Masculinity, spirituality and the strange convergence of counterculture and hate

BY MARISA MELTZER
Finally... A scooter that loads itself in and out of your car.

Introducing Quingo® – the powerful, take-anywhere and go-anywhere mobility scooter that you never have to lift.

It’s a sad fact. Many people who have mobility issues and could benefit from a scooter aren’t able to use them away from home. Struggling to get it into a car or loading it onto a bumper-mounted lift just isn’t worth the effort. Even travel scooters can be hard to pick up and load into a car... and many are prone to tipping over. Now, there’s a better scooter, Quingo. It’s easy to use, even for one person, and requires no more effort than opening a car’s tailgate and pressing a remote. Now anyone with a SUV, cross-over or mini van can go anywhere they want any time they want.

Quingo can load and unload itself in less than 60 seconds using the simple remote. The innovative “easy-in-and-out” ramping system can be installed in minutes, and then either remain in your car or be easily uninstalled when more room is needed.

“For the first time in years I’ve been able to go with my granddaughters to the mall. A crowd gathers every time I unload my scooter from my car!”

– Judi K, Exeter, CA

This scooter provides 5-Wheel Anti-Tip Technology for stability, agility and comfort with its unique wheel configuration. The patented 5-wheel design by Quingo enables it to ride safely over a wide variety of surfaces. It uses 4 ultra slim powerful batteries providing a range of up to 23 miles on a single charge.

The best selling auto-loading scooter in Europe is now available in the US! Don’t wait to take advantage of this exciting new technology, call today to regain your independence.
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A Mental Facility Faces Its History

Buried in storage rooms are the stories of Black patients who were sent there

BY BRITT PETERSON

The very first entry in the yellowing, fragile committal records of the Central Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane describes the final years of a man named Benjamin Stewart. Stewart was committed on Oct. 16, 1868, just before the former military hospital in Richmond was officially designated as the nation’s first mental institution built solely for African American patients. He was 35 years old at the time, an unmarried laborer who suffered from epilepsy. Stewart was never discharged from the Central Lunatic Asylum. Less than two years later, on May 10, 1870, he died of “phtisis,” a contemporary term for tuberculosis.

Little else is known about Stewart; the “remarks” section for his entry is blank. Nor do we know much about any of the tens of thousands of other Black patients who spent time at the hospital from its post-Civil War beginnings to the 1960s, when civil rights legislation forced state mental institutions to integrate. But researchers are beginning to uncover records like Stewart’s, long buried in the hospital’s storage rooms. Over the past decade, there has been an extraordinary effort to preserve and digitize these documents. While the records have thus far revealed little about individual patients, they have, in the aggregate, painted a disturbing picture of the facility’s past. And they say much about the history and oppression of institutionalized Black lives.

When the Civil War ended, Southern White health professionals believed they were facing a potential wave of Black patients. The contemporary racist thinking held that, without slavery, Black people would fall into illness and insanity. “Under the compulsive power of the white man,” influential physician Samuel A. Cartwright wrote in a 1851 article, “Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” “they are made to labor or exercise, which makes the lungs perform the duty of vitalizing the blood more perfectly than is done when they are left free to indulge in idleness.”

Virginia’s push to create an all-Black state asylum came out of this fear of Black madness, as well as the segregationist desire to house Black patients separately from White ones. Officially founded in 1869, the asylum at its inception committed 123 supposedly mentally ill patients and 100 who were
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become a more than decade-long project to preserve Central’s funding from the university and the National Association of Austin, with a plea to protect the archives. Davis quickly secured a former mental health commissioner for Virginia and a papers in a cleanup effort.

watching in horror as a staff worker nearly tossed out a sheaf of deterioration. One historian who visited in 2003 describes name Central State Hospital, in the town of Petersburg, about researchers at all. The hospital — which exists today under the name Central State Hospital, in the town of Petersburg, about 25 miles south of Richmond — has been chronically underfunded and unable to protect its century-old files from deterioration. One historian who visited in 2003 describes watching in horror as a staff worker nearly tossed out a sheaf of papers in a cleanup effort.

