Most of us put our lives on hold over the past year. But some decided to make a big change.

I quit the restaurant business and started my own art studio.

I got laid off and founded my own consulting firm.

I'm moving to Paris.

I fell in love.

We started flipping houses — 1,200 miles from home.

I got divorced after 33 years of marriage.

We built a house — on our own — in the woods.

I got gender-affirming top surgery as part of my transition.

We started IVF.

I bought my dream restaurant.

I ran for school board and won.

I moved across the country to live closer to my family.

INTERVIEWS BY AMANDA LONG
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How families and synagogues have adapted bat and bar mitzvahs for the pandemic era

BY JESSICA M. GOLDSTEIN

Most mortals have lost track of time as the pandemic spills into year two. But God — assume for the purposes of this article there is one, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-everything — loses track of nothing and nobody, including the generation of Jewish children who, during the time of covid, turned 13.

On that occasion, these children become adults in the eyes of their religious community. Their bar or bat mitzvah day (b’nai mitzvah is the plural) is the culmination of significant preparation; children are typically assigned b’nai mitzvah dates about three years in advance. Planning soon begins for the service and, usually, a big party. Everything about the event, from its religious significance to its social elements, is time-stamped.

The covid pandemic, however, overrides everything. It has called for families to find creative workarounds, since the date cannot be readily changed. “This is a life-cycle event for a child,” says Heidi Hiller, who runs a D.C.-based event planning company, Innovative Party Planners. She knows how long families await these days; she has made “My Bar Mitzvah Will Be In 2033” baby onesies. “These are things that are planned for a long time.”

So are sweet 16 parties and quinceañeras, other birthday and anniversary celebrations, weddings, confirmations and the like, but postponement in those scenarios is less of an ordeal, because the b’nai mitzvah entails an overarching, difficult religious experience. First you need to learn to read Hebrew, then how to read from the Torah, which is harder — like learning English, then cracking Shakespeare — and then learn a reading from the Book of Prophets. You also need to master those readings’ particular melodies. B’nai mitzvah students also write and deliver a sermon, often
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How families and synagogues have adapted bat and bar mitzvahs for the pandemic era

From top: Evie Namath, center, leads a prayer with her family around her during her bat mitzvah service. A “Mazels for Maya” sign for Maya Levine’s bat mitzvah. Photographs from top by Stone Photography Inc. and David Stuck
connecting that week’s reading to their own life. All of these pieces correlate to one specific day in the Jewish calendar.

So what’s a family to do? “I know that’s something parents have struggled with,” says Rabbi Susan N. Shankman of Washington Hebrew Congregation, whose younger daughter, Evie, had her bat mitzvah in December. “How do we preserve what is special and celebratory about this day when there is so much disappointment?”

Washington Hebrew allowed students with assigned dates in spring of last year to read their prepared portions a few months after the fact, once the synagogue and larger community had adapted to our new covid-normal. “For centuries, rabbis have ... recognized the way in which life impacts what we do,” Shankman told me. “We were not asking our students to start over.”

Washington Hebrew’s services are held on Zoom. There’s a silver lining to the virtual version: More family members can attend from far-flung locations. For a safe sense of ceremony outside the sanctuary, the Torah is brought into the celebrant’s home.

At Tifereth Israel Congregation in D.C., 25 people — distanced and seated by pod — are allowed in the room at one time. For the benefit of virtual attendees, the sanctuary has been equipped with cameras and a sound system. However, notes Rabbi Michael Werbow, some more observant families won’t use Zoom on Shabbat and are holding out for a post-pandemic service. “The hardest thing is ... just not being able to truly show the joy through giving a hug and being close to somebody,” he says. “That really is a lack. I think that just the shattering of an image of what their celebration was going to be like, there’s sort of a mourning process that they go through.”

Amid that understandable sorrow, Shankman says: “I would say it’s been very affirming ... to watch and witness as parents continue to transmit their values and tradition to their children. It’s certainly something that’s happened before in Jewish history: There have been outside forces that made it challenging to continue forward. [Now it’s] a different type of bravery and courage, but we’ve witnessed a sense of commitment and a sense of connection.”

When it came to the post-service party, however, Hiller says that “families were paralyzed.” Many who’d planned events for the first half of 2020 had put down a deposit on a venue, paid a caterer and booked a DJ. “That money is gone,” she says. Families who’ve had more time to adjust are imagining these events anew. “The questions we’re getting now are: I’m not postponing the party. What can we do, creatively?”

The go-to pandemic choice is a drive-by: The celebrant hands out goody bags in front of their house to a car parade of friends who shout mazel tovs out their windows. But Amanda Levine wanted something unique. Her daughter, Maya, attends a Jewish day school in Baltimore. When the pandemic hit, one of the first things the parents worried about was how their children would handle missing out on “such an important year for friendship-building.” “It took me a long time to embrace that this year has to be different,” Levine says. “Our other two girls had a big DJ party and fancy dresses and hair and makeup and the whole business, and she wasn’t going to have that.”

Levine and her husband were adamant about keeping Maya’s assigned date: Jan. 16, 2021. “We felt like: The ritual is what’s important here, and the ritual is not affected by covid. If we pushed off the whole thing because we can’t have a party, what we’re saying is, the importance of a bat mitzvah is that you have a fancy party.” (Not to offend anyone who did postpone, she adds. “It just wasn’t right for us.”)

Levine’s husband is the president of a major hospital and serves on the health and safety commission for their synagogue and school; whatever they did would have to be 100 percent covid-safe. So Levine and Hiller cycled through a hundred ideas. In the end, they rented a tent, fire pits, a couple of games and a grilled-cheese food truck. Guests signed up to attend eight at a time in 15-minute shifts, with masks on. (They grabbed their grilled cheese on the way out.) Though it wasn’t exactly what anyone hoped for, “that’s sort of the covid way,” Levine says. “I wish it could be normal, but this is good, too.”

For a small group of families with more extravagant visions, things are playing out differently. Event planner Andrew Zill works mostly with “socialites and society people, businessmen, philanthropists”; his clients, he says, can spend “up to millions.” In his world, families are not canceling. They are postponing. And postponing. One family was supposed to hold their event in March 2020; they’ve pushed it back four times. Custom-made swag for guests has been donated to charity. They’ve printed multiple save-the-dates and redesigned invitations.

Is it kosher to postpone a lot? Not really. But he doesn’t serve a super-religious set. “I tend to work with families that are not extremely traditional,” says Zill, who will happily put bacon-wrapped scallops on the menu. “They don’t always adhere to Jewish law, so to speak.”

For kids who’ve been forced to radically alter or cancel their plans, Hiller hopes that going without the b’nai mitzvah they expected during this strange, cruel year will bring them closer together: “They will have shared this experience and that will connect them automatically.”

