

# VINSON HALL RETIREMENT COMMUNITY CAMPUS NEWS & VIEWS



Summer 2021

## CEO Corner

### Not So Lazy Days of Summer

This summer is a busy season at VHRC. The past several weeks have been full of all kinds of activity from fairly quiet – but important! – administrative work to exciting event planning and a little bit of everything in between!

One administrative milestone, achieved June 14, was refinancing around \$70 million in debt to get a savings of approximately \$10 million over a 12-year period. Kudos to Chief Financial Officer, Rick Bova, with support of our Board of Trustees and input from our residents. We will make every dollar saved count for our residents and our staff!

We are also very excited about improvements happening on our campus. Work on our new Sports Park continues. Last spring our Facilities team installed a bocce court and a horseshoe pit. This summer a pickle ball court is going in. In addition, we will have a small clubhouse with running water and electricity. The Sylvestery is also getting attention, specifically in the dining areas. These updates will offer a clean new look and functional improvements which will allow our residents more choice about food selections and portion size. Both of these projects highlight that at VHRC our residents live life their way.

Arleigh Burke Pavilion, our skilled nursing area, has a five star rating. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid rates communities on a five-star rating system to help consumers, their families and caregivers compare nursing homes more easily. A five star rating is CMS's highest rating.

**SAVE THE DATE**

**9/11/2021**



*Still Standing Strong*



**VINSON HALL RETIREMENT COMMUNITY**

This rating is completely reflective of the amazing work done every day by our ABP nursing staff and the wonderful leadership provided by ABP's administrative team.

Finally, our Foundation team is busy planning what is sure to be a meaningful event in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of 9/11. That heartbreaking day 20 years ago forever changed the trajectory of our country and tragically affected so many lives – particularly the victims, first responders, military members and their families. We are humbled and gratified to take some time on the anniversary to recognize all the heroes who live around us. I know this event will be a memorable time of recognition, as well as an opportunity to showcase our community. The event will be made complete with delicious food, entertainment, and most of all friendship. I hope you will join us!

# Happy 52nd Birthday to Vinson Hall!



VHRC celebrated 52 years of providing dignity, security, and friendship. Of those three values, friendship was most on display during the birthday celebration on June 23. Many of the nearly 100 residents and staff who attended commented that the highlight of this event was just having the chance to see neighbors and friends who they had not seen in quite a while. As it was the largest event in over 16 months, it certainly felt like a return to normal, which was so appreciated.

## New Vinson Hall and Willow Oak Residents

We are happy to welcome new independent living residents to Vinson Hall Retirement Community. If you see them around the campus, be sure to say Welcome!

Lizbe Clark

Roland and Lucille Creps

Victoria Liu

Margaret Dean and Thomas Wukitsch

Arma Jane Karaer

David and Marilyn Taylor

Richard Weaver

## About Campus News and Views

Campus News and Views is Vinson Hall Retirement Community's quarterly newsletter. The goal of this newsletter is to share stories and remembrances from VHRC residents and staff. All residents and staff are invited to submit articles for inclusion in the newsletter. All items included in the newsletter are original pieces submitted by the author. This newsletter is reviewed by a newsletter committee, comprised of VHRC residents and staff. This edition and previous editions can also be found on our website at: [www.vinsonhall.org/blog/](http://www.vinsonhall.org/blog/)

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Submissions for the Fall newsletter are due October 22, 2021. Please submit entries to Amiee Freeman ([amieef@vinsonhall.org](mailto:amieef@vinsonhall.org))

## Campus News & Views

### Summer 2021

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# Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation News

## The Foundation is Filling Its Calendar with Fun

By Michelle Crone, Senior Director of Philanthropy & Engagement

Spring is always a time of rebirth. But this year, spring was an especially joyful season at Vinson Hall Retirement Community, as all of us emerged from our COVID cocoons and came together again. At the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation, we were delighted to help organize these first on-campus events.

On May 24, a small gathering was held in the newly renovated Bistro to reopen and rename this beloved VHRC space in honor of long-time employee Fred Johnson, who died in Feb. 2020. Lingering COVID restrictions limited guests to those who had donated funds to the Foundation in honor of Fred, members of the Big E Committee that Fred founded, artists whose work was shown on the walls, and VHRC staff who were his closest friends. It is wonderful to have Fred Johnson's Bistro open again!

The next day, a larger group of residents and staff gathered in the Ballroom for VHRC's third annual Corn Bag Toss Tournament, which the Foundation helped to organize. The competition was fierce, but judging by the laughter a good time was had by all. Then on June 23, VHRC celebrated its 52nd birthday in the Penthouse Lounge, the first on-campus event in 16 months to be open to all! We made sure there was no shortage of cake, champagne, or fellowship when nearly 100 of us came together to celebrate our home!

Meanwhile, in June we also kicked off our Annual Membership Campaign, and thanks to your generosity we have already raised more than \$137,000! At the same time, the Foundation, as the communications arm of campus, partnered with Vinson Hall and Willow Oak administration



*Seventeen teams competed for glory in our 3rd Annual Corn Bag Toss Tournament in May. Paula Yewdall, pictured above, along with her teammate, Midge Holmes, Team Dusty Old Bags, came in second to Miriam Howard and Eddie Tapia, Team Slip and Slide, who competed in five rounds of play and were crowned the 2021 Corn Bag Toss Tournament winners.*

to launch The Beacon, a new weekly digest for residents. We hope you have been enjoying this new publication!

But the best is yet to come. Mark your calendars for Still Standing Strong on Sat., Sept. 11 from noon to 3 p.m. None of us could ever forget Sept. 11, 2001, a day that shook our country and the world. Now, 20 years later, we wanted to commemorate this date by coming together to reflect on the values that enabled communities like ours to endure. VHRC residents have devoted their lives to patriotism and service to this country, and it is because of heroes like you that we are still standing strong today.

So please watch for your invitation in the mail! We hope that you will join us for this outdoor event which will include a barbecue lunch and musical entertainment, as we open our doors to our neighbors to celebrate you, your service to our nation, and this very special community that we at the Foundation are honored to support. ❖

## **ABP Riding a Wave of Good Feelings**

Arleigh Burke Pavilion is riding a wave of positiveness this quarter. The community – which includes both assisted living and nursing care – continues to be COVID-free. Nearly 100 percent of its residents are vaccinated and a high percentage of ABP staff are vaccinated as well.