In 2007, hospital administrators reached out to King Davis, a former mental health commissioner for Virginia and a professor of mental health policy at the University of Texas at Austin, with a plea to protect the archives. Davis quickly secured funding from the university and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors to begin what has become a more than decade-long project to preserve Central’s files. Since then, his team has digitized approximately 800,000 pages of documents, 10,000 photographs and hundreds of pages of negatives and slides about the hospital, among other records.

The documents and photos shed light on a painful history. Patients at Central in its first few decades lived in crowded and unsanitary conditions, subject to treatments that were anything but therapeutic, including experimental surgeries and forced sterilization. Because doctors believed that Black sanity depended on hard labor — and because that labor was free — patients were required to work at the hospital, tending its large farm or doing domestic chores such as laundry and cleaning. “Central really worked just to re-enslave the people who were there,” says Kirby Randolph, a professor of history and bioethics at the University of Kansas medical school who has studied the hospital’s early years.

Patients could be hospitalized for manias supposedly brought on by “religious excitement” or “freedom.” Women were committed because they were upset about their husband’s desertion, or because they had intense menstrual pain. People could be committed by a White employer or by others in the
community, essentially on hearsay, with little chance to defend their sanity in court. Shelby Pumphrey, a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in African American history at Vassar College who has studied Central’s turn-of-the-century records closely, found only one reported instance of someone who avoided being committed once a process was initiated — and no one who committed themselves. Many patients attempted to escape, and many others, like Stewart, died of unrelated illnesses contracted in the hospital. Those who died were buried in unmarked graves, some of which may have been disturbed by grave robbers hunting for cadavers to be used at local medical colleges.

Some of these traumas were common among all patients in 19th-century mental institutions. But Davis has found that more Black patients than White ones were diagnosed at the time with some form of mania. “One of the reasons we got all these unusual diagnoses, particularly mania, had to do with perceptions of Black people, Black men, as being on the cusp always of violence and danger,” Davis told me. These misperceptions persist today. According to psychologist Arthur Whaley, who has studied race-based mental health inequities, Black people are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia, to be hospitalized and to stay longer in hospitals than White people; once hospitalized, they’re more likely to be physically or chemically restrained. And when Black people resist arrest or hospitalization, their fear can be perceived as aggression, with sometimes devastating results.

“When African Americans respond or react to oppression, in an appropriate way, because those experiences are not shared by the mainstream, they’re seen as paranoid, and they’re misdiagnosed,” says Whaley, who does clinical work in Houston. The 19th century’s racist ideas around Black mental health — the notion that Black men are “on the cusp always of violence” — are still carried by some today, as evidenced by the disproportionate killings of Black men by law enforcement.

The papers at Central aren’t important just because of their relevance for today, of course — but that relevance certainly makes an urgent case for their preservation. “I don’t think we can fully appreciate where we are without understanding that past,” says Brandi Justice, Central’s acting director, who says she feels a strong responsibility toward the hospital’s former patients as well as its current ones.

And yet millions of pages, including treatment records that could offer vivid clarity on how patients were viewed and diagnosed, have yet to be digitized or preserved because of a lack of funding. In addition, the Library of Virginia has made a controversial decision to cut off researcher access to all state mental health records 125 years old or younger (previously, the number was 75), stymying crucial studies of Central’s history. In hopes of moving the project forward nonetheless, Davis is cheering on a bill recently introduced in the Virginia State Senate to allocate $150,000 to preservation efforts at Central. “You bring light to the system, to expose both its strengths as well as its weaknesses,” Davis says. “I think that’s how change starts to occur.”

Britt Peterson is a writer in Washington.
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Pete Buttigieg

INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPH BY KK OTTESEN

Pete Buttigieg, 39, is the secretary of transportation and the first openly gay person confirmed to the Cabinet. He served two terms as mayor of South Bend, Ind., and ran for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. He is the author of “Shortest Way Home” and “Trust.”

At perhaps all stages of your journey, people worried about your relative inexperience. South Bend is a small city with something like an 18-route bus network and an Amtrak stop. In taking on this massive [transportation] system, what experience translates, and what do you need to figure out?