Shankman’s daughter Evie felt more comfortable leading services on Zoom than she might have in person — and, with her feet hidden from the camera, she could swap out her high heels for Doc Martens. (Had they been in the synagogue, “I probably would never have let that happen,” Shankman says. Evie: “I think I could have swayed you.”)

Maya’s service was inside the temple, with extremely limited attendance: her immediate family of five people, the rabbi and the guy running the Zoom meeting, which was beamed out to all their other family and friends. Their synagogue, Chizuk Amuno Congregation in Pikesville, Md., allows no more than 25 people inside at a time.

At first, Maya told me of her bat mitzvah, “It felt pretty bad, because this is something you wait for your whole life, and then you just can’t do it. And it’s really disappointing.” But when we spoke about a month later, after she’d had time to reflect on the experience, she said: “It sucks, but no one has ever done it before. It feels cool to be the first to do something, you know? And we are going to have much better bat mitzvah stories to tell than our siblings.”

Jessica M. Goldstein is a contributing writer for the Arts & Style section and the magazine.

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“The world is changing.
It just isn’t changing
fast enough.”

Katharine Hayhoe

INTERVIEW BY KK OTTESEN
PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY RODGERS/TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Katharine Hayhoe, 48, is an atmospheric scientist, professor and director of the Climate Center at Texas Tech University. She is also an author, speaker, recipient of the United Nations’ Champion of the Earth award and co-founder of Science Moms, a new effort to engage mothers in climate change issues.

You’ve said that the number one predictor for whether we think that the climate is changing and its impacts are serious has nothing to do with how much we know about science, but simply where we fall on the political spectrum. How do you explain that?

Climate change is a casualty to the political polarization that has been emerging in the United States over the last few decades. You have a lot of people who are just really confused because they hear people whose values they share, who call themselves Christians, who have called themselves Republicans or conservatives, telling people, “Those scientists are just making it up.” “It’s just a liberal hoax.”

As a climate scientist and an evangelical Christian, you’ve talked about how people assume those identities are incompatible. Can you explain how, for you, each informs the other?

People often assume they’re incompatible because in the United States the word “evangelical” has become synonymous with conservative politics. But it really wasn’t until the ’80s when the Moral Majority gained force and began to say, “How can we bring Christians around to supporting a single political party?” that “evangelical” and “Republican” really became associated with each other.

So the term “evangelical” is now used in the United States for two very different types of people. One I would call political evangelicals, who base their statement of faith on their politics. And then at the other end of the spectrum are theological evangelicals, who base what they believe on the Bible. Which, in Genesis 1, says that humans have responsibility over every living thing on this Earth. And, at the end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, [it] says God will destroy those who destroy the Earth — and, in between, talks all about how God cares for the smallest and most insignificant aspect of nature, and about how we are to love others and care for others. Well, the poor and vulnerable today are the ones most affected by a changing climate. In fact, when I connected the dots between poverty, hunger, disease, lack of access to clean water and education, and basic equity, and the fact that climate change is making all of those worse, that’s what led me, personally, as a Christian, to become a climate scientist.

When the pandemic hit and economies across the world started shutting down, we saw big improvements in pollution levels, in air quality. Has it influenced your thinking about what’s possible in fighting climate change?

Oh, yes. First of all, it was very dramatic. We have satellite observations from around the world that showed that, as the lockdown progressed from China to Europe to North America, levels of dangerous air pollution dropped significantly in some of the most polluted parts of the world. At the same time, our carbon emissions dropped. So it’s estimated that in the month of April, at least, global carbon emissions were down 17 percent. Now, of course, as the lockdown lifted, air pollution and carbon emissions bounced right back up again. So people might say: Well, does that mean it’s hopeless? And I would say no because we’ve seen what can happen. Now, we didn’t do it in a sustainable manner.

Right, obviously halting all activity is not feasible. Or desirable.

What is desirable is achieving those reductions in sustainable ways.

If we implemented all currently available efficiency measures, that would cut U.S. carbon emissions 50 percent. That’s efficiency — not even clean energy. And during the lockdown around the world, during the pandemic, clean energy took off. The International Energy Agency estimates that 90 percent of new electricity installed around the world in 2020 will have been clean energy. Ninety percent. So the world is changing. It just isn’t changing fast enough. We need more hands rolling that giant boulder. It’s already rolling downhill slowly. And we need it rolling faster.

KK Ottesen is a regular contributor to the magazine. This interview has been edited and condensed. For a longer version, visit wapo.st/magazine.
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A year into the pandemic — after a series of Zoom dates that led nowhere — 30-year-old Brigitte Thieme-Burdette decided to apply to Date Lab. She had grown up in Virginia reading the column and figured: Why not? “I’m looking for the real deal,” said Brigitte, who lives in Sterling. Still, she didn’t go into the date expecting to meet her soul mate. “I didn’t really have high expectations. It’s more like throwing spaghetti at the wall,” she said. But she did hope it would be better than some of her previous Zoom dates. “I once had a Zoom date where the guy had his TV on and I could see it flickering in his face,” she said. “I want someone who is here with me and who is going to truly take their time.”

To prepare for this date, she took a shower, styled her hair and makeup, and wore a wine-colored pussybow blouse and black yoga pants. “I made sure I looked especially good, and that I had my lighting right so that I’m not just a whole bag of shadows,” she said. She had ordered tapas from Barcelona Wine Bar in Reston — as many as the Date Lab budget would allow for — and drank seltzer water from her SodaStream. “I went for a couple of things that I normally haven’t ordered, since I’m not paying for it,” she said, including shishito peppers (she found them too spicy) and olive oil cake (she liked). When her date, Luke Haynes, 33, logged on, Brigitte immediately thought, “Oh, he’s pretty good-looking.” Luke, who lives in Arlington, thought the same of her. “I went into the date pretty apathetic,” he admitted, but when he saw Brigitte, “I immediately got nervous. It was a pretty exciting feeling to get to meet someone brand new for the first time, especially now.”

Despite the mutual attraction, the initial moments were awkward. “It was like, okay, what do we do now?” said Brigitte. She has nailed down a strategy for what makes a successful Zoom date. The key, she said, is to “make it interesting” so that it doesn’t feel like a job interview or business meeting. “There has to be a different kind of effort put in,” she explained. With Luke, she broke the ice with a show-and-tell of her meal. “I started to open up a few of the things and just show him what I got,” said Brigitte.

Luke’s dinner, however, was not nearly as conducive to the icebreaker. He got a burrito from Chipotle. To drink, he had water and bourbon. It later dawned on him that his date might have perceived his dinner selection as a statement about his dating style. “I unfortunately wasn’t taking the date as seriously as I should have,” he said. “I know that if I was on a date with someone, Chipotle would not be my first restaurant.” But Brigitte was amused. “I had fun ragging on him for that,” she said. After her show-and-tell, he jokingly did a similar thing with his burrito.

From there, the conversation flowed smoothly. Well, mostly. “His Internet connection was a little funky,” Brigitte recalled, “so his image was a little bit lagging and a little bit choppy. It kind of made our
rhythm a little off." There were a few moments when Luke interrupted her or talked for long stretches without engaging her, but Brigitte chalked it up to nerves and the potential lag time in their Internet connection.

Technical issues aside, the two quickly found that they shared a background in theater and acting — for Brigitte, that’s not always a plus. “I don’t really date other actors,” she admitted, noting that in the past, boyfriends who share her profession have been competitive or condescending. Despite her wariness of actors, she appreciated that Luke had other interests. “One thing that stood out to me was that he mentioned that he doesn’t want to come home and just talk about acting all the time,” she said. Brigitte teaches acting to children, while Luke works at a nonprofit and maintains theater as a hobby.

Like Brigitte, Luke is looking to date someone with interests beyond their job. “She’s a pretty well-rounded individual, and I think I am, too,” he said. Both also focus on healthful eating and are active: Luke runs regularly, while Brigitte enjoys yoga and biking.

“It felt like time moved by so quickly,” Luke said. “It felt like the conversation just went and went and went.” After two hours, they decided to call it a night, but stayed on for 20 minutes more, chatting and taking screenshots in various poses. That’s when Luke gave Brigitte his phone number, and she texted him as they chatted. “It was a pretty awesome date,” Luke said.

But for Brigitte, something felt a little off. Was it a function of the technology and the glitchy Internet? Or was something else amiss? While they had enough in common, “I didn’t walk away from the date feeling like I was comfortable being my full self,” she said.

Still, when Luke texted her the next day and asked her out again — this time for an in-person date — she said yes. “I can only get so much information from a Zoom date,” said Brigitte. She wanted to find out, sooner rather than later, whether there might be a spark between them. “I saw the possibility from the first.”

RATE THE DATE
Luke: 4.5 [out of 5].
Brigitte: 3.5.

UPDATE
Luke and Brigitte went on a second date the same week but ultimately decided to part ways.

Prachi Gupta is a writer in New York.
New Beginnings

It's March, the month that brings us the first day of spring; the time of new beginnings. Does your winter den need its own fresh start? Why not turn to the local décor experts below for some stylish inspiration?

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In our year of waiting, here are stories of people who didn’t wait

On March 11, 2020, the coronavirus outbreak was officially declared a pandemic. The 12 months since have been filled with undeniable, ubiquitous reminders that life is short and unpredictable. Somewhere between “How could this be happening?” and “Is this what I want my life to be?” some people went ahead with life-changing decisions. Despite the global health crisis — or because of it — they didn’t tread water. Instead, they created the lives they’ve always wanted.

BY AMANDA LONG
Interviews have been edited and condensed
I QUIT THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS AND STARTED MY OWN ART STUDIO

Maria Milton, 34, former beverage manager, now owner of MarzDM Studio, Arlington, Va.

I’ve been in the restaurant industry since I was 16 and became a general manager at 24. I love the people, the camaraderie of regulars and industry workers. It just felt like home.

A lot of [customers] coming out [this summer] tried our patience. There were absolutely generous and amazing people who supported small businesses. I’m talking about the other people, who were like, “I’m not going to wear a mask even if I’m talking to you because I’m outside.”

“In a pandemic” was always in my head: “Why am I dealing with this in a pandemic?” “Don’t they realize we are in a pandemic?”

The compounding frustrations of trying to keep myself, my 64-year-old father, who I live with, our team and other guests safe all while this person or group of people have little to zero respect for our health and safety really pushed me toward this decision to leave.

Throughout the summer, I was channeling my frustrations into art. It was healing to be able to have something beautiful at the end of the day. Once you start using that part of your brain, it just keeps coming.

This got me thinking about what my mother would do. She would say, “What makes you happy?” and [my job] was not making me happy. She passed away three weeks before her retirement [in 2017]. I hate that she didn’t get to do all the things she dreamed of with her retirement. I was watching the [restaurant] industry morph before my eyes, and I realized this is the perfect time for me to do something that makes me happy. When indoor dining started, the GM asked everyone: “Will you still work here?” My immediate answer was no. That was a line I was not willing to cross.

Since my last day on Nov. 1, I’ve been focusing all my energy and time into creating a shop to focus on my art and glass. I get up, make coffee and sometimes forget to eat. I just can’t stop when I’m in the studio. It’s an entirely different kind of stress — and I like it. I have so much to do, but I can’t wait to do it.
I got laid off and founded my own consulting firm

Julye M. Williams, 43, founder of Project 2043, Silver Spring, Md.

It was April 15 [of 2020]. I was working at an educational nonprofit when I got a call at 9:30 in the morning from our human resources department lead. Shortly after, my boss joined the line. They let me know as a result of the pandemic, and a loss of revenue, they were having staff layoffs. My position was being eliminated.

As soon as I hung up the phone, I started thinking, “I know there’s always an opportunity in everything. What’s the opportunity here?” It made me think back to a projection from the U.S. Census Bureau that in the year 2043, the majority of the U.S. population will be people of color. I can’t tell you when I read that, but it has never left my mind. It was always coming back to me, asking me what I’m going to do about it.

My years at the nonprofit showed me that while leaders often believe they have the best of intentions, they are often clueless about matters of race and inclusion. I worked in an organization where 98 percent of the time I was the only person of color at the table. I helped the organization develop a new revenue stream, create new educational products, and offered deep insight into matters of race. All of this made the company look great. However, I was continuously passed over for promotions, faced microaggressions in the workplace, and as the woman of color they often turned to, I felt tokenized.

I now hope to change that. U.S. demographics are shifting. Deciding to launch Project 2043 was a way for me to help individuals and organizations become more aware of the day-to-day actions and inactions that promote the inequities we have now — and learn about this demographic shift. We do this through training and educational support. We want companies, organizations, schools and individuals to hire us to prepare for this shift.

I’m a spiritual person, and I felt like getting laid off was truly an act of divine intervention. The call from the HR director opened a path for me to do this important work. It was [a] combination of being laid off, looking at my path, looking at this [demographic] projection, seeing what’s happening in society and the murders of Black people at the hands of police. I just had to do something. Being laid off finally gave me the time to address what was percolating in my heart.
In 2019, I got laid off, was newly single and my dog died. I was basically a sad, gay country song. My cousin, who lives in France, said, “Why don’t you come here and figure out what you want to do next?” I put everything in storage and went for 3½ months. While there, my father needed heart surgery, so I came back to be with him in February [2020]. Then the pandemic happened, and I was basically stranded in Wisconsin.

During quarantine, I started drafting floor plans of houses I would love to build, just for fun. A light went off: “What can I do with my existing skills that is not completely new?” I thought interior design. I applied to [a local college] and was accepted but placed on a year wait list. If I have to wait a year, I thought, I should apply to a school that I really want to attend. I found the Paris College of Art, the one Tom Ford attended.

I’ve always known that I was going to get back to France; I just didn’t know how. The pandemic made the decision much easier. It was like a giant bear hug for my sense of adventure and wanderlust. My only trepidation was around the choice of interior design. It seemed so extravagant and self-indulgent with people getting sick and dying. But I started hearing news reports of Lowe’s and Home Depot recording record profits as people were taking on home improvement projects. We need designers more than ever as we reimagine our personal and public spaces going forward.

In the spring, I started selling the contents of my storage space. It was a way to say to myself: You have nothing holding you back in the U.S. No mortgage, no car payment, no children or pets, and not even a set of china or houseplant. If I don’t do it now, I never will. Had the pandemic not happened, I would be doing more of the same. The pandemic was the defibrillator that jolted my dream into life.

I’M MOVING TO PARIS

Jamie Godfrey, 45, housewares designer and product developer, Dodgeville, Wis.
In 2016, I moved [from D.C.] to New York with my ex. When that [relationship] didn’t pan out, I stayed and eventually started online dating. I had some really good dates with this guy named Dan. But I wasn’t enjoying the city. I didn’t find it sustainable, emotionally or financially. Honestly, we’re both defeatists and didn’t think it would work long distance. So, I came back to D.C., and we stayed friends. We sent each other funny texts. He came down for Pride, but nothing more than friends.

In August, he was getting sick of the city and mentioned he was thinking of coming down to hang out. I told him: “Don’t spend money on a hotel. Come stay with me.” He was supposed to be here for two or three days. He stayed a week.

I think all of us reevaluated our priorities [last] year. We were like, “Do you wanna give this a try? We only live once, right?” He was gone for maybe a week, and I was already trying to get on a train to go see him. I went up in early September, and that’s when we told each other we loved one another. We’ve seen each other just about every other week since. I know my friends were worried about me traveling, especially to New York, but I’m already at a high risk working in hospitality. This is a lateral move in terms of risk exposure — riding the train vs. working in a restaurant — and it’s for me.

This has proven itself against all odds. I never thought we’d see each other this much, especially during a time when you’re not supposed to be seeing people. I don’t want to wait anymore. He’s already thinking about moving down here. It just seemed as if all the barriers we’d put up before were removed, oddly because of the pandemic. We had time to just be together. Things just hit different in a pandemic.

WE STARTED FLIPPING HOUSES — 1,200 MILES FROM HOME

Samantha Green, 41, teacher, and Kevin Green, 46, HVAC technician, Pembroke Pines, Fla., flipping houses in Cleveland
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Samantha Green, 41, teacher, and Kevin Green, 46, HVAC technician, Pembroke Pines, Fla., flipping houses in Cleveland

Samantha: We took a big [financial] hit with covid in South Florida. My husband does air conditioning, and that just absolutely dried up. It was either continue to wait for something to happen or do something different. We’d dabbled in real estate as landlords, but even being a landlord during covid isn’t the brightest idea. So we sold a duplex we owned in Cleveland and made a good chunk of money. That got us thinking about flipping houses.

I always felt that there would be a “right time” to venture deeper into real estate: right amount of money saved, right connections. Then, in May, I listened to a webinar about investing and one of the speakers said, “skin in the game.” That shook me because I was doing the opposite. I was trying to do what the market, but we had no skin in the game.

If there is one thing that 2020 taught us it’s that things are not always within our control and the best-laid-out plans don’t always work out. So why not just go for it?

Kevin: We had not worked together in any kind of business venture before. Let’s put it this way: We have learned a whole lot about each other. ... We have to agree to disagree on some projects.

Samantha: It also helps that we delineate who’s doing what. My husband is on-site as the project manager. He goes up to Cleveland on Thursdays and stays on-site until Monday a couple times a month. I deal with design. He always says that I’m the boss lady, so when someone needs a firm talking-to, I put on my teacher voice and I deal with them.

Kevin: She’s the bad cop. I’m the good cop.

Samantha: We sold our first flipped house in December. It feels good, but it was hard work. We are on track to replace his income this year. Our goal is to flip three to four properties. We’re going with momentum.
I’d been married since 1987. It had been a difficult marriage for a number of years. We were already living apart in March. But it was still a very, very hard decision to let go.

Perhaps, since the pandemic sped up technology and ratcheted up the pace of our lives, I went through the divorce 10 years earlier than I would have otherwise. Maybe that is what the pandemic did for me. It didn’t let me go back on my promise to myself. It could have taken me years! With all the threat of dying everywhere around, I get to choose to live? You’re damn right. I could not get mired in the moment — and, well, that moment was devastating at every level. The searing loneliness. If I stopped and looked around me, it was just me and everything I owned in boxes.

All I had was me. At some level, going through a divorce, that’s what it boils down to: All you have is yourself. You’re not defined by your marriage or your job. You have to conquer the world in a different way. The pandemic forced that on me. Any other year, I’d have likely started dating or at least going out, but that would have been, in some ways, a distraction. This year, I got to know myself. When I finally decided to go through the legal process of divorce, the courts were like, “Sorry, no can do.” All the courts were closed. So, I was in this limbo of not even being divorced. We finally set the [video] call for April 23. I was sitting in a room at home by myself. My ex wasn’t on the call. The judge got on and said, “Well, you’re our first. We tried one before and there was a glitch, so here’s hoping.” It took five minutes. It was so bizarre. I think we need a bit of that ritual of going to the courthouse. Like a funeral, the ritual helps you process everything. All I did was click “Leave the meeting.”

I had told myself I was going to drive to the ocean right after. And that’s what I did. I went for a swim. I flung myself out there. All I could think was, “I am alone and look at how good this feels.”

Lisa Gergets, 49, Web developer turned furniture maker, Grand Marais, Minn.
About three years ago, my husband [John] and I bought property in the woods, with plans to build a house there eventually. This [past] spring, we had a sense that covid was going to be bigger than a flu, [and] we started getting serious about getting out of town. Covid spurred us on.

Both my husband and I had done some basic remodeling, but [at the time] we had never built a single thing — not even a bench. We had to get this done in a very short period of time, before it got too cold. We started clearing the property in May. We both had the desire, the will and the good health to build a home. Every step of the way, we were panicking that we were getting it wrong. We needed to research every single step so the house didn’t fall down on us. We over-engineered this house, for sure.

We only hired three things out: excavations, electricity and the roof. If it [could] kill us, we [decided we] didn’t need to do it. We learned we could do [almost] anything. That inspired us to change careers.

We’re now making and selling rustic furniture like we’ve made for our home.

It kept our minds busy during the pandemic. We saw a lot of people really struggling. When you have to get up and do hard physical labor every day, you don’t have time or energy to think about anything else.

We moved in [in January]. It’s incredibly surreal. I’m having a really hard time relaxing. I feel there’s something I should be working on. I’m trying to be conscious of getting myself to shut off and just be here.

Lisa Gergets, 49, Web developer turned furniture maker, Grand Marais, Minn.
I GOT GENDER-AFFIRMING TOP SURGERY AS PART OF MY TRANSITION
Frances Reed, 43, owner of Freed Bodyworks, D.C.

Before the surgery, every morning I’d wake up with this reminder that I was not living in a body that felt like my own. I could never just get up and get on with my day. I had these enormous triple-D breasts. I’ve hidden them well — by binding, by wearing sports bras — but that takes a lot of work.

In 2012, I was pretty severely injured working [as a massage therapist] in my binder. I knew beyond a shadow of doubt I wanted a change. But I was one year into this fledgling little business and there was not a snowball’s chance in hell that I could afford surgery. Fast forward to the end of 2019: The business was finally stable. I started planning my surgery for early 2020.

We went into lockdown March 16 and closed the business. The consultation [for my surgery] was canceled. That flipped a switch. There was something about this agreement I had made with my body, and now I couldn’t follow through on it. My body was like, “No, dude, you said we were done with this. You promised.” I was living pandemic life on Zoom, seeing clients and teaching. Seeing myself in that little window was making my dysmorphia around my chest out of control.

We set our reopen date at Freed for Aug. 2, [and then] they scheduled my surgery for Aug. 3. I wouldn’t have enough time to recover and get my business back up on its feet. Making that call to cancel the surgery was the lowest point of the pandemic.

They put me in the queue for the next available time, which ended up being Nov. 16. I wouldn’t even let myself get excited. This was not like a trip to Ireland was canceled: This was in my soul. I didn’t tell anyone. I didn’t talk about it. Then in October, I let myself start thinking and talking about it. When the [coronavirus] surge happened, I was like, No, I’m not giving up. I had the surgery as planned.

Now I feel amazing. Top surgery means finally not having this constant reminder of my body being not consistent with my gender. Walking past mirrors brightens my whole day. I can take selfies of my whole torso! I can run up the stairs without boobs hitting me in the face. Six weeks after the surgery, I pulled out all of my dress shirts and started trying them on for [my partner] Jessica. I would put on the shirt and just beam, like that innocent joy of a kid on Christmas morning — no brain, just all body and all emotion.
After we lost our third pregnancy shortly before Christmas 2019, we decided that IVF [in-vitro fertilization] would be the best option. We agreed to start in March. The day we were supposed to start our medications, we got a call from our clinic encouraging us to postpone the cycle because of covid.

It was pretty devastating. It almost felt like the universe was telling us this wasn’t meant to be. I was very much traumatized by the repetitive losses and was worried I couldn’t put myself through another.

We got the notification in May that the clinic was reopening. We would be able to go in July. It was very anxiety-provoking. My husband [Brian] works in car sales, so he’s with the public. I’m a pediatrician. Our clinic takes all the precautions, but there’s still that risk.

Once we realized it was looking like there was no end in sight for covid, we had a heart-to-heart about what it would mean to do this during a pandemic. We knew we couldn’t put this off for another year or two. If we tested positive at any point during the retrieval or transfer cycle, it would be canceled.

While everyone had to limit their social interactions, we had to completely wall ourselves in for a few months. I didn’t even go to the grocery store. Our families have been being so careful throughout this, but we couldn’t risk seeing them. The social isolation eats away at you, but we reminded ourselves that we were doing this to give us our best shot and that lots of people across the globe were experiencing similar isolation.

Luckily, we had a good cycle in July. Then we did our transfer in October. When we announced our pregnancy to friends and extended family, it was a surprise for everyone. There’s never a perfect time to do IVF or have a baby, not even when there isn’t an ongoing global pandemic, so carpe diem.
much as I could, saving the marketing. I worked six days a week, as plotting, reading, thinking about the menu, When I was driving that shuttle bus, I was someone else if you can work for yourself? everyone off in March. Why work for hotels to the airport when the company laid me down. I'm enjoying every bit of it. plan the menu. I like to talk to the customers. I do the dishes, I help in the kitchen, I not a whole lot you can do. You can march, you can make billboards, but unless [you] have someone who understands what's going on in our classrooms and how hard our teachers and staff are working, no matter what is thrown at us. [But] when you don’t have a title, people don’t listen or want to listen to you. That’s why I wanted to be a part of this school board. Those decisions are made at the top, and unless you’re at the level, there’s not a whole lot you can do. You can march, you can make billboards, but unless [you] have someone who understands what’s going on on the front lines, you can’t change a whole lot of that.

Since I came to this country in 2015 from Egypt, I’ve never stopped thinking about owning my own restaurant. I had worked in an Italian restaurant, and that’s what I wanted. I was driving a shuttle bus from hotels to the airport when the company laid everyone off in March. Why work for someone else if you can work for yourself? When I was driving that shuttle bus, I was plotting, reading, thinking about the menu, the marketing. I worked six days a week, as much as I could, saving.

When I was laid off, I had enough free time to focus on my dream. I knew that it was a tough time to own a restaurant, but a restaurant [called] Ruffino’s Spaghetti House was for sale. Before I bought the restaurant, I used to come to Ruffino’s to see how it was impacted by covid. Many people told me it wasn’t the right time, but I decided to take the risk and be confident that I won’t fail and things will get better. Better to try and fail than having regret of not trying.

I took ownership Oct. 15. Customers — some who have been coming here for a very long time — have been coming even more now. I do the dishes, I help in the kitchen, I plan the menu. I like to talk to the customers. I am enjoying every bit of it.

It’s a good feeling when you achieve something. It’s not about the money. It’s about feeding people. There’s just something inside of you that makes you proud of yourself.

I had planned to run [for the school board] when I retired from teaching in seven or eight years, but I felt I should step up. There was an urgency to run. I’d seen a need for a focus on mental health even before the pandemic, but seeing what my students went through [from] March to May, when I decided to run, was devastating.

One student said, “Mr. Tang, I’m sorry I can’t do the work, because no one is home to watch me and I have to go to work with my parent.” I remember a third-grader apologizing that she couldn’t do the work because she was helping her mother sew masks so they could pay rent. That got me to partner with the school district and education association to get a food-assistance program started.

Students are learning to survive. They’re learning to problem-solve in a crisis. Teachers are building the plane while having to fly it. I want the public to know and understand what goes on in our classrooms and how hard our teachers and staff are working, no matter what is thrown at us. [But] when you don’t have a title, people don’t listen or want to listen to you.

That’s why I wanted to be a part of this school board. Those decisions are made at the top, and unless you’re at the level, there’s not a whole lot you can do. You can march, you can make billboards, but unless [you] have someone who understands what’s going on on the front lines, you can’t change a whole lot of that.
I was living in Oakland, working as director of finance for a nonprofit. It was very isolating working from home and living alone in one of the most expensive parts of the country and not being able to enjoy any of the things that make the Bay Area great: the music, the queer community.

My dad is 71 and lives alone in Massachusetts in the house that I grew up in. My mom is 69 and lives in a nursing home two miles away. I wanted to be close, so the day my work decided to switch to remote work, I decided to leave.

I definitely had second thoughts. I love the friends and chosen family I have in the Bay Area. But what made it worth it was twofold. The first was that I was very worried about my mom, with the news of the deaths in long-term care facilities. The second was that I knew this wasn’t just going to go away in a couple months. It seemed like my life was going to be very isolated whether I stayed in Oakland or not.

I loaded up my RAV4 at the end of May and drove across the country. I’ve driven across the country before, at least seven times. This was easily the weirdest trip — barren towns, the difference in mask-wearing from state to state — and the fastest trip because I didn’t stop to do anything but sleep.

I’m the first person my dad got to hug since February. I’m a pretty good hermit, but it’s good to have a buddy. He makes me lunch every day, which my co-workers find delightful, and cooks me dinner most nights. In a stressful time, that’s been phenomenal for me.

At first, we were able to do outside, distanced visits with my mom. Her nursing home had an outbreak in April and another in October. She got covid in the second outbreak. She’s recovered. After that, though, they stopped doing outside, in-person visits. We’re able to call her from outside her window; her bed is right there. We go pretty much every day. She hasn’t hugged anyone. I think about that a lot.
We call it mango season. It happens every year in the dry season when the fruit starts falling from the trees, abundant and generous to those who are hungry. In Venezuela this past year, its arrival was particularly heralded, as the pandemic wore away even more access to basic necessities in a country racked by deepening poverty and crisis. The United Nations' World Food Program reports that one-third of Venezuelans suffer from food insecurity. The pandemic has made us especially vulnerable to a battered economy. Fuel shortages are common and halt food distribution. Job opportunities do exist, but barely. Dollars are the king currency, and very few people earn in dollars.

During the mandatory confinement, as covid-19 struck, all commitments were suspended and life became quotidian. This was at the very beginning — and I had so much time that I sat with my dad in his garden to watch the grass grow (literally). Gradually the need to eat, provide and work shook us into a new awareness. Necessity forced us to reassess what tools were available for survival.

What everyone can count on is nature, with mango season among the gifts it provides. We depend more than ever on mangoes. Before the crisis there were too many and we threw them to the trash; now we gather them all up. The lucky among us who can afford sugar make mango jelly, and those with flour make mango crumble. People these days are also eating a lot of bananas, plantains and papayas, and using wild herbs to season simple meals like rice and beans and cornmeal arepas. We grow peppers in our backyards.

I made these images while walking on the streets of Caracas, the capital, and smaller towns. One thing I observed on my long trips was that most Venezuelans eat fewer than two meals a day. People awaken late in the morning so they can skip breakfast and go directly to lunch. Water scarcity has made us bathe in nearby rivers; water plants are not working to capacity. All of this speaks eloquently to the national mismanagement of resources, but also demonstrates how the people solve everyday problems through sheer will and creativity. This time, when the economy halted, as it so often does, we looked outside and understood that our only chance was to go back to our roots.

Andrea Hernández Briceño is a Venezuelan photographer and National Geographic Explorer based in Caracas. This project was completed with the support of the National Geographic Society’s Emergency Fund for Journalists.
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Alfred Flores, 5, holds a bunch of quenettes in Patanemo. His family lives from the land, trading what they hunt and grow with others in the area.
This page clockwise from top right: Freingi Flores, 7, wears a crown of flowers in Patanemo. A girl fixes her sister’s hat in Galipan. A macaw tries to fly into the photographer’s kitchen in Caracas.
This page clockwise from top left: Sofia Monteverde after bathing in the sea in La Guaira. CDs hanging from a tree in Caracas. Mango peels and seeds on the streets of Caracas.
Right: A horse takes a break from carrying cocoa beans on a family farm in Patanemo.

Opposite page from top: A statue of the Virgin Mary on a wall in Caracas. A friend of the photographer’s in a pool in Caracas. Alfonso, 10, counts coconuts before selling them at Playa Grande in Choroni.
Right: A horse takes a break from carrying cocoa beans on a family farm in Patanemo.

Opposite page from top: A statue of the Virgin Mary on a wall in Caracas. A friend of the photographer’s in a pool in Caracas. Alfonso, 10, counts coconuts before selling them at Playa Grande in Choroni.
Clockwise from top right: A mosquito net over a bed in the photographer’s apartment, which is surrounded by green. The photographer’s cousin shows her self-made tattoo. A statue in front of an art school in Choroni.

SURE ENOUGH, CLYDE’S OFFERED HIM THE JOB IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE LAST COURSE.

“THIS IS A CORONATION, NOT AN INTERVIEW,” JOHN MCDONNELL, PRESIDENT OF THE OPERATION, RECALLS TELLING EOM LAST AUGUST. HIS NEW BOSSES AGREED THAT THE KOREAN NATIVE, 44, PRESENTED “THE BEST TASTING OF ANYONE” THROUGHOUT A FIVE-MONTH SEARCH FOR SOMEONE TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE GRAND DAME AND ITS UNDERGROUND TAVERN, THE TOMBS.

HAVING EATEN EOM’S FOOD THREE TIMES SINCE HE CAME ABOARD IN SEPTEMBER, MOST RECENTLY THIS WINTER, I CAN UNDERSTAND THE EAGERNESS TO ACQUIRE HIS SKILL SET IN THE SHADOW OF GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY. 1789 IS SERVING SOME OF THE BEST HIGH-END TAKEOUT IN WASHINGTON RIGHT NOW, FOOD THAT’S ALSO EXPERTLY PACKAGED AND TRUE TO THE CLASSIC SENTIMENT OF THE RESTAURANT, AN ENTERTAINMENT VENUE OVER ITS SIX DECADES FOR BUSINESS EXECUTIVES, DIPLOMATS, FAMILIES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AND ANYONE WHO SAVED UP FOR A NIGHT TO REMEMBER. (ME IN MY COLLEGE DAYS IN WASHINGTON, LIVING OFF TIPS FROM SLINGING DEEP-DISH PIZZA AT UNO.)

EOM’S SEDUCTIONS INCLUDE HAND-CUT STEAK TARTARE FLANKED WITH SLENDER BARS OF GOLDEN FRIED POTATOES, CURRY-LACED SQUASH SOUP FANCIED UP WITH COCONUT MILK PANNA COTTA AND HALIBUT DECKED OUT WITH A LIGHT-AS-AIR LID OF TOASTED Brioche — DISHES YOU ARE APT TO RECOGNIZE BUT

PEHANT BALLOTINE — GROUND PHEASANT AND DUCK LIVER FOIE GRAS IN A BAND OF PUFF PASTRY — SERVED WITH SALAD AND PICKLED VEGETABLES AT 1789 IN GEORGETOWN.
whose clever touches make them seem fresh, and easy as Dolly Parton to like.

My last review was three years ago, when I encountered a slight disconnect between the restaurant’s mission statement and what appeared on the plate, and even a physical addition, in the form of a bar and club room, that seemed forced on the brand.

The arrival of Eom, preceded by the hiring of Brian Zipin as general manager the year before, prompts a fresh look. Both men bring serious credentials to the table. Eom has worked for the esteemed Daniel Boulud in New York, where he met Bertrand Chemel, now the executive chef at 2941 in Falls Church, another stop on Eom’s journey to 1789. Zipin most recently oversaw the front of the house at the very good Central Michel Richard downtown. The two men head up a team of people who seem dedicated to elevating the reputation of 1789, whose Federal-style facade gives way to several well-aged rooms, each with its own charms. A hearth and floral displays grace the main dining room; the handsome pub is lit with an old gas chandelier.

Fine points are in abundance. The restaurant shaves a few dollars off takeout prices. “You’re not getting the fireplace, you’re not getting the service,” says Zipin. True, but the kitchen arranges its food to go as if it’s headed under Anton Ego’s microscope.

Just look at the pheasant ballotine, ground pheasant and duck liver foie gras in a band of puff pastry, served as thin slices alongside a pinch of salad and spark plugs including pickled Swiss chard stems. At home, the only thing the appetizer seems to be missing is a landing spot of cream-colored linen.

When I lift the lid on a carton of beef tartare, an oval of chopped American wagyu, zesty with mustard and lemon juice, I see the same precise dots of black garlic aioli alongside it that customers get in the dining room.

Meals come with a gratis box of pillowy, house-baked rolls and — another plus — room-temperature butter.

The 1789 team doesn’t make takeout recipients guess what they’re about to eat. Labels tell you what you need to know about the contents of the substantial containers, which neatly separate garnishes and sides from featured attractions (and cost the restaurant $1.25 each).
Should you have any questions once you’re home, a note inside the bag, printed on the kind of rich stock associated with wedding invitations, lists a number to call. I didn’t use the line as an anonymous takeout customer, but as a critic fact-checking his copy. The reason for the pine nut puree in an order of black truffle risotto was so Eom can avoid using cheese or cream and offer something for vegans. A plastic cup of smoked sea salt lets recipients season the aged acquerello rice to their taste. The flakes also impart light crunch to the entree.

No two entrees are dressed the same. Halibut is elevated by roasted fingerling potatoes, bright carrots, grill-softened leeks and fennel, plus a saffron-mussel broth. Tourneados Rossini — blushing beef tenderloin paired with foie gras — rests on sauteed spinach alongside buttery potato puree. Monkfish is as pleasing for its creamy tarbais beans, crisp lardons and silken red peppers as for the thick roasted centerpiece. The spark in the veal tagliatelle, enough for dinner for two? Orange zest brightens the braised cubed meat and ribbons of handmade pasta, rich with a reduction made from the braising liquid of the veal, orange juice and butter, which explains the gloss.

Here and there, the food speaks to the chef’s heritage. Note his use of black garlic, and the Korean-pickled turnips and radishes with the Black Forest cake combining flourless chocolate cake, chocolate mousse and cherries spiked with brandy. Five years in the pastry department at the Inn at Little Washington have clearly influenced her fine work here.

The hands behind the wonderful rolls belong to pastry chef Shari Maciejewski, 28, who kept busy when the dining rooms were closed by selling brunch boxes and seasonal pastries on Saturdays. 1789’s sole takeaway dessert option is apple Paris-Brest, a glorious round of pastry shaped as an apple stuffed with a creamy, maple-flavored filling and apple compote, a confection I never tired of eating. I had a chance to taste more of Maciejewski’s range with a Valentine’s Day special, an elegant spin on the classic mousse and cherries spiked with brandy. Five years in the pastry department at Little Washington have clearly influenced her fine work here.

Was I tempted to book a table and eat off 1789’s china? Only for a nanosecond. Handsome as the trio of dining spaces are, I can’t in good conscience recommend dining indoors right now. The closest I got was inside the foyer, where I went to collect one of three recent takeout orders and my temperature was taken near the host stand. In my few minutes inside, I glimpsed the tony pub and learned about 1789’s safety protocols, including a new hospital-grade air filtration system. (The Tombs, dependent on college students, remains closed for the near future.)

“What can we help you with your bags?” Zipin himself asked a masked, capped — hidden — me when I showed up for carryout. I declined the assistance, but appreciated his suggestion to switch my takeout cocktail selection from one made with sparkling wine that would have flattened on the journey home to the more stable, gin-based Road to Provence sweetened with herbes de Provence syrup and lightened with cucumber water. (FYI: Zipin is happy to consult over the phone on wines to go, plucked from a cellar of about 250 different bottles, with a focus on major U.S. wine-growing regions, as well as France.)

Before the pandemic, 1789 was once the rare restaurant with a dress code. Now, jackets for men are “not required, but suggested,” says the general manager. He knows some people pay a lot for designer jeans and shirts. “We’ve tried to meet the times.” Besides, he wants the place to be considered for other than special occasions.

1789 is an old restaurant with a new way of looking at things. It’s also a wonderful illustration of aging with relevance.

**SOLUTION TO PUZZLE “SUBTEXT,” FEB. 28**

Five theme answers contain the name of a novel, indicated in the clue by the author’s name. The letters directly underneath those novels spell THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER.

**KEY TO THE PREVIOUS SECOND GLANCE FEB. 28**

1. No roofing
2. Unbroken
3. Solid pane
4. Bigger shingles
5. Larger arm
6. New interstate
7. Fewer teeth
8. No sign
9. Moved over
10. Flew in
11. Missing trim
12. More mulch
Eclectic collection

BY RANDY MAYS

Find the 12 differences in the photo of a kitchen shelf at a residence in Upper Marlboro, Md., in November.

PUZZLE ANSWERS
See them online now at washingtonpost.com/secondglance or in next week’s issue of the magazine.

SEE YOUR PHOTO
To submit a photo of the Washington area for use in Second Glance, email a high-resolution jpeg attachment of 8 megapixels or larger to secondglance@washpost.com. For information about our guidelines for user content, see washingtonpost.com/secondglance.
“Film starring Richard Gere” is the clue for a movie that has the same pattern as the starred answers. Which film is it?

ACROSS
1 Smith’s workshop
6 Leaves home, in a way?
11 Rising and falling, as waves
16 Item swapped in the game “Bejeweled”
19 What Hillary used to climb to the top
20 French equivalent of 106 Across
21 Pointless
22 Special day predecessor
23 “Band with the album “If You’re Feeling Sinister”
26 Very small
27 “Balls” actor Gere
28 Religious infractions
29 Indigenous group profiled in Eve Ball’s book “In the Days of Victoria”
30 Driver’s suitcase spot
32 Flagmaker Betsy
34 Deface
36 Like a clamorous crowd
37 Crass sort
38 Nonbinary pronoun
40 Neck ___ (alternative to a face mask)
42 Score without a goal
44 Drug control VIP, or a former Russian ruler
47 *Coin depicting Simón Bolívar
50 “___ boy!” (‘Well don’t!”)
51 Poker in a western?
54 Sunken place
55 After at submission
56 Coldblooded creature
57 Vehicle in the game “XCOM: Enemy Unknown”
58 “For goodness ___!”
60 Vehicle with a fuselage
62 Signs of stage fright?
64 Identified, as goals
66 Slice off
68 Steering wheel’s place
69 Source of snickers on “Sesame Street”

DOWN
1 Digestive health aid
2 Rainforest plant
3 Green condiment, often
4 ___ pals (bachelorette party attendees, often)
5 Duo whose members went solo?
6 “You comin’?”
7 Put 2 and 2 together
8 “Mona ___ Overdrive” (William Gibson novel)
9 Hang in there
10 Locale within a locale
11 “Dr. Ken” actress
12 Designed “Grammar for Beautiful” Bassist Brooks
13 Impess big-time
14 Extraordinary exploits
15 Time line?
16 Like flights with a layover
17 Like fluffy bunnies
18 Lambo’s parent
19 Talia Shire, ___ Coppola
20 Whole number?
21 “Singer who won a Grammy for Beautiful”
22 Metaphorically faster
23 Impressed with a spiffy new coat
24 Cambell-Martin
25 Worked at a summer job, in a way
26 Raised platform
27 “Dynasty” actress
28 “___ expect it ...”
29 Slowly, in a sonata
30 Wine made from one of the four “noble” grapes in Alsace’s grand cru vineyards
31 Former hip-hop record company co-founded by Jay-Z
32 Schismatic group
33 Intensified
34 Irregular mark
35 Half of a Disney symbol
36 Avian symbol of the Harvard Lampoon
37 Goddess of the Egyptian goddess Nephthys
38 Colliding component of nuclear fusion
39 Counter cleaners
40 Exam that univ. seniors may take for, aptly
41 “___ Dragon” (1977 film made in 2016)
42 Like swiftly
43 Like athletes at the Olympics come from
44 Color that Johannes Vermeer frequently used in his paintings
45 Life is Beautiful” musician ___ Mo’
46 “Demonstrates derision
47 “Good for nothing”
48 Affix anew
49 Dizzy on spinning records
50 Epithelial cell collector
51 Whisky blend with “vibrant flavors that add a fiery kick to any mix,” per Johnnie Walker’s website
52 Home of the newspaper Jornal do Brasil
53 Where do you get off?
54 Between two points
55 Spay or neuter
56 Rat row consonant
57 “And then, when you ___ expect it ...”
58 Deliver a big hit
59 Choral ensemble part
60 Taken by swallowing
61 Trim (down)
62 Deliver a big hit
63 Polynesian ring
64 Polynesian ring

For the solution to last week’s puzzle, see page 33. Online: Classic Merl Reagle Puzzles at WaPo.St/classic-merl.
Almost as soon as the Internet began yakking about “Karens” — entitled middle-aged women who display a septic amount of white privilege — an informal competition arose to come up with a name for the male equivalent. For unfathomable reasons, the most popular nominees were Greg, Terry and Ken.

This debate was inane. For one thing, the male Karen is obviously “Darren.” I so declare it, and, inasmuch as I exclusively speak for smartass America, that’s that. It is Done. But the entire debate has been moot and misdirected: Who cares what Darren’s name is? What matters is who Darren is.

Karen’s official acknowledged personal profile is one item long: She demands to speak to the manager. But that’s just shorthand. People are entitled to make certain additional assumptions about her and her type. For instance: She orders dressing on the side but when the salad arrives, she says she can still taste dressing in it and sends it back. Her children’s names celebrate her artistic creativity: Elyzzabeth, Viktoriah, Xzavier. Her hairstyle is modern: short but not easy, and must be professionally maintained. There are highlights, lowlights, layers and colors, and, most important, the whole thing doesn’t move. Karen keeps asking people to define white privilege but has not liked an answer yet. All of her minority friends are people she can fire, but she wouldn’t, because she loves them all dearly. Every single college-bribing mom was a Karen.

The big misunderstanding is that Darren is not exactly the same. Darren is a man and Karen is a woman, and the genders approach life differently. No man — no matter how Darrenish he might be — “demands to see the manager,” because that implicitly acknowledges the authority of another. Men earn their Darrenhood differently. Darren wants to be thought of as a sophisticated man of the world. Darren feels he is inclusive, considerate, gentlemanly. Only when you poke him a little ...

Darren drives a car with a wheelbase so wide that the guy coming toward him has to squeeze past or back up on a narrow street.

Darren knows that women deserve respect, and he knows that because he has a wife and two daughters. Darren’s wife rules the roost, and she runs a very tight ship, ha-ha, and Darren doesn’t know how she gets it all done, God bless her.

Darren has been told what mansplaining is, and he doesn’t do it. He just has thoughts on the subject.

Darren is totally color blind. He doesn’t care if you are White, Black, red, blue, orange or purple!

Darren is gravely concerned about property values, which is the only reason he likes his neighborhood exactly the way it is.

Darren wears a gleaming metal watch with a gleaming metal band. The watch is too large for his wrist. It is a well known brand popular with politicians and Mafiosi, costs thousands of dollars and is hideously, pugnaciously ugly.

Darren does not like being served fish with the head on; he’d rather not think about that. His canned soups of preference are trying very hard to sound manly, like “Chunks ‘n’ Chonks.”

He doesn’t like antique furniture because people he doesn’t know sat on them first.

Darren doesn’t mind trans kids as long as they go home to pee. For emergencies, there should be a bathroom in every school labeled “other.”

Darren feels he could probably beat most female professional athletes at their sport. Not Serena Williams, but the rest.

Darren does not manspread. He just has a sensitive scrotum.

Darren knows this column is about someone else.

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