Due to its COVID-free status and the low COVID infection rate in the surrounding community, ABP is open for visitation. Visitors are invited to meet with their loved ones and friends in ABP's common areas, or if they are vaccinated they can visit in the resident's apartment. Residents are at this time limited to two visitors per visit. Visitors are requested to make appointments, however, Antionette Doublin, Senior Director of Arleigh Burke Pavilion and The Syvestery, said that they do not turn away unscheduled visitors, especially if they have been vaccinated and can go to the resident's apartment.

These few restrictions do not prevent ABP residents from having a fun time. Recently, to make up for lost time during the pandemic, ABP residents have been traveling while staying within the comfort of their community! With help from the Dining Services team, residents are enjoying the cuisines of France, Jamaica and various African countries. They have also been learning about the cultures and traditions of these countries. "The residents especially enjoyed tasting cuisines from different countries. They enjoy the variety," said Antionette.

As part of learning about other cultures, ABP staff members, many of whom hail from various African countries, hosted a fashion show. Nurse supervisor Joyce Johnson, who organized the fashion show, said that she is often asked where she is from and what life is like there. Joyce, who is clearly a true storyteller, decided to employ the classic writer admonition to show not tell! About



*Members of Arleigh Burke Pavilion's caregiving team, many of whom come from Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, and other African countries, hosted an African Fashion Show in July to share their culture with residents and families.*

a dozen ABP care providers, dressed in beautiful outfits, shared a bit of the culture of their countries. Nigeria, Ghana, South Sudan, Cote D'Ivoire, and Kenya were among the countries represented. Antionette said that she heard a lot of positive responses about the fashion show from residents and their families. "Our family members just thought it was top notch," she said.

Antionette was also pleased to share that for the second quarter in a row, ABP's skilled nursing community received a five-star rating. Every quarter, surveyors from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) evaluate nursing home communities. These evaluations look at health inspection reports, staffing, and specific quality measures that focus on how well the community cares for its residents' physical and clinical needs. Antionette is pleased to report that no major violations were cited and ABP's skilled nursing community received an excellent survey.

In the coming months, Antionette is looking to hire additional staff to improve coverage seven days a week. She is also looking for ways to respond to resident requests to ensure that ABP continues to be a supportive and peaceful environment. ❖

## The Sylvestery News

# The Sylvestery Plans, Prepares and Participates

Over the past few months, The Sylvestery has been busy adapting to the current COVID situation while taking part in more outings, utilizing technology, having renovations completed, and supporting the Alzheimer's Association.

As nearly all Sylvestery residents have been vaccinated and the infection rate for COVID is low in Fairfax County, The Sylvestery has been relaxing COVID restrictions. Families members who are vaccinated are allowed to visit their loved ones in their apartments. The community has opened its doors to entertainers such as magicians and musicians. Residents who wish to do so have also been taking their first group trips outside of The Sylvestery in over a year. Residents traveled to see the cherry blossoms, had lunch in the Penthouse Dining Room and gone on sightseeing trips around McLean. In the coming months, The Sylvestery team also plans on offering residents to have lunch in the Rose Café on occasion.

Thanks to NMCGRF and a grant from the McLean Community Foundation, The Sylvestery now has five iPads. These new iPads allow The Sylvestery's residents to access apps that help keep their minds sharp and often include a dexterity component. Thanks to this technology, The Sylvestery's activity assistants can tailor activities to an individual resident's preferences. Families can share music playlists with their loved ones for them to listen to whenever they need a pick-me-up or could use something calming. Some apps allow the user to play the drums or the piano on the screen of the iPad. Other apps offer fun games that focus on pattern recognition, identifying details or even trivia. The iPads can also be used by residents to connect with family members via Facetime.

In another utilization of technology, The Sylvestery is planning an upgrade to the sensory



*The Sylvestery, thanks to NMCGRF and a grant from the McLean Community Foundation, now has five iPads which allow residents to engage in more tailored activities.*

room, an area designed to help residents reduce anxiety. The sensory room, which is currently not being used, will be revamped with soothing lights, bubble tubes, and acoustic chairs. All of these features are designed to help connect with residents and provide them external stimuli to focus on, shifting their focus away from their anxiety and offering calming elements.

Aside from technology, The Sylvestery is undergoing some more traditional renovations. The kitchen space is being transformed from a country kitchen look to a more refined appearance. The renovation will also include the addition of hot and cold food wells. Analisse Vasquez, Assistant Administrator of The Sylvestery, is excited about this renovation as residents will be able to have more say over their food choices and portion sizes. Typically, residents' meals are plated in a separate area. With the hot and cold wells, residents will be able to see their food choices and have more options about the food they are eating. The activities staff will also be able to use the kitchen for baking cookies or aromatherapy.

Finally, The Sylvestery is spearheading VHRC's support of the Alzheimer's Association. This support includes participating in the Walk to End Alzheimer's in October. ❖

# Harvey

By Joe Kammerer

Harvey was a “cool” 13-year-old Boy Scout. He was tall and wiry, athletic though not interested in the school athletic teams. He was good looking with blond curly hair and he was thoroughly nonchalant. He was intelligent, but only a mediocre student.

Shortly after being selected by our scoutmaster to be the Patrol Leader of the “Stags Patrol,” Washington, D.C.’s Boy Scout Troop 12, I selected Harvey to be my Assistant Patrol Leader. I, too, was only 13 years old. I had many reasons for choosing Harvey besides the fact that he was the next oldest boy in the Patrol of eight boys. Every kid in the patrol liked Harvey, even though Harvey marched to the beat of a different drummer. Harvey and I liked each other, and I reasoned that Harvey had the potential to lead our patrol and six younger boys in my absence. I also felt that Harvey would agree with my decisions and plans for the patrol, which would help me be an effective leader.

Following Harvey’s promotion to Assistant Patrol Leader, we planned a weekend campout in our troop’s campsite, about a five-mile hike into the woods from the end of the streetcar line at Cabin John, Maryland. There were eight patrols in the troop and each patrol had a designated campsite a good distance from other patrol campsites. The camp was called “Camp Albert” after our Scoutmaster’s son, who lost his life in WWII. Our Scoutmaster, Henry Saur, dedicated the rest of his life to scouting. So intense was his devotion to scouting that he never missed our weekly troop meetings in 25 years. We all looked up to Mr. Saur, a man we all respected and loved.

After reaching Cabin John by streetcar, the



*Cabin John Bridge, also called Union Arch Bridge, now carries MacArthur Blvd. over Cabin John Parkway.*

conductor gave us extra time to unload our backpacks, tents, and food. Part of the fun of camping in the outdoors was fixing our own meals, using innovative techniques like the “coffee-can-casserole” to show off our cooking skills, and having fun on a hike while our meals cooked in the smoldering coals. We were on our own with the older scouts keeping a distant eye on us.

Knapsacks on our back, we started the five-mile hike to Camp Albert. Up ahead, we needed to cross the Cabin John Bridge. The bridge is a famous Civil War bridge. Construction was started in 1857 and completed in 1864. At the time of its construction, the main span was the longest, single-span masonry arch in the world. And it kept this distinction until 1903. It was designed as part of the Washington Aqueduct and Roadway Bridge and continues as such today. The bridge rises 101 feet above Cabin John Creek. It is only 20 feet wide, which provided room for two-car traffic when constructed. Today traffic passes only in one direction controlled by a traffic light at each end.

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# Harvey

Continued from page 6...

We had waited for traffic and proceeded onto the bridge roadway when one of the young boys said, "Joe, look at what Harvey is doing!" I looked and gasped, "Oh my, God!" Harvey had positioned himself on the outside ledge of the bridge and was crossing with his knapsack on his back.

I said, "Let me tell you, Harvey. My first inclination was to run over to you and pull you over the side of the bridge, back onto the roadway. But, if you resisted we could either lose you or the food you're carrying, either of which would be a tragedy.

"But let me ask you a question. If you perhaps misstep and go flailing out and down 100 feet to the Cabin John Creek, do you think your arms and legs will stay attached to your body? Would you like this for your coffin?"

"And, what should we call this: a suicide or an accident? What should I tell your parents?"

"But more importantly, Harvey, is this your idea of leadership? Should I tell the other boys to follow your example? If they do, what's your estimate of the probability of losing one, two, or three of them over the side down to the Cabin John

Creek? If you survive and they don't, do you want to break the news to their parents?"

Through all these questions, Harvey only shrugged and said nonchalantly, "If they want to follow me and think they can, you should let them."

"No, Harvey, I won't let them and if you survive, you know what awaits you at our next troop meeting. Scoutmaster Saur will orchestrate the 'Belt Game' for your benefit, and I know he will question my wisdom in selecting you as Assistant Patrol Leader.

(For the Belt Game, the members of the troop form a large circle. The Scoutmaster passes slowly around the circle selecting a scout he knows is a fast runner. The belt is transferred to the fast runner who applies the belt to the perpetrator while running around the circle back to his place.)

Harvey eventually completed his stunt on the outside of the bridge and nothing more was said about it for the rest of our camping trip. However, Harvey conducted another "attention getting" unfortunate trick. He threw a small can of baked beans into the fire to see what would happen. I saw what was happening and immediately placed each scout behind a tree. As expected, the can exploded, shooting hot beans everywhere and causing holes in several tents. The troop Quartermaster insisted that Harvey replace the tents. Harvey's father was furious, and I suspect there was another Belt Game at home for Harvey.

Harvey matured quickly following these events and all the scouts continued to like Harvey and forgive him for his indiscretions.

Meanwhile, I shall never forget the Civil War Cabin John Bridge, and our adventures while tenting on the old campground. ❖



## *Tenting on the Old Campground*

We're tenting tonight on the old campground.  
Give us a song to cheer.  
Our weary hearts, a song of home  
And friends we love so dear.

Many are the hearts that are weary tonight,  
Wishing for the war to cease;  
Many are the hearts looking for the right  
To see the dawn of peace.

Tenting tonight, tenting tonight  
Tenting on the old campground  
Tenting tonight, tenting tonight  
Tenting on the old campground.

— Walter Kittredge, 1863

# Gunther: A Parable

By Anonymous

Divorced for many years, I was almost 60 when I re-married a woman widowed six years earlier at a comparatively young age. She had three young daughters when we married – and a male black cat named Bowtie, whom she adored almost as much as her girls. But she had no dog.

A dog-lover since childhood and the prior owner of many, I waited a discreet period and then enlisted the girls in a campaign to add the missing pet to the household. My new wife had been a devoted cat-person all her life, but had nothing against dogs. It was thus an easy sell. In time, we found a beautiful female black Labrador Retriever, whom we named Tuxedo to pair up with Bowtie, the cat. I was ecstatic: with the addition of a dog, “my” dog, the household was complete.

Now, I know what you are thinking: Tuxedo changed my life, or my cat-loving wife found out she didn’t like dogs, or Bowtie and Tuxedo didn’t get along or did get along, and that changed my outlook on life. Those speculations would all be wrong. The fact is that Tuxedo turned out to be a very loving dog – as almost all Labradors are – and despite the fact that Bowtie was there first, he and Tuxedo got along just fine. My wife and the girls loved Tuxedo as much as did I. My life was all vanilla, plain vanilla.

Actually, the outlook-altering chain of events began about five years after Tuxedo arrived. One day, we discovered a large lump high on one of Bowtie’s rear legs, and it turned out to be a cancerous growth. We were all saddened, but my wife was devastated; her first husband, the father of her children, had died of a particularly virulent cancer, and her preoccupation with this dread disease was always evident.

I will not take you through the full pain of Bowtie’s demise: It is not necessary to the story. Suffice it to say that his condition required amputation of his leg, and he lasted only a few weeks after that. He was euthanized about a



month before Christmas. It was a sad holiday season for us all; even Tuxedo, as dogs often do when they lose a companion, became noticeably despondent, and for almost a month she often left her dinner half-eaten.

We all agreed that the best course of action would be to find another cat, and my wife soon undertook to do so. Because it was the holiday season, however, she had no success. Cats don’t normally breed in the late fall, so the supply of kittens was limited, and what kittens there were tended to be in great demand as Christmas gifts to young children. Her lack of success served to prolong and deepen her sadness at Bowtie’s passing. Enter our hero, Gunther.

On my own, I decided that the best course to ease the situation was for me to get a cat, to serve as a sort of stand-in until my wife could find a new kitten of her own. I had never been a “cat person,” and had been frankly put off by cats’ traditional haughty independence – as compared to a dog’s unswerving loyalty and affection. But I knew that if I were willing to accept a grown cat, I could easily find one at the county shelter or at one of the several PetSmart stores that made space available to pet rescue agencies.