So the truth is, it’s rare for a Cabinet secretary to have managed an organization as large as a federal agency in the past. And in that sense, I’m not different. And that’s where the phenomenal career staff here at the agency as well as a set of presidential appointees that support me are so important. But I would say that my experience has, I think, prepared me for this, precisely because it gives me the prism of dealing with this department from the perspective of a community that really needs that support.

It’s one thing if you’re a city that has multiple full-time federal-relations employees. And some do. We sure didn’t. [Laughs.] And so I had that experience of trying to get your calls returned in Washington — and it’s part of what motivates me to make sure that we’re serving every kind of community. And while it’s certainly a different scale — I’m used to a budget in the hundreds of millions, and now I have one in the tens of billions — there is also something [similar] about taking the leadership of an agency with a lot of complex and diverse functions and very different kinds of people working within it and bringing a common culture and vision to that entity.

You seem to love new tech, innovation, like the smart sewers you implemented in South Bend. What is the coolest stuff that could be game-changing for transportation?

When it comes to driving, it’s AVs or EVs, automated vehicles and electric vehicles. But some of the most interesting things happening are around what’s called micromobility. Scooters — all of that. Then you look at trains, right? We might be poised for the second great railroad revolution in this country. Then you got the aviation side, right? Jet planes, drones and commercial space travel. There’s no shortage of fascinating things.

Just after leaving Afghanistan, where you served as a Naval Reserve officer, a fellow serviceman was killed by a roadside bomb along a route you might have been on yourself. How did that experience shape your outlook and trajectory?

It gives me an appreciation for the unjustifiable luck that explains why it was somebody else and not me. Why I came home and other people didn’t.

Some people think things happen for a reason. You would not agree?

No. How can I say that there was any better reason why a father didn’t make it home and a guy like me did? The only reasons are the ones we create after the fact. And that’s why I feel it as kind of a propulsion more than anything. The only way I figured out how to make good on that fortune is to do everything I can with my time above the ground to make sure that my life, but also my country’s life, is worthy of the cost of securing it.

I think a lot about the difference between workhorses and show horses and how to make sure, arriving in Washington, that I make it clear that I’m here to work and get results and be part of the team. Especially in a very functional role like delivering on American transportation after being in a campaign environment, where it’s inevitably a bit more about the show. This is the doing of all things that people talk about on the campaign trail. And so I’m very mindful of the need to just put my head down and deliver.

KK Ottesen is a regular contributor to the magazine. This interview has been edited and condensed. For a longer version, visit wapo.st/magazine.
APRIL 4, 2021

Just Asking

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INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPH BY KK OTTESEN

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For Anney Bolgiano, 29, being selected for Date Lab was “surreal.” The Maryland native said she’s been “religiously” reading the column for a long time, and over the years it has been a topic of conversation among family, friends and roommates. However, she didn’t consult any of them when the impulse to apply came over her this past winter break.

As the 5 p.m. Zoom date approached, Anney confessed that she was all nerves. “What if something terrible happens and it goes viral? It’s giving up control,” she said. Anney, a writer and an English professor, has dated men and women in the past. She is drawn to people who are “close to their family, artistic and passionate about something.”

We set her up with a fella who is definitely passionate — about statistics. Keith Zirkle, 29, who works as a statistician, was relaxed about meeting Anney, but his mind was occupied elsewhere. “I’m very focused on the compounding variables,” he told me. “The date can’t end too early or everyone will know it went bad.”

The Virginia native is also open to dating men and women. “I started dating men about a year and a half ago. It didn’t feel drastically different. But I have not successfully dated a man either, so it really hasn’t impacted success,” he said with a laugh.

He was excited about this opportunity because he feels “desensitized” by dating apps. He’s seeking someone who is “adventurous, ambitious and has intellectual curiosity.”

In preparation for the date, Anney made sure to have “the varsity team” of her 50 plants on display, and Keith noticed her efforts. “She had a bunch of big plants behind her and they were live plants, not fake,” he said. “She was fake insulted when I asked her if they were real.” Keith revealed that he had faux plants, and Anney told me, “At first I was like, ‘Oh. He’s a fake.’ But then he said he saved them from the dumpster and I thought, ‘Aww. He recycles!’ ”

As far as first impressions go, they seemed to be on the same page. Keith said she was “really cute” and looked “bