnessed the onset of the disease first hand in Barcelona in 1493. You might recall that Columbus returned from his adventures in Hispaniola and arrived in Spain in 1493, as well.

Here's where it gets ugly. Many of the crew members who served on Columbus' voyage later joined the army of King Charles VIII in his invasion of Italy in 1495. This probably resulted in spreading the disease across Europe and as many as five million deaths.

As Jared Diamond describes it, "[W]hen syphilis was first definitely recorded in Europe in 1495, its pustules often covered the body from the head to the knees, caused flesh to fall from people's faces, and led to death within a few months." The disease then was much

more lethal than it is today. Some findings suggest Europeans could have carried the non-venereal tropical bacteria home, where the organisms probably mutated into the more deadly European form.

Whatever the case, Syphilis was a major killer in Europe during the Renaissance. In the 16th century, it was sometimes called the "great pox" in order to distinguish it from smallpox. Because in its early stages, syphilis (or the great pox) produced a rash similar to smallpox. There are other terms that were used to describe syphilis as well, such as Lues venerea, Latin for "venereal plague"; and "Cupid's disease."

There were originally no effective treatments for syphilis, although a number of remedies were tried. Some methods included blood-letting, laxative use, and bathing in wine and herbs or olive oil as if you were a lightly tossed salad.

Mercury was a common, long-standing treatment for syphilis, maybe because it had positive effects in the treatment of leprosy, which was thought to be related to syphilis. Like leprosy, in severe cases of syphilis, body parts fell off, fingers, noses, etc...

None of these so called cures were especially effective, and syphilis had its way with the West. It scarred and disfigured faces, leading to what was sometimes called "nasal collapse." Artificial noses were used to improve appearances as well as heavy makeup and the occasional 'beauty marks' to the hide the pustules or poxes.

Curiously, some patients who developed high fevers were cured of syphilis. Because of this, for a brief time, malaria—which produces high fevers—was used as treatment for syphilis. This was considered an acceptable risk, the logic being that malaria could later be cured with quinine, which was available at that time.

Believe it or not, in 1927 Dr. Julius Wagner-Jauregg won a Nobel Prize for Medicine for using malaria as a treatment for syphilis.

In fact, the struggle to discover a cure for the disease has been almost as awful as the disease itself. You might recall the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Males" that oc-

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that occurred between 1932 and 1972 by the US Public Health Service. The ostensible purpose of the study was to observe the natural history of untreated syphilis; the African-American men in the study were only told they were receiving free health care from the United States government. Some of the men were actively infected with the disease without their knowledge, then left untreated for 40 years even though penicillin was commonly available for treatment shortly after World War II. The same type of experiments were also conducted in Guatemala from 1946 through the mid-1950s by the United States, by the same doctor who also helped with the Tuskegee Study. His name was Dr. John Charles Cutler.

In Guatemala, he and other doctors deliberately infected healthy people with the disease. The researchers paid prostitutes infected with syphilis to have sex with prisoners, while other subjects were infected by directly inoculating them with the bacterium. Through intentional exposure to gonorrhea, syphilis, and chancroid, a total of 1,308 people were involved in the experiments. Many died brutal and unnecessary deaths.

In October 2010, the U.S. government finally apologized. A commission concluded nine months later that the experiments "involved gross violations of ethics as judged against both the standards of today and the researchers' own understanding"

Once penicillin was formally introduced as a cure, the main threat of syphilis was greatly diminished for all of mankind, but the disease had left millions dead or ravaged in its wake. Great minds like Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde and even Beethoven were lost to it; and less likable personalities as well: Al Capone and Adolf Hitler probably suffered from it, to name just a few.

But perhaps there's one name that should be added to balance out this story.

At the time of his death, his symptoms included arthritic pain, mental confusion and instability, inflammation of the eyes, and gout - all of which are consistent with undiagnosed and untreated syphilis. His name was Christopher Columbus, the person who brought syphilis from the New World in the first place likely died from it in the end.

A little poetic justice, after all.

Happy belated VD day everyone!

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# Play Therapy

## Going Back to the Earliest form of Teaching

by CONNOR LOBB

**A**S SUSAN MUHORO WAS earning her master's degree in counseling back in 1997, Angela Marshall was just graduating from high school. They wouldn't cross paths until seven years later, but they were connected by a common desire to help those in need through their work at an outpatient facility in Lynchburg. Twelve years ago, they became co-workers.

Susan began working with at-risk teenagers at HumanKind (then called Presbyterian Family Services) in 1984, and left after two years to start a family. She returned to the field in 1997, and earned a master's degree in counseling from Lynchburg College (now the University of Lynchburg), where she resumed her work at HumanKind, serving at-risk adolescents.

Susan became a licensed therapist in the fall of 2004, and then ventured out on her own. She and Lavinia Garbee founded Wishing You Well Counseling Center in the spring of 2004. Susan believed such a facility would benefit her community. She says there was a need in Lynchburg for therapists who focused on services for children. In the early years of business, Susan and Lavinia did everything from answering phones to mowing the grass. "We often worked fifteen-hour days, if not more," Susan says.

Angela Marshall graduated from the University of Lynchburg at about the same time Wishing You Well Counseling Center opened. She then enrolled in a master of education in community counseling program, where she completed her fieldwork at HumanKind. Some of Angela's clients needed more advanced treatment, so Angela brought them to Wishing You Well Counseling Center, where she met Susan.

Susan was Angela's supervisor for two years while Angela was completing her residency to become a licensed professional counselor. Angela decided that after finishing her master's degree she would join the staff at Wishing You Well rather than work for a large company.

"That was a leap of faith," she says. "Susan and Lavinia were looking to add

another therapist in the building, and offered the office space to me." Susan says that she felt Angela would fit right in, and the pair began working together professionally.

Both clinicians used play in their therapy sessions, and wanted to become formally trained play therapists. In 2019 there were 185 registered play therapists in Virginia, and 4,224 in the United States, according to the National Association for Play Therapy. Since most children aren't able to verbally express complex emotions, therapists and counselors use play therapy to help them communicate. "If you're going to work with kids, there is no other way to do it," Angela says. "Because [play is] the language of kids. It's how they learn, how they express themselves, and how they perceive the world."

To become a registered play therapist, licensed mental health professionals must complete requirements outlined in the national Association for Play Therapy's credentialing standards. There are a few institutions in Virginia that offer the appropriate training to meet those requirements. Ultimately, Susan and Angela decided on a play therapy program at the Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Continuing and Professional Education (VCU OCPE).



*Angela Marshall using play therapy to help a young client.*

"I had been interested in [play therapy] for years, and had gone to lots of different trainings and learned nothing, or little to nothing," says Susan. "[I] spent lots of money trying to find what I was looking for, and didn't find out until I came to the VCU program."

The VCU OCPE is an approved continuing education provider of play therapy and has been offering weekend workshops for the past five years. The workshops meet the play therapy training requirements for becoming a registered play therapist (RPT) as established by the national Association for Play Therapy. To date, the VCU OCPE has offered training in 33 weekend workshops to 215 mental health professionals. Tracy Whitaker, LCSW, RPT-S, leads many of the workshops and is a founder of the VCU OCPE play therapy program.

"Teaching play therapy is incredibly exciting," Tracy says. "I get to be a part of helping amazing clinicians leave with new skills they can use the next day to help kids do better."

Susan and Angela finished all six of the workshops two years ago, and both became registered play therapist supervisors after completing practicums under Tracy.

"Tracy was very open to [talking] dur-

ing breaks [and] to staying late, to us picking her brain," Susan says. "We would come in with cases and say, 'Can we talk to you when we have a break or at the end of the day?' And she was very open to that. So you're getting that piece in addition to the trainings."

Tracy's dedication illustrated how helpful play therapy can be to the life of a child when Susan sought advice on a case she was having difficulty with.

"I had this five-year-old boy coming in, and the referral came through the school system because he had out-of-control behaviors," Susan says. "Tracy was able to help me see that something was going on inside of the home, and so I met with mom alone and there was domestic violence going on inside of the home. Before play therapy, I would've just dealt with the kid's behaviors and how to manage his behaviors from a parent perspective; from discipline and how to work with it with coping skills."

Play therapy has done more for Angela and Susan than making them better clinicians. Susan says the experience helped her become a more compassionate person. "I am more flexible even in my personal life," Susan says. "More flexible with people, more patient with people, and able to see things from different perspectives, where I could not before."

Providing play therapy as a trained RPT has given Angela and Susan a sense of confidence when they interact with their clients. "I would say now that we know how play therapy really works—it takes pressure off of us," Angela says. "All I really have to do is show up and be the container to hold that safe space for a kid."

When these therapists can show a child that they are loved and can be helped, it makes the time, money, and effort they put into their education and training well worth it.

"There are no words to describe that—when a kid has that [lightbulb] moment," Angela says. "Because it just encompasses everything that we strive for. It's the most valuable proof that you're doing the right thing, or that this is where we're supposed to be at in life." **NJ**





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A series of monthly stories about the COVID-19 Era. From a Petersburg man whose catering business was crushed by the pandemic, yet he still feeds twenty-five families every day; to a former Marine who is again fighting on the frontlines, this time as a nurse in the ER at McGuire VA Hospital. There are other stories about a woman who brings natural beauty into the world with floral arrangements. And another woman who can help you maintain your mental health in these existential times. Not to mention a Northside family, musicians all, who bring hope into a darkened world. The stories share a common thread—they are stitched together with humanity's greatest strengths. Compassion and generosity.

## SOUND OF MUSIC IN THE COVID-19 ERA WITH THE ARTHURS

**URNS OUT RICHMOND** has its own Trapp Family Singers, only they're better than the Austrian transplants of Sound of Music fame.

They're the Arthurs—Charles “King”, Sara, Josie and Loudon—and live in Bellevue on Richmond's Northside.

On COVID-19 Palm Sunday, while Christians worldwide wove palm fronds into crosses, the air was warm and the sky clear, and the streets still. Cars, coated with a yellow haze of pollen that had accumulated for weeks, hugged curbs, motionless and silent. The only sound was a sort of dawn chorus (though it was almost noon) of jays and robins, cardinals and Carolina wrens, and other species I could not identify.

Rounding the corner at Newport, I could see the Arthurs on their front porch, and they were good enough to allow a socially distanced interview, and then a gift for all to hear.

I've known the Arthurs for years now, some of my favorite people on our beleaguered planet. Charles has let me use many of his original compositions to build sound beds for audio stories. Easily the most versatile musician I've ever met, he can play any instrument he picks up, even a washboard. I suspect he could coax music out of a cucumber. What's more, he is an extraordinary songwriter and an excellent performer.

Sara Murphy Arthur has a voice somewhere south of Norah Jones, and a little north of Patsy Cline. For years, she and her husband, along with Johnny Hott and a number of other musicians,

had a band called Piedmont Souprize that played every Sunday night at Café Diem in the Devil's Triangle. Some of the best music you were likely to hear in Richmond at the time. And it was up close and personal, and Sara's voice would melt you away.

When Charles was just eight years old, he performed his first impromptu gig at a wedding reception. The band had just finished their set, and Charles mounted the empty stage, picked up the drumsticks and began banging away. A small crowd gathered and someone said, “That kid ought to have a drum set.”

As he entered his teens, Charles realized he could tap out melodies on the piano. He would also sneak into his older brother's room and play his guitar, plucking out tunes.