For reasons that I do not understand even to this day, I was determined that if I were going

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# Gunther

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to get a cat, it would have to be a tabby, and a male. Perhaps this was the first indication of how important Gunther was to become to me: Unconsciously, I guess, I saw a male tabby as the personification of self-assured masculinity, a symbol of the felines who first provided their rodent control services to agrarian centers in the Fertile Crescent, so many centuries ago. No long-haired mewing pile of fluff for me.

So one Saturday afternoon, I went to the PetSmart alone, without telling the family. When I went to inspect the inventory of available cats, it was simply "no contest." Gunther was sitting in his cage, right in the middle of a wall of cat cages, staring at me with undisguised indifference. He was a black, brown and grey tabby, and I didn't even have to guess that he was a male. As he sat there, another cat on an exercise break walked by his cage, and Gunther reached out through the bars and gave the poor, unsuspecting intruder a shot in the ear, just to establish who was boss. It was pretty much a symbolic shot, though, because Gunther had been declawed by his prior owners – a practice which incidentally I find truly barbaric. Gunther must have known, though, that it was important right then that I learn of his infirmity, which only heightened my initial affection for his appearance.

After a get-acquainted session in the deserted PetSmart employee lounge, during which Gunther repeatedly rubbed his head against my legs (I thought he was showing affection for me but actually his eyebrows always itched, as I later found out), the selection process was over and I signed the necessary adoption application. It was at that point that I learned that Gunther was 14. Nobody in his right mind adopts a 14-year-old cat – nobody, that is, except me. "This is only proper," I thought, "One senior citizen being adopted by another. Who knows how many years each of us has left. We can live out as many as we can of our golden years together. Harry and Tonto ride again."

Two days later, I brought my new pal home. Though he certainly did a great job in filling the feline vacancy in our home, Gunther turned out to be a pretty grouchy old guy. He showed utter contempt for the two young cats that my wife eventually was able to find, and would give them his clawless shot if either of them invaded his space. He did not "play;" he was beyond such foolishness.

His table manners were abysmal. As far as he was concerned, if he weren't to have an assigned seat at the dinner table, he felt himself perfectly entitled just to jump on the table and help himself to the evening meal (or more specifically that part of it he found to his liking). He had no use whatsoever for dry or canned cat food: if he couldn't get his fill of "people food", he would deign to eat only canned tuna or salmon, and then only Chicken of the Sea. No house brands for Gunther.

From the very first day, it was clear that Gunther knew he belonged to the only other old guy in the household, and although he was courteous to the other human residents, and for that matter to Tuxedo the dog, he essentially had his own agenda and merely chose to coexist with them. With me, it was different. He regularly sought the comfort of my lap when I was reading or watching television, and if one of the younger cats pushed back at him when they grew older and less fearful, he would race across the room to find the safety of my lap. More often than not, he would curl up in the crook of my arm at night in bed, and make sure I woke up in the morning in time to get to work (and before that, of course, to feed him).

As Gunther grew older, he became less active and, if a door were left open, he would wander out into the neighborhood without any apparent sense of where he was. Always, however, he maintained a dignity in old age that I admired. Everything he did was done with deliberation and measured pace, and he seemed very comfortable

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# A Perfect April Day at Meadowlark Gardens

By Stephanie Kitchen

We enjoyed a trip to Meadowlark Gardens in Vienna on April 12. The weather that day was just perfect – a beautiful spring day. Then the garden – WOW! The fields of multicolored flowers. Birds singing and chirping all over the place. The handsome, blooming trees – from the palest blush to the hottest fuchsia pink. The lilies of the valley showed off their pure white bells. There were tulips of all imaginable colors, filling every path and corner of the garden. There's no need to travel to Holland when such a gorgeous display of tulips is so nearby! In the large pond, silver, orange, and gold-colored fish were frolicking and playing on top of the lazy turtles. For those of us who needed some rest or

time to take photos, there were many benches along the way. Everything looked so gorgeous, healthy, and happy. Upon



*Koi and turtle at Meadowlark Garden*

returning home – to complete the delightful day – a boxed lunch awaited us with a scrumptious sandwich, fruit, an oversized chocolate brownie, and a drink. Thank you, Mirna for this wonderful day! ❖

## Gunther

*Continued from page 9 ...*

with who he was.

Inevitably, at the age of 19, Gunther developed the kidney problems that were to prove his undoing, but he never complained as he steadily lost weight. If he was in pain, he never showed it. He just sought the security of my lap more and more and reassurance from me that we were peas in a pod, that we were bonded. His passing came suddenly on one beautiful spring morning, and I remember thinking – as I drove his comatose form to the vet's office – about the eternal process of earthly renewal, and the possibility of afterlife.

It is pretty absurd to say that the life and death of a cat changed one's outlook or perspective, but in the special circumstances of Gunther's and my short journey on this planet together toward the end of our days, that is exactly what happened. I think of Gunther often as a true pal at a time in life when one only reluctantly reads the obituaries for fear of finding another friend there. What I remember most clearly was his dignity. In my mind's eye, I can see him sitting on his haunches, with his forepaws – foreshortened by amputation – supporting his majestic, multi-striped head and

torso. And when I do that, I always tend to think of his ultimate ancestor, that regal progenitor of the feline kingdom, slowly finding his way out of the wilderness to reward the civilizing world with his presence.

As we age, really age, we are often preoccupied with the increasing physical and mental limitations that are a part of the aging process. We become fixated on what will catch up with us, and when. We live Satchel Paige's immortal injunction: "Don't look back, something may be gaining on you."

But what most of us seek, above all else, is to live out our final years with as much dignity as possible, and then when the end is upon us, to die with the same dignity and with as little fuss and bother for loved ones as possible. I believe – and it doesn't matter if it's true or not – that Gunther came into my life not by accident but by design, to provide me with an example of how to accomplish these things. Chances are, on that final inevitable day for me, my last conscious thought will be of Gunther, and of what that ornery old guy taught me: "Above all dignity, Kemosabe, dignity above all. Dogs may exemplify love, but I am the god of dignity." ❖

# Il Piroscrafo

By Rosemary Hogg

From the pier at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, we watched as our blue Rambler was hoisted aboard the USNS William O. Darby on a June day in 1961. When the car disappeared from our view, our family – Gordon (father), Rosemary (mother), three children, (Gordon, 11 years old, Anita, 9, and Evelyn, 4) and one Boston Terrier, Pepi, 5 – walked up the gangway into our “home” for the next four or five days as we sailed to Italy. Livorno was our destination where the Accademia Navale is located, and where Gordon would be teaching American English to the cadets, the pre-flight cadets, and later on to the officers at the War College. The exchange program was a new one initiated by Admiral Arleigh Burke of the U.S. Navy and his counterparts from the naval services of other countries.

After disembarking at Livorno we made our way to the Albergo Palazzo, where we stayed for about a month while looking for an apartment. Gordon walked to work every morning and settled into his teaching routine. His colleagues kidded him about his large car, dubbing it “il Piroscrafo” (the steamship). We had purposely selected the Rambler because it was somewhat smaller than many American sedans. Little had we realized how much bigger than most Italian cars it really was! But time would come to its defense as it proved its worth and became an integral step in establishing close relations with our neighbors in the suburb of Antignano where we eventually settled.

As new residents and tourists, we used the car to take us to medieval towns and cities, art galleries, museums and opera houses in Tuscany, in other parts of Italy, and beyond, as well as to shop, to enjoy evenings with the officers and their wives, to dances, to carnevale in Viareggio and, for me, to Piazza Sant’Jacopo, where I knitted with the wives while watching the children play. It also made an important stop at the hospital in Pisa, where our fourth child, Millicent, was born in 1963.



The following incidents stand out when il Piroscrafo performed a yeoman’s job:

Leda had been our sitter since the summer of 1961. The wife of the director of the Hotel Palazzo had suggested her to me. She lived in Antignano and her husband and a son worked at the hotel. Our children were fond of her and she chatted with them, even though in the beginning they probably didn’t understand what she was saying. She walked to our apartment. It wasn’t far, but Gordon always drove her home. One afternoon she came to the door to tell me that she would not be able to sit with the children the next evening because she was going to the hospital to have some tests performed. I hugged her and wished her well. Two days later Leda died from cancer. Gordon and I walked to her home to pay our respects. She was lying fully dressed on a bed in the front room. Her face was covered with a handkerchief and her ankles were tied together, also with a handkerchief. The next day there was a Mass at the Church of Santa Lucia, after which the hearse, bearing Leda’s wooden coffin, proceeded to the cemetery. Il Piroscrafo followed with Leda’s husband and son. The burial was above ground. Cemetery workers lifted the coffin and placed it into an opening. A marble slab sealed it in place. We were all sad. About a month later, I visited the burial site. Leda’s picture had been added to the marble front of the enclosure along with her birth and death dates and a container for flowers, which I lovingly filled.

Twice the car was filled to overflowing. I think the number of passengers must have exceeded the legal limit, if there was one. In late February 1963 Gordon made arrangements for Anita’s class at the Istituto San Giuseppe to go aboard

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## Il Piroscrafo

*Continued from page 11...*

the aircraft carrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt that was visiting Livorno and was anchored off shore. Although there were only five students in the class (four were Italian), three of the nuns (also Italian) who taught at the school joined the group, as well as our son, who had our permission to be absent for the day from the American school at Camp Darby. Somehow these 10 people packed themselves into il Piroscrafo, rode to the port and boarded the launch, which took them out to the ship through choppy waves, habits billowing and hair blowing. I've heard several versions of the precarious boarding of the carrier. However, the outing was a huge success according to all involved and they returned safely to Antignano.

The other occasion occurred at Christmastime 1963. Don Lelio, pastor of our local church, asked us if we would consider hosting some orphans in our home one afternoon. We agreed and on the appointed day Gordon picked up our guests – nine children and their chaperone (11 in the car.) It turned out to be a lovely visit. The children sang a few Italian Christmas carols, after which they drank cocoa and ate cookies. We enjoyed meeting and chatting with these young people who were lively, outgoing and courteous. When it was time to leave they arranged themselves in the car like sardines in a tin and off they went.

The last big event in our lives in Italy came near the end of our sojourn there. It was Carla and Raimondo's wedding! We had vacated our apartment in the villa on Viale di Antignano, sent our household furnishings and sundry items on their way home, and were spending our final days in Italian naval housing – Villa Marina – a few steps from the Accademia Navale. Carla and her parents lived in the same villa that we had just left. Her father was the caretaker of the building. They occupied the apartment below ours. We had the main floor with a balcony overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. Carla became our sitter and also cleaned the house. At times, she and Evelyn



*Rosemary Hogg, right, with her daughter Millie at Carla and Raimondo's wedding in Italy.*

would go down to the little port at the back of the house to pry clams or similar mollusks (I can't remember the exact name) from the concrete walls to use in a pasta. Carla had our complete trust, so much so that we left Millie in her care on two occasions when the rest of the family left for a couple of days: a trip to Verona to enjoy operas performed at the Roman coliseum, and a New Year's celebration in Napoli at the home of the mother of one of the Italian officers, Gigi. He and his wife, Anna Maria, were our dearest friends while we lived in Italy.

Gordon offered to drive Carla and Raimondo to Montenero for the wedding ceremony. It was a late August day in 1964. Early that morning Raimondo arrived at our apartment carrying a box filled with white carnations. He placed the flowers around the inside edges of the windshield and the back window of the car. Il Pirascafo had never looked so elegant or festive! Upon their arrival at the Church of La Madonna di Montenero, Raimondo asked Gordon to be his *testimone* – his witness, his best man! Gordon was honored. The ceremony was lovely, Carla was a radiant bride – happy and all smiles. An outdoor reception at a restaurant in Ardenza followed. Raimondo and Carla circulated among the guests receiving good wishes and thanking

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# Making Medicine Safe with Information

By Lorna Lagarde

It was mid-spring and I was the Chief Pharmacist for the Pentagon. I loved my job, but I still had days, like we all do, that I did not want to go to work. Nonetheless, I got up, got dressed and went to work. Once at work, I had the usual crowd in my office, pharmacy patients wanting to talk with me. I graciously welcomed their conversation, but still the day dragged on and I could not wait for it to end. At 5 p.m. on the dot, I closed my office and went to the Ft. Myer Officer's Club for Happy Hour. I so loved these occasions to be with my friends; they never failed to improve my spirits.

While enjoying my evening, my Blackberry rang. I could see from the caller ID that the person calling was from a government office. On the other end of the line was the aide for the Secretary of Health Affairs for the Pentagon. The aid told me that the Secretary had a new prescription that he wanted filled. I told the aide that we had this medication in stock and I would be happy to go back to my office to fill the prescription.

Later that evening, after the Secretary had received his prescription, he called me to ask some questions about it. Remember, this was in the days that when you received a prescription from your doctor, you were told to "take the



white pill orally at bedtime" or "take the red pill one hour after taking the white pill." With the Secretary still on the phone, I pulled out my Physician's Desk Reference, which provides the drug maker's prescribing information. The Secretary listened very intently as I read the drug information to him. Once the call ended, I put my reference book away and didn't think much more about the exchange; I was just glad to be of help.

About a month later, I received a memorandum from the Secretary that all new prescriptions and refills must be accompanied with literature about the prescription, including name of the drug, expiration date, contents, and more – all available to anyone who wishes to read it. This requirement applied to the Department of Defense, but was later expanded to apply to all prescriptions made by all U.S. doctors. I am glad I went to work that – and every day – and that I could answer the Secretary's questions and play a small role in this great decision, which helped make medical care in the U.S. safer. ❖

## Il Piroscrafo

*Continued from page 12...*

all for their presence. One custom they introduced to us involved Carla's wedding ring, confetti (white candied almonds) and yet unmarried females. Raimondo held the ring over the cupped hand of a young woman and Carla inserted an almond through the ring. If I remember the story correctly, if the almond successfully dropped through the ring into the recipient's hand, wedding bells were in the offing. On a whim and "un po' di fantasia" Carla, with Millie in her arms, passed an almond through her ring into our 19-month-old's small

hand. We all laughed and clapped.

A few days later we packed our things, said our goodbyes, shed some tears and then climbed into our car and drove north from Livorno to Genova, where we boarded the cruise ship, SS Atlantic, en route to New York City. Homeward bound! Following our arrival we stood on the pier in Manhattan and watched as our blue sedan was lowered to street level. Il Piroscrafo no longer. Smaller perhaps than many American cars, it had nevertheless served us well on a remarkable and memorable adventure. ❖

# Speck Easley

By Roy Easley

In 1891, a son was born to Alexander Campbell Easley and his wife, Claudia Miller Easley. Their son started life as Claudius Miller Easley. At a very young age, Claudius had a hobby and a "calling" – rifle marksmanship. While a student at Waco High School in Texas, he enlisted in the National Guard and competed in the National Rifle Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio. By this time he had the nickname "SPECK," with his rifle he could hit a speck, or a small spot, on a target.

Speck graduated from Texas A&M with a bachelor's degree in architectural engineering and a commission as a second lieutenant in the Regular Army. Prior to WWII the Regular Army was extremely small and Lt. Easley was known throughout as "Speck" Easley. He became the Captain of the Infantry Rifle and Pistol Teams from 1937 to 1939.

In 1942, Speck was promoted to Brigadier General and appointed Assistant Division Commander of the 96th Infantry Division, a newly activated division for initial training at Camp Adair, Oregon. Speck took personal charge of the rifle and carbine marksmanship training. He was a taskmaster and soon the 96th became known as the Deadeye Division.

By late 1943, the 96th was ready for combat and was shipped to the Pacific. The division had an outstanding performance as one of the infantry divisions defeating the Japanese Army on the island of Leyte in the Philippines. Speck's image as a frontline soldier was expanded on Leyte. Daily, he and his small reconnaissance team prowled the forward edges of the battle to determine what was going on, and what needed to be done. One day near the conclusion of the battle for Leyte, he was wounded and received his first Purple Heart. He also was awarded the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star for bravery and leadership in combat on Leyte.

A trip north to the island of Okinawa was next for the 96th Deadeyes. At that point, the U.S. Navy



*General Easley demonstrates the proper way to hold and aim rifle while firing from a sitting position.*

had reached a marvelous apogee in the battle for Okinawa. The superb operational efficiency and widespread and penetrating logistical systems of the Navy in support of its ships at sea in Okinawan waters, its aircraft in the sky above, and the soldiers and Marines on the island of Okinawa – was beyond meritorious! The 35 aircraft carriers at Okinawa (12 fleet carriers, 6 light fleet carriers, and 17 escort carriers) were "home" to over 2,000 naval aircraft. The U.S. Tenth Army's 95,000 soldiers and Marines were opposed by 97,000 Japanese and Okinawan conscripted soldiers who were fighting from well-fortified strongpoints, caves, and caves with connecting tunnel systems. It was a battle royal, and victory for the U.S. took 83 days. The Tenth Army had 7,613 killed and 31,807 wounded, for a total of 38,420 casualties. The Navy suffered 4,907 killed and 4,225 wounded for a total of 9,132 casualties. Total U.S. military casualties was 48,552.

On June 18, the Tenth Army Commander Lt. General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. was at a forward observation post watching the progress of the battle when a Japanese artillery shell exploded directly above. A fragment of coral broken off by the explosion struck the general in the chest. He collapsed immediately and died 10 minutes later.

Speck was killed the day after General Buckner's death. He was pointing out the location of a  
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# Motion is Lotion

By Midge Holmes

I embarked on a brief career as a snare drummer playing in marching bands in both Moorestown High School in New Jersey and Colby College, Waterville, Maine. The experience told me that I have a keen sense of rhythm (which I am currently putting to good use in a drum circle in Arlington County). Moving ahead three decades, I enrolled in a 55+ aerobic dance class at the McLean Community Center taught by Ann Patterson. We bounced to the beat, rocked to the rhythms, stomped, skipped, shook and shimmied. It was loads of fun. I soon realized that if an activity is fun, it is easier to make a habit of it. I was asked to sub for Ann, when she was away, and, *voilà*, I was teaching. This experience gave me the confidence to perform later for two years with the Hexagon comedy troop in Washington, D.C.

When we moved to Vinson Hall in 2016, that wonderful mirrored room in the Fitness Center called out to me. Why not teach a variation of Ann's aerobic dance class there? I called it Motion is Lotion. We sway to the music and step out to easy patterns that avoid turning,

## Speck Easley

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*Last known photo of Speck Easley on Okinawa; taken within two hours of his death.*

Japanese machine gun when two bullets from this gun struck him in his forehead. He died instantly. The battle for Okinawa concluded three days later. A final note on Speck: In mid-April, Speck led an assault on a Japanese strongpoint and

was awarded the Silver Star, a significant award for bravery while under conditions of grave peril.

Okinawa was deemed secured by the U.S.



*Motion is Lotion performed at VHRC's 50th Anniversary Talent Show in 2019.*

jumping and high kicking. We do the twist, the hand jive, a little cha cha, mambo, west coast swing, strut, waltz, and glide. As we dance we become more limber, improve our balance and challenge our brains. You may recall seeing our group performing the Macarena in black and red flouncy costumes in VHRC's 2019 talent show. I choreograph familiar music that brings back fond memories, as well as smiles to our faces and fitness to our chassis! Of course, there is also camaraderie and corny joke telling. Newcomers are very welcome! The steps are easy to learn. Join us, Mondays starting at 1:30 p.m.! ❖

Tenth Army on June 22, 1945. That day, United Kingdom Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent a message to President Truman: "The strength of willpower, devotion, and technical resources applied by the United States to the task, joined with the death struggle of the enemy... places this battle among the most intense and famous of military history... We make our salute to your troops and their commanders."

Forty-five days after the capture of Okinawa, this victory was eclipsed by the release of an atomic bomb over Hiroshima, largely destroying that city. This bombing also caused many Americans to overlook the tragedy and triumph that was the Battle of Okinawa.

In 1946, the rifle range at Fort Benning was named Easley Range. Speck Easley Range would have been better! ❖

# Favorite Mysteries in Vinson Hall Library

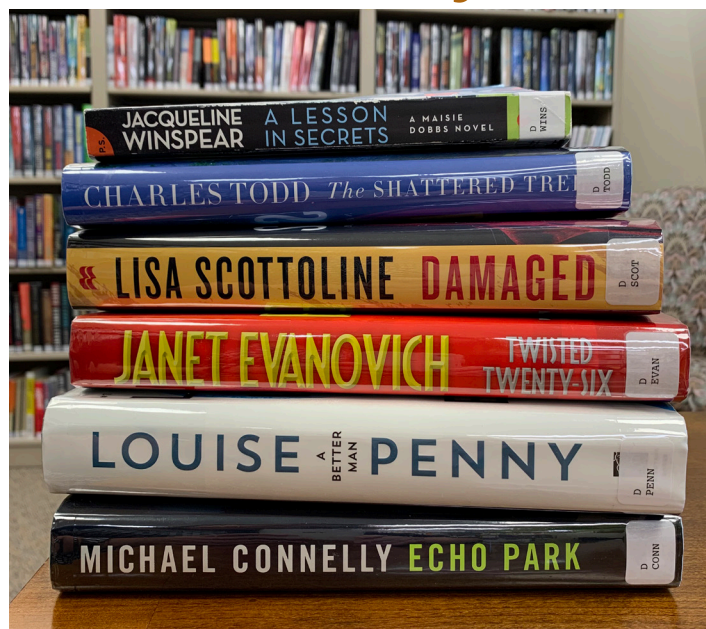
By Carol Henderson

*The Washington Post* recently asked readers to choose the greatest fictional detectives of all time. The top four were Armand Gamache, Sherlock Holmes, Harry Bosch and Hercule Poirot. Based on current book checkouts at the Vinson Hall Library, residents would agree with Armand Gamache, but most popular after that might be Guido Brunetti, Maisie Dobbs and Ian Rutledge.

If you recognize these names, you are probably a mystery book fan. And librarian Mary Blair has recently acquired 14 books by Donna Leon featuring Venetian detective Guido Brunetti. The author, an American resident in Venice, has 30 of these novels that will give you the feel of what it might be like to live in Venice as Commissario Brunetti solves complex crimes. You will meet intriguing colleagues, Brunetti's literature professor wife and his son and daughter. The early titles are the best, but the entire series is enjoyable.

The library has all the Chief Inspector Armand Gamache series by Louise Penny, and there is usually a waitlist when a new book in the series arrives. This Canadian official discovers the idyllic village of Three Pines south of Montreal, to which he returns again and again. Excellent character development will make you feel you know colleagues, family, villagers and the Canadian countryside as the series progresses. It's best to read them in order.

Sherlock Holmes (Arthur Conan Doyle) and Hercule Poirot (Agatha Christie) are represented in the library, but residents prefer detectives by more contemporary writers, whether set in historical periods or in the current day. Historical mysteries with recent acquisitions include Jacqueline Winspear's series about London private investigator Maisie Dobbs. Maisie has an unusual history as a maid, a nurse who served in World War I, a protégé to an older professional, and a businesswoman running a business on her own. Characters are well developed; plots often relate to the war, and it's best to read them in



order.

Ian Rutledge is a war-damaged Scotland Yard inspector whose experience during WWI in France has left him shell shocked, and often hearing the voice of Hamish MacLeod, a Scottish soldier he was forced to execute. Rutledge is assigned difficult cases and expected to fail, but manages, with difficulty, to succeed. A fascinating series by Charles Todd, the pen name of an American mother and son writing team.

Mysteries set in the late 20th century and popular here include the Harry Bosch series, number three in the *Washington Post* poll. These Los Angeles police procedurals, far better than most thanks to author Michael Connelly's background as a newspaper crime reporter, follow maverick homicide detective Bosch. Connelly is involved in the popular TV series *Bosch*, based on the books and which streams on Amazon Prime.

Daniel Silva is another popular writer whose protagonist, Gabriel Allon, is an art restorer and an Israeli spy and assassin with an interesting backstory. These thrillers include some explicit violence, but they are well-written novels with international terrorism-related plots.

For a contrast, dive into Janet Evanovich's Stephanie Plum novels. Set in New Jersey in the  
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# Robin's Nest

By Susan Osborn

We had just finished reading a story to our grandsons by Zoom in New Jersey when Peter once again remarked that birds kept flying by our living room window. He believed that some birds were building a nest in the large holly tree next to our bedroom. The book we had been reading was called *Flap Your Wings*, a favorite of all our grandchildren. As the story goes, a blue bird couple finds a large egg in their nest, which turns out to be a baby alligator. The hapless birds spend the next several weeks trying to feed the baby, which finally outgrows the nest and falls happily into the lake.

After our Zoom call, we looked further into the holly tree and discovered a nest with baby birds. We watched the parents going back and forth all day with food in their beaks. They never had a break! When one flew out, having delivered a worm or two, another parent would go in with a beak full of insects. We believed that the holly tree was a perfect place to hide from larger predators, due to the pointed leaves – a natural fortress.

One problem arose – soon the workers cleaning the porches and patios would arrive. Would they scare away the parents or inundate the babies with water? Susan talked with the workers' supervisor, Luis Morales. He suggested that we cover the top of the holly with a tarp and this would protect the nest.



The day of power washing arrived. A worker got a big ladder and covered the holly with a tarp. Water poured down five stories to the tarp covering the top of the tree, but it held. The noise from the machines was very loud and we were worried that the robins would abandon the nest. However, late that afternoon, after the workers had left, we saw the robin parents resume their duties.

We did a little exploring on the internet and found that Mrs. Robin builds the nest with small sticks, grass and mud. Both parents feed the chicks for a few weeks. Mrs. Robin then leaves to build another nest while Mr. Robin is tasked with getting the chicks out of the nest, encouraging them to fly and to find their own food. We watched the chicks' initial flights – not very smooth, but they practiced and soon they were gone. Since robins have two or three broods a summer, perhaps we will see them again! ❖

## Favorite Mysteries

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90s and starring a female bounty hunter with attitude, it is a witty and fun series. Sue Grafton's Alphabet Mysteries series features another female protagonist Kinsey Millhone, who is a tough-talking former cop turned private investigator. Grafton launched this series with *A is for Alibi* and reached *Y is for Yesterday* before her death in 2017. Another popular author is Lisa Scottoline, whose Rosato and Associates novels each focus on a different protagonist from this all-female

law firm. The characters are engaging and plots believable and exciting.

If you've ever yearned for French village life with local characters and great food and wine, enjoy the Bruno, Chief of Police, series by Martin Walker. Benoit Courreges (Bruno) heads the police department in a small village in the Dordogne area of France. The mysteries are satisfying; Bruno cooks great dinners for friends; the local wine is terrific; there is romantic interest, and the countryside is lovingly described. What's not to like? ❖

# Who Put the Muti in the Nescafé

By Bill Clair

In August 1967, Judy and I and our two young boys, David, who was three, and Chris, who was just one year old, departed from Dulles to begin our first overseas assignment with the State Department. Our destination was Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, which is today Harare, Zimbabwe.

Once we arrived in Salisbury, we were assigned a relatively new house on about an acre of land. We were also assigned a household staff: Cecelia, a kindly young Shona (one of the native tribes of southern Africa), who was to be our sons' nanny, and Davis, who was also a Shona and was to be our cook and housekeeper. In addition to these two, we needed to hire a gardener to help develop the gardens and keep the grounds tidy.

Along came Renard, a strapping, young Malawian man, who was highly recommended. He brought his own tool – a machete – which he explained was all he needed to get the grounds into shape. Renard did not speak English. We communicated with him through Cecelia and Davis.

A key factor affecting our everyday life was the challenge of living in a country that was heavily sanctioned as Rhodesia was. As a result only a few legally imported food items were available in the markets.

These inconveniences were trifling as we found Rhodesia to be an absolutely lovely country. Situated at about 5,000 feet above sea level, it remains comfortable year round, with the freshest air you could imagine. Aside from imported goods, we did not lack for food. Almost everything that could grow, did. But for some reason coffee was not one of them. The majority of the Europeans living in Rhodesia at the time were British, so they managed just fine with tea (and gin!). Our household, however, craved a proper cup of coffee. The only coffee available was instant coffee, specifically Nescafé. One morning, Judy decided to make her own cuppa. She noticed some strange items in the can – what



*Bill and Judy Clair at Dulles Airport in August 1967 with their two young sons, ready for their adventure in Africa!*

appeared to be dead bugs. When you are new to a country and your security awareness is high, this raised a red flag. What was in the Nescafé? The staff mumbled and pointed fingers at each other, which did not satisfy Judy's determination to get to the bottom of this mystery.

She brought the situation to the attention of the local municipality, who referred her to the government department responsible for analysis of consumer goods. Judy outlined the situation to the man in charge who said that the "foreign substance" was probably *muti*. He explained that *muti* in the local dialect means medicine, but it is a bit broader to include other mysterious ingredients. A few weeks later he sent us a written report of his analysis of the contents which I quote: "Nothing of a harmful nature was detected. As mentioned, it is not uncommon to find natives who think that by putting 'charms' in their employer's food they will be in favor and in their master's 'good books.'"

On further investigation, Judy got the staff to fess up. It was Renard who had committed this dirty deed. They explained that Renard had felt  
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*My husband, Bill Howard, and I moved to Vinson Hall on April 8, 2015. Bill was very happy here, but unfortunately passed away after a year. He was a man of many talents, one of which was that he could write poetry. Usually the poems were funny little couplets, but occasionally he wrote longer, thought-provoking ones. This is an example of one of his serious poems. He wrote it in memory of one of his friends, and I would like to submit it in memory of two of our friends, George Hall and Charlie Shank who have passed away recently.*

— Miriam Howard

## Ode to the Death of a Friend

No one can describe all the heartache inside  
That we feel at the death of a friend.  
As we look back on life, and we see all its strife,  
We wonder – Is it really the end?

The cycle of life is a mystery profound  
That's eluded our attempts to resolve.  
Could it be that life's passing that now prompts our massing  
Is a step that life takes to dissolve?

The bright joy of birth – the deep sorrow of death  
Are extremes in the passage of life.  
Could it be that life's message is only a presage  
Of creation to disperse all our strife?

For some, life is long and for some, it's cut short.  
Length's one mystery of life that confounds us.  
It's the wonder of birth – it's our place on this earth.  
It's the beauty of life that surrounds us.

It's so hard to let go the life's pleasures we know,  
All the warmth of the land and the sea.  
But when our time's here, all the things we hold dear  
Are behind us. Our spirit's now free.

Facing death when things cease, we experience peace,  
And we search for some order to steer us.  
It's the test of our creed 'midst this time of great need  
To gain peace when life's anchor is near us. ❖

— Bill Howard, October 2000

## Who Put the Muti in the Nescafé

*Continued from page 18...*

slighted and was not fully appreciated by the Clair family. So, he went to the local medicine man and paid good money for a batch of *muti* that would right the situation. We had no choice but to fire Renard. We will never know if he went back to his supplier and asked for his money back.

I would suspect that somewhere in Malawi, there is an old man sitting and reflecting on his quest to make a name for himself. He traveled to a neighboring country to find employment. He was successful because he was a hard worker. But what he could never understand is why an American family fired him for no apparent reason other than his quest to make them like him. ❖



## Vinson Hall Retirement Community

6251 Old Dominion Drive  
McLean, VA 22101

VINSON HALL RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

# Campus News & Views

Summer 2021



*We have started to celebrate again! After 16 months of reduced activities due to COVID-19, we have started to hold events. A few of the activities included VHC's 52nd birthday party, 3rd annual Corn Bag Toss Tournament, and an African Fashion Show.*