And then, on his sixteenth birthday, Charles received his first electric guitar, and he's been hard at it ever since. In those early years, he emulated Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Joe Walsh. “The whole classical rock thing,” Charles told me years ago. “And then I got into the blues.

While attending college at Virginia Tech, Charles honed his skills on the guitar and dug deeper into the tangle of American roots music. Stevie Ray Vaughan, who was big at the time, led him to B.B. King, Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters—blues royalty.

“They opened up whole windows to me,” Charles recalled. “I went from blues to rockabilly and other things.” And then he began exploring other

branches of the tree of American music. He studied Chuck Berry, Chet Atkins, Les Paul, Scotty Moore, Merle Travis—and virtually every great side man who had performed on the Nashville pop records of the fifties and sixties, and the soul records out of Motown. “All these quintessential American guitar players,” he told me. “I was discovering American music.”

He played a couple of gigs in college, and after graduation took all of his classic rock music to the record store and traded them in for older recordings of blues, rockabilly, country and jazz—real American music.

After college, Charles joined the U.S. Air Force, became a navigator, and was stationed at Pease Air Force Base, a Strategic Air Command facility in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. During his time in Portsmouth, which had a very active music scene, Charles began studying music in earnest. “I'd go fly for ten days and then I had five days off, and I had nothing to do so I sat and studied recordings,” Charles told me. “That's when I really, really studied.”

After his military service, having achieved the rank of captain, Charles decided to get his teaching certificate at James Madison University. While at JMU, he would frequent a bohemian dive in Harrisonburg called the Little Grill. It's where actors and local artists and hipsters-in-training hung out. There was a velvet painting of Bob Dylan on one wall, an old upright piano in the corner, a guitar propped against the makeshift stage. At an open mike night one Sunday, a young woman was

urged by friends to get up on the stage and sing. She finally relented, and told the audience she was going to sing a number by Patsy Cline and was going to do it solo and a cappella because she had no one to accompany her.

A hand shot up in the audience and someone shouted. It was Charles Arthur. “Hey, I know all the songs,” he said, pointing toward the guitar that rested against the stage. “I can play that guitar if you want.”

The young woman on stage was hesitant. They'd never rehearsed before, but she said, “Okay.” And before she knew it, Charles was on the stage with guitar in hand, standing directly behind her.

“What song are you going to do?” he asked.

“Crazy,” said the young woman.

“Well, what key?”

“I'm not sure.”

“Sing a little bit,” Charles suggested. She opened her mouth, and it was as if Patsy Cline had reincarnated.

It was in B-flat. She sang; he played. The audience was dead quiet, enraptured. There was a real kind of magic there, and at the end of the song, the audience roared approval.

“That was the night I met Charles,” Sara told me years ago. “We exchanged names, but not phone numbers. I thanked him for accompanying me.”

When Sara first went off to college at JMU she studied music. “I did a semester of music and realized what I wanted to do with music I was not going to get from the music department,” she said.

STORY BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN  
PHOTOGRAPH BY REBECCA D'ANGELO



Sara, Charles, Loudon, and Josie Arthur.

“It was a very classical-driven program, voice lessons, learning how to sing arias, operatic things.”

She changed her major to human communications with a minor in English, but she continued honing her own vocal skills.

After their initial meeting, Sara and Charles learned that they lived a few short blocks from one another on South Mason Street. They met up a few times, talking mainly about music, but that’s about it. Sara left for the summer to do an internship in Richmond and returned the following fall.

In the fall, when Sara returned to Harrisonburg, she and Charles began spending more time together. And then the sparks of romance began to fly, and the relationship flamed. After they finished school in Harrisonburg, Charles and Sara moved to Richmond.

That was in 1993, and a year later the two were married.

From their union came forth two children, a girl and a boy. And considering the genes that intertwined to create them, both Josie and Loudon are liberally endowed with musical talent, and

they both share the physical attributes of a beautiful mother and a handsome father.

“I don’t think I was very good at singing when I was really little,” Josie said from the porch steps. “But I always liked to sing, and I always thought I was a good singer. Then I started doing theatre and I would sing in theatre and everyone was like, ‘Wow she’s really good for a ten year old.’ I took vocal lessons after that.”

Even in elementary school, Josie did her fair share of theatre. But in middle school that all ended—they didn’t offer theatre. So, Josie turned to SPARC (School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community). “I was kind of reluctant to do it in the beginning,” she said. “But then I did it, and it was a lot of fun and it ended up opening a lot of doors for me.”

Josie attended Appomattox Regional Governor’s School, which is well-known for its arts programs. “They kept me busy,” she said. “At Appomattox, there was a lot of creative and artistic opportunity there, and I learned a lot and got a lot of experience.”

Now with college looming in the fall,

Josie is considering either the Boston Conservatory, or Emerson, which is also in Boston. “I’m interested in studying acting and theatre,” she said. “The benefit of going to school in Boston is I could take songwriting classes in the school of music.”

Like her daughter, Sara seemed born to sing. “I started pretty young,” she said. “I just went through school liking to sing. I was in any choir I could be in, and then in high school, where there were no musical productions, I begged the drama teacher there to do one, and she did.”

Charles nodded and smiled. He thought back on his own introduction to a life of music. He remembered hanging out in a music store and a guitar shop in Portsmouth, New Hampshire when he was stationed at Pease Air Force Base. “I got to meet real musicians and they’d go play gigs and sometimes I’d sit in with them,” he said.

“Some people are just really quick to learn things,” said Charles. “I certainly had a knack for music, but I wouldn’t say it all came easily. It was natural for me to love it, but I’ve worked at it my whole life. I’ve been playing for forty

years, and clawing my way through it.” Now, his son, the youngest member of their clan, is edging his way toward music.

“Loudon has a really beautiful voice,” said Sara. “And he’s learning how to play piano. So he’ll be part of this Trapp family.”


Loudon also plays percussion. “And I love science,” he told me. “And this not-going-to-school thing because of this COVID-19 is making me kind of sad. But I’m learning a lot these days. I’m also getting into the Harry Potter movies. I really like the ones where he’s talking to snakes. But I don’t like his stupid family.”

“Muggles be damned,” I said and then asked the Arthurs if they’d perform a song, and since Bill Withers had just passed away, they sang one of the most moving renditions of “Lean on Me” I’ve ever heard (you can listen to it here on our website under COVID-19 remotes).

When they finished singing, a round of applause erupted from the front porches of the American Four Squares lining the street. It was the perfect antidote for these surreal times—a sovereign remedy, a medicine for melancholy.

“You guys are amazing,” I told them. “You don’t know what joy you bring. I think you underestimate it.”

“It’s interesting to think what songs will come out of this period of time,” Sarah said. “The loneliness and the isolation and the longing and everything that everybody’s feeling at the same time. So it’s going to be an interesting artistic swell, I think.”

Sara Murray Arthur’s eyes then roamed slowly around the porch, taking in each member of her family. “I’m trying to find as many bright spots or silver linings in this as possible,” she said. “We probably wouldn’t have taken the time to do what we’ve just done. Because, honestly, everybody was so busy with their lives. Sitting down and singing songs together. The fact that we’ve done it a few times now is just so precious to me, and it will be something that we’ll always remember and think about. I feel fortunate for little stuff like that. Sometimes you can make lemonade.” 

## THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS WITH NICOLE ROBERTS

**NICOLE ROBERTS**, who owns a florist on Bellevue Avenue on Richmond's Northside. She and her husband continue to provide people with flowers in these existential times. Clusters of natural beauty to remind us of the way things will be again.

Flowers are a marvel. Their scent can help you sleep and actually improve your memory. And their colors, vibrant or muted, can relieve stress and anxiety, regulate your emotions, even make you more productive.

Like words, each flower is charged with meaning. Red roses may be eros rampant, forget-me-nots mean remembrance, while bluebells express gratitude. And so on.

*"Consider this piece of Victorian poetry.*

*There is a language, little known,*

*Lovers claim it as their own.*

*Its symbols smile upon the land,*

*Wrought by nature's wondrous hand;*

*And in their silent beauty speak,*

*Of life and joy, to those who seek*

*For Love Divine and sunny hours*

*In the language of the flowers."*

Nicole Roberts is fluent in this language, and she possesses an artist's eye for creating arrangements that can bring hope and love and all things good into your home, even in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic. A rare flower herself, personifying grace and elegance, Nicole's shop is aptly named Nicola Flora.

Nicole considers the many benefits of fresh-cut flowers in the home or office, and how they can influence our emotional well-being.

"Starting with the smell," she says. "Certain smells will take you back to a place and time. Music will do the same thing as well." She mentions three particularly fragrant flowers. "Freesia, stock, and stargazer lilies."

As well as stimulating the sense of smell, flowers also appeal to our sense of sight. "Whites or pastels can be calming," says Nicole. "Yellow and orange and red are of course more vibrant. Different color roses have meanings. They say red is for love, pink is for elegance, and yellow is for friendship and happiness."

Nicole, who grew up not far from Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania (of Groundhog Day fame) is a certified art teacher. "I went to Penn State and I became a certified art teacher," she says. "But I worked more at a psychiatric center and worked with a lot of teen-

agers there. I really enjoyed that a lot. It was probably my favorite job other than this one. I love what I do today."

Well before she studied art, Nicole knew more than a little about the floral business. It began with calamity just after her sixteenth birthday.

"Right after my sixteenth birthday, on Valentine's Day I was to deliver flowers for a family friend who owned a flower store," Nicole remembers. "I borrowed my dad's Jeep Cherokee, and up in Pennsylvania they hadn't plowed the roads yet, and I totaled his car and flipped it and the ambulance came and all that jazz."

Even after that accident, Nicole continued working for the florist where she honed her skills as a floral designer.

"I ended up helping them in the store so I was doing a lot of processing flowers, and she was a great family friend and she was motivating," says Nicole. "She would say, 'Make a funeral arrangement.' And I was like, 'I don't know what I'm doing.' And she was like, 'You know what you're doing. Just make it up and then I'll let you know if anything needs to be fixed.' So I was making up things since I was young. I worked there from when I was sixteen until I was twenty-one or twenty-two."

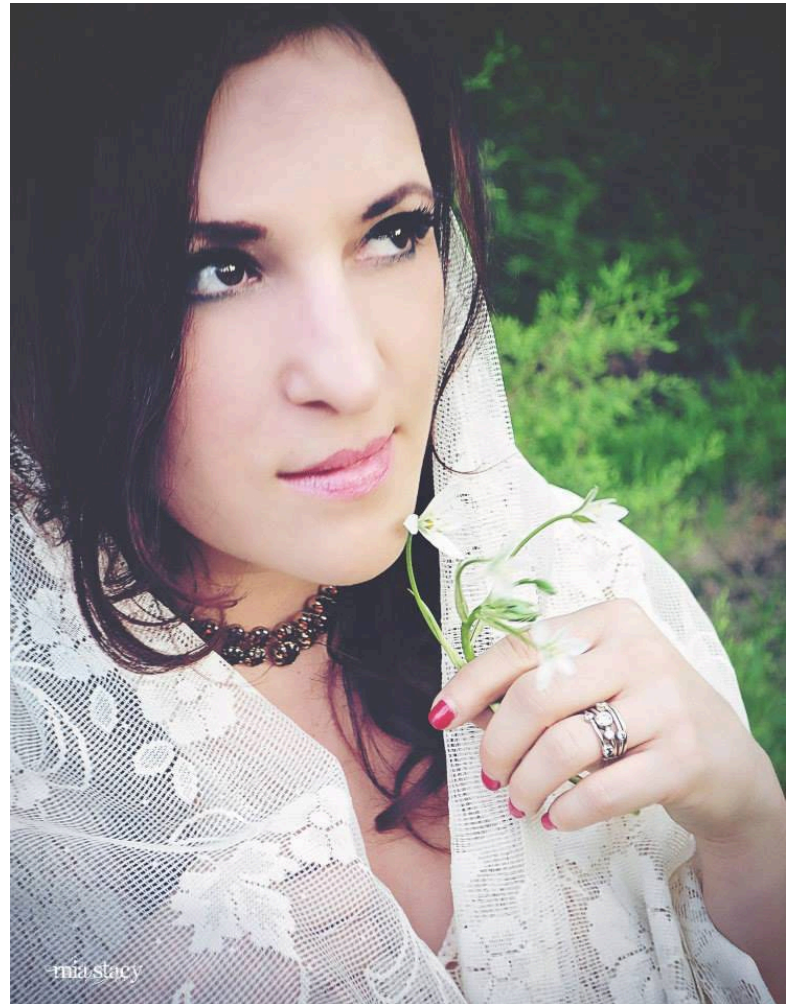
These days, amid the pandemic, Nicole and her husband, Brad, practice a strict regimen in both the making of floral arrangements and their delivery

"We have to or else I will hear it from my husband's mom," Nicole says. "She's a nurse and she's been telling us if we have to leave the house we need to wear gloves and a mask. We are disinfecting everything, and it's just he and I working. He's delivering, and I'm working in the store with my cat and my turtle. Brad's wearing gloves, then sterilizing his gloves, cleaning the mask, leaving the arrangement on the porch. A kind of knock and run by. And then he skedaddles."

Though some of her suppliers have closed up shop, others are still selling flowers to Nicole.

"A couple of my wholesalers are closed, but others are open for business," she says. "They are limited on some things, but they're trying to get everything in they can. And my customers have been very, very patient. They'll say, 'Oh, you can't get that color? That's fine. Whatever you can get.' They're just happy to get something to be able to spread their love to others."

One of Nicole's business neighbors is also selling some of her arrangements. "We're also selling bouquets down at



*Nicole Roberts, owner of the flower shop Nicola Flora.*

Little Green House Grocery which is just down the way," she says. "We check with them just about daily. So when people are picking up their groceries, they can pick up some flowers there as well."

Anyone wishing to purchase Nicole's floral arrangement can place an order online or simply call Nicole.

"You can call the store phone because that number is linked up to my cell phone, which is great so I can be anywhere and answer," she says. "Because we live so close to the store, we just walk on over and do what we need to do and walk back."

As with all small business owners, Nicole is thankful for any business that comes her way.

"I'm glad that people are still able to do something," she says. "Thank you to anyone who orders flowers, thank you so much. I'm happy with anything. It's something to get me out of bed and out of the house and get some fresh air and see the cat and the turtle, and hanging out with them."

The cat and turtle who reside at Nicola

Flora have been an integral part of the business for years. They're much more than mascots.

"The cat is Sue, he's a boy named Sue, and he's been with us ever since 2011," Nicole says. "He just walked in—he was beat up—and I took care of him and he's now the mayor of Bellevue. And then my turtle is Chloe, who's also a boy, and I've had him since he was a baby, and he's just turned sixteen."

If you'd like to order flowers from Nicola Flora visit their website or give Nicole a call.

You might even get a meow from Bellevue's mayor, a boy named Sue.

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-Charles McGuigan

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## ON THE FRONT LINES WITH LEIGH CARTER

**LEIGH CARTER AND** millions of other health care workers are working day and night to combat COVID-19, but they are short on supplies. Even in medical facilities that care for our veterans. The film Gallipoli, which came out back in the 1980s, ends with a notorious event that occurred during World War One, the war to end all wars, that didn't. The allies were trying desperately to gain ground, and the no man's between them and their Ottoman Empire enemies was sometimes no more than thirty feet wide. West Australians were dug in, and though they did not have any ammunition, they were ordered to charge the Turks with just their fixed bayonets. Minutes later, just as they rose out of the trenches, they were mowed down, three hundred of them, many of them just boys under eighteen years old.

Today, on the front lines, in the trenches, we have millions of soldiers who are running short of ammunition in a war against a virus unlike anything the world has ever seen. Nurses, doctors, orderlies and other healthcare providers are waging battles on thousands of fronts simultaneously. But their supplies are running short, even in federal medical facilities where the population is particularly susceptible to the novel coronavirus.

Leigh Carter is a combat veteran. He served in the first Gulf War as a field radio operator, in reconnaissance, and as a tactical air control party leader. In all, he spent six years in the United States Marine Corps.

These days he is again risking his life daily. Leigh is a registered nurse in the ER at McGuire VA Hospital here in Richmond, Virginia. And things there are not good, because, like elsewhere, the Coronavirus is a threat, and basic medical supplies, specifically personal protective equipment, or PPEs, are in short supply.

"I can't tell you the exact numbers because that information is being withheld for different reasons," Leigh told me. "I know for a fact that we have multiple cases on-site there."

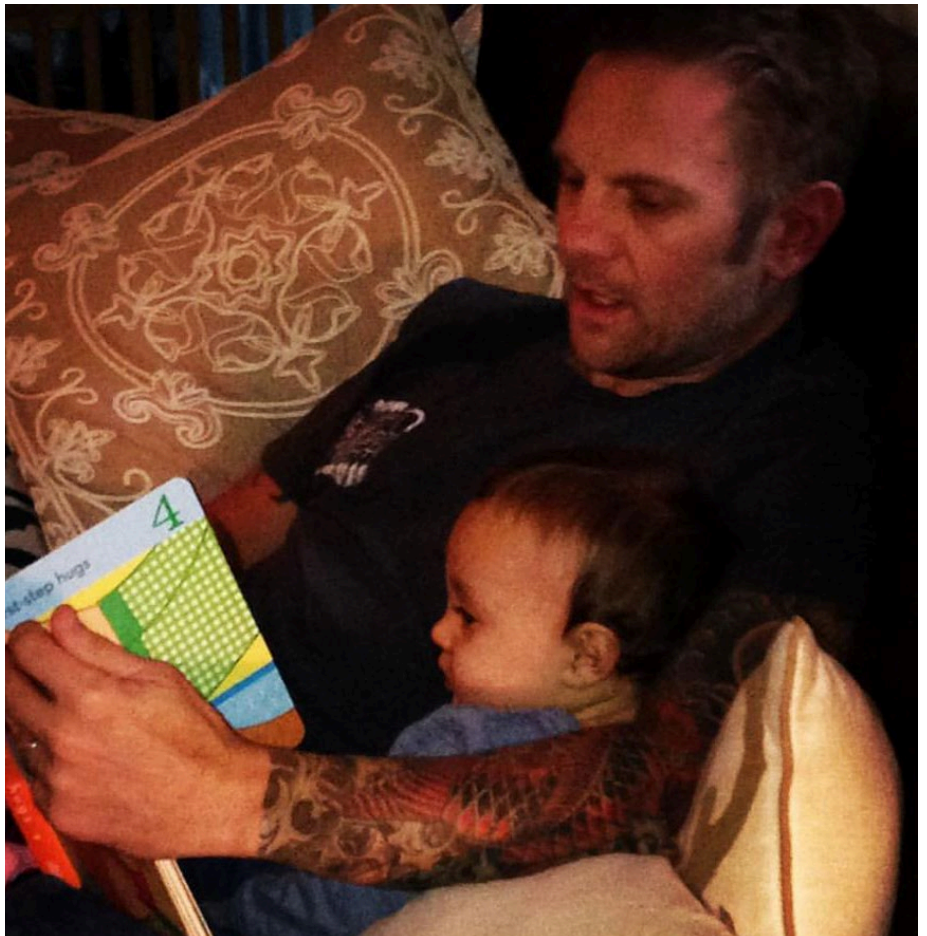
Due to shortages, some protocols have been altered, at least temporarily. "The policies have been bent because of a lack of PPEs (personal protective equipment), and a lot of the things that we'd been doing that were strict are a lot simpler," Leigh said. "It's not the most optimal conditions to be treating patients, let alone keeping us safe."

Chief among the very basic protective gear that these men and women in the healthcare professions need are N95

respirator masks. These are designed as single use facemasks. But healthcare workers are using them multiple times.

"I have one that I used for four straight days," Leigh told me. "The fourth day I had it on, it was still moist when I came back the next morning, clearly

be pent up in their own home, and he does not understand, contrary to what science tells us, that there are still people who insist on gathering in large groups. He'd like to remind everyone that not all of us are fortunate enough to be holed up in a safe home, insulated from this hideous pathogen.



*Leigh Carter, a healthcare worker at the VA hospital.*

degraded."

The scarcity of these very basic safeguards is so intense that Leigh's boss kept them under lock and key.

"The nurse manager is locking up these things in her room, in her office," said Leigh. "She's doing a great job, doing the best she can to stretch the PPE out because we are limited if not on the brink of not having any."

Amid this epidemic, Leigh has seen his fair share of outright lies and misinformation spread like another sort of virus on the internet.

"The multiple posts I'm seeing on social media of misinformation being spread around does everyone a disservice," Leigh said. "When you tout your knowledge that's ill-informed, you do yourself and everybody else a disservice, and you're just prolonging this process."

Leigh sometimes gets tired of hearing people complain about having to

"My ex-wife is a nurse at Chippenham, and I have a four-year old daughter," he said. "We share custody and we're going through this every day so the posts that we hear about how horrible it is that you're imprisoned. Think about that. Think about what we're doing every day. I have two twelve-hour shifts starting tomorrow. Meanwhile, people are complaining about having to stay at home. So, just try to take pause and think about those people that are consistently out doing that and we're all suffering this together." **N9**

*-Charles McGuigan*



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## MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH WITH TRACEY WINGOLD

### TRACEY WINGOLD,

a licensed clinical social worker, offers some tips for maintaining mental health during this unprecedented pandemic. Tracey, who has worked as a counselor for well over a decade, had a sort of head start on the COVID-19 crisis.

“I have been doing online counseling for the last three years through a telehealth platform,” she says. “And telehealth is the thing right now. But I’ve been doing it for almost three years, counseling in this way.”

Tracey’s specialty area has traditionally been with mothers, which dovetailed nicely with teletherapy.

“If I have a niche, it’s working with mothers which is how I got into the telehealth because I work with a lot of postpartum,” Tracey says. “I also just do general mental health with depression, anxiety and trauma, and people really like the venue to be able to do it from the home or office. It takes it to another level of comfort that for some people it’s really conducive for doing good work, doing good hard, emotional work.”

In these surreal times, it can be next to impossible to discern between rational and irrational fears.

Tracey recalls recent postings on a professional Facebook groups she belongs to. “There was a thread talking about you know how hard it is right now to differentiate between rational and irrational fear and anxiety,” she says. “Because there’s a lot that we would have considered irrational that’s actually pretty rational right now for people. I mean we’ve all got a little anxiety right now.”

And anxiety is not necessarily a bad thing.

“Anxiety is an adaptive response that our bodies and our minds do when we perceive a threat, feel unsafe,” says Tracey. “And I always say it’s a very primal response and very adaptive and has helped us as a species to survive and to be on guard, and to protect our young and all of those things. But when it’s overactive, it becomes problematic.”

I ask Tracey what she recommends people do to cope with their heightened levels of anxiety.

“That’s a really good question,” she says. “There are some things that can be helpful. I’ve been telling people to try to maintain a routine. So many of us have routine changes because so many people are working from home, or have kids at home, or just have changes in their day-to-day life right now. So as much as possible, maintain your routines, and by that I mean bed times, getting up times, meal times and



Tracey Wingold, a mental health counselor.

things like that.”

And though social media is a double-edged sword, it does provide us, in these days of isolation, a very basic human need.

“Stay connected,” says Tracey. “I heard a psychiatrist on one of the morning news shows last week who was talking about the term social distance that we’re using so much, saying that we really should be saying physical distance because we are social beings and we need to stay connected to each other. So maintaining social connections while maintaining physical distance is really, really important. Use the internet, stay connected to neighbors and friends and family. As much as we curse the internet and social media at times, it really helps us to stay connected right now. The disadvantage of social media is that misinformation can be spread widely.”

And don’t underestimate the importance of fresh air, sunlight and exercise.

“I know when we’re fearful it’s easier to just hole up inside, but fresh air’s really important,” Tracey says. “There’s really no risk of getting outside your door and getting some natural light on your face, some fresh air, despite the pollen right now. And getting some exercise, moving your body. Whether it’s a dance party in your kitchen or an online yoga class, just get your body moving.”

I ask if it’s a particularly difficult time for new or expectant mother when the world goes into a lockdown mode, and

the future looks apocalyptic, in a way

“It’s incredibly difficult for people with new babies,” says Tracey. “Although the flip side of it is it’s a really good time to just hole up with your family and bond with your baby and all of that. And for women who are getting ready to have babies especially, this is really devastating right now to think about going into the hospital to have a baby and hospitals are really limiting how many people can be there and all of that. Pretty devastating, moms had lovely visions of bringing their babies into the world.”

To preserve mental health in these trying times, Tracey also recommends that people limit the amount of news they watch or read or listen to daily.

“Be intentional about how much news you’re watching,” she says. “It might be smart for some people to limit the amount of news that they’re taking in because it can really increase your anxiety a lot.”

And then there’s this.

“It’s good to distract yourself,” says Tracey Wingold. “Distraction is a good coping skill in a lot of situations. You don’t want to always distract yourself from your feelings or you’re not dealing with them, but in times like these it’s so important to distract yourself. Just pretend like it’s normal for a few hours, and it’s going to make you feel better. **N9**”

-Charles McGuigan

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## FEEDING THE HUNGRY WITH CARLTON JOHNSON

**THERE'S AN ODD** part of human nature that I've never really gotten. The haves tend to be pretty selfish; while the have nots sometimes literally give you the shirt off their back. When I was in college, and for a number of years after, I worked jobs that depended primarily on people's generosity in the form of tips. Gratuities. I drove a cab, worked as a bellhop. But mainly I was a server in restaurants. And here's what all of us, meaning waiters and waitresses, noticed. The worst tippers were often the wealthiest. If you had a table of suits—stock brokers, CEOs, high-powered attorneys—you could expect a ten percent tip, sometimes even less. And more than a few of them were demanding and demeaning, and felt entitled to do a little ass-grabbing of the waitresses, particularly if it was at night and they'd had a few drinks. On the other hand, if you got a table of waiters and waitresses or minimum wage workers, you could always expect twenty, twenty-five, even thirty percent tips. Plus, they were kind to you, said thank you and please. Common courtesies. So we would all vie for the commoners, not the well-to-do.

There's a man in a small city thirty miles south of Richmond who really doesn't have a pot to piss in these days. The pandemic pretty much wiped out his business. But despite that, he's already giving back to his community in a very big way.

His name is Carlton Johnson. "I am owner and sole proprietor of Exquisite Taste Catering and Events in Petersburg, Virginia," he tells me. "We had a total of thirty-three events scheduled from the beginning of March through the end of September. Every one of those events has been either postponed or cancelled."

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*Carlton Johnson, owner of Exquisite Taste Catering and Events.*

Taste Catering and Events in Petersburg, Virginia," he tells me. "We had a total of thirty-three events scheduled from the beginning of March through the end of September. Every one of those events has been either postponed or cancelled."

As the owner of a small business Carl has learned to think fast on his feet. And so he reconfigured his business model, if only temporarily.

"We were in a really bad bind," Carl says. "So what I did was to take to selling lunches and dinners daily to try to keep the doors of the business open until all of this passes over, and we're able to start booking and securing events again."

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced Carlton to become a one-man band.

"Because we are not bringing in a steady income," he explains. "I've had to lay off all of my staff (six workers in all). So currently, I am doing one hundred percent of the operation myself. I am passing out flyers advertising what we have for lunch and dinner, and then I'm taking the orders, processing transactions. I'm also cooking all the food and delivering all the food by myself."

Even though he's barely eeking out a living himself, Carlton did something exceptional immediately after his business went south. It started when he

began getting requests, pleas really, from families in the community that were more or less homeless, living in seedy motels. This is how one of those requests, generally in the form of a text message, would read, "If you've got something extra, cause I know you're in the catering business, can you please feed me and my kids." Then they would tell Carlton their individual stories.

"I have seven families that I feed consistently," says Carlton. "I take them lunch and I take them dinner every day, twenty-five people. And I've been asking people, when I put out the fly-

Then he says something else. "At the end of the day, I believe that God is going to see my good works, and he'll take care of me."

Carlton, when he was still a very young man, not much more than a boy really, found himself homeless.

"I come from a very, very religious family to a point where they have their own church, and my lifestyle was not accepted by my family," he says. "So because I chose to live in my truth of being gay, my family, they didn't disown me, but they would not help me as they would help other family members. They all love me and there's no doubt in my mind about that, however, they do not love the lifestyle that I choose to live. My grandfather put me out of the house so I had nowhere to live. I was on my own."

Carlton remember those days vividly.

"I got a job at IHOP at the time, and I would literally go to work from open to close just to make enough tips to pay for my motel room just for that day," he recalls. "You know I would go to the motel, pay for the room, get me a few hours of sleep, get up and go to work. I would go to work every day, and everything I owned was in a backpack and I took that backpack with me every day to work, and that went on for about two years."

He eventually landed a job that helped him secure a permanent residence.

"I was blessed with an amazing job as a server at a really, really good restaurant—the Italian Kitchen in Mechanicsville," Carlton says. "I worked my way up from a server all the way up to the dining room manager and the special events manager."

He later moved to the catering division as a server, and ultimately became the lead sales associate within that catering division. "I stayed with that company until they closed in 2016," says Carlton. "And that's when I started Exquisite Taste Catering."

Regardless what happens, Carlton plans to continue feeding the hungry.

"Like I said, we're in the red right now because of feeding these people, but I don't care if I go broke," he says. "Well, I've already gone broke, but I don't care, I'm gonna feed them every day. I don't care. I'll figure out something, some kind of way to do it, but I'm going to feed them every day."

If you'd like to contact Carlton and make a donation, please call (804)484-0000, or email him at

carlton@exquisitetastecateringandevents.com

A lot people are depending on it. **NJ**

-Charles McGuigan





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Stir Crazy Cafe is going a little, well...stir crazy! We've been spending our down time doing heavy cleaning and disinfecting, rearranging our kitchen to be more streamlined, freshening up paint in the dining area and revising our menu. All great projects, but now we really miss our customers! Don't worry — we have plans in the works to reopen very soon with a limited version of our old menu plus a few new items to try out. Of course, it will be contactless, curbside delivery at first and we'll be taking all the necessary precautions to keep our customers and staff safe. Once we set the reopening date, we'll post all the info on our website, Facebook, and Instagram! Be safe, be kind, and we will see you soon!

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## BOOK REVIEW

# A Daily Dose from the Poetry Pharmacy

by FRAN WITHROW

**I**T IS OUR LOT AS HUMANS to face challenging situations throughout our lives. We all experience loneliness, self-doubt, despair, guilt, and grief. Dealing with hardships can be tough, and while there are many ways to tackle difficulty, William Sieghart has one novel suggestion: read a poem.

William Sieghart grew up in London and found solace in poetry as a boy. As an adult, poetry continued to bring meaning to his life. After a friend heard him speak at a literary festival in Cornwall in 2014, she suggested he prescribe poems to festival goers who were going through rough times. She set him up with a couple of chairs, invited people to talk with him about their problems, and let him suggest an appropriate poem for their situation.

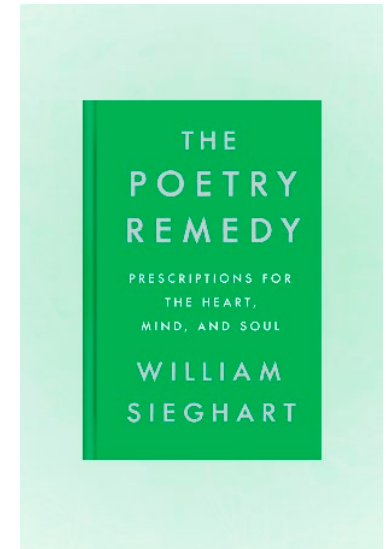
The session was a hit, and thus was born the Poetry Pharmacy, which Sieghart took to radio, television, as well as to festivals and libraries. People were eager to hear how poetry could help them deal with their problems, and Sieghart was happy to offer his prescriptions.

Sieghart has collected 74 of his favorite poems, addressing plethora of common struggles, resulting in this lovely little book, "The Poetry Remedy."


Each poem is prefaced with a thoughtful commentary that not only sheds lights on the subject, but also adds an added layer of meaning to the poem. I was delighted to read many familiar and beloved poems, and equally happy to meet some which were new to me.

I knew I would like this book with Sieghart's very first selection, a poem he chose for those suffering anxiety (in other words, almost all of us at one time or another). Wendell Berry's "The Peace of Wild Things" is a perfect antidote for those times when the stress of life seems overwhelming. Sieghart has poems for just about everything you can imagine: insecurity, procrastination, illness, lack of motivation, even for times we have made an embarrassing gaffe.

There are some situations I would never have thought a poem could address.



Hafiz, a 14th century Persian poet, offers a way to live with those who are different from ourselves. What a great offering during this time when bipartisanship seems like a pipe dream and when racism and other types of discrimination continue to rear their ugly heads.

Readers can find help for everything from infatuation (oh, those heart-breaking high school days), to divorce and losing loved ones. In the back of the book is an index of conditions, so whether you are dealing with aging parents or feeling inadequate as a parent yourself, you can quickly find a poem to read. To list the poets featured in this anthology is to eagerly anticipate reading from some poetic giants: Billy Collins, Maya Angelou, Rumi, Pablo Neruda, Naomi Shihab Nye, and (my poetic hero) Mary Oliver. You just can't go wrong with this helpful book. Find a copy. Set it by your bed. Read one poem every night for whatever is ailing you. While there is no such thing as a quick fix, a daily dose from the Poetry Pharmacy may be just what the doctor ordered. 

*"The Poetry Remedy: Prescriptions for the Heart, Mind, and Soul"*

by William Sieghart

Viking Press

224 pages

\$20.00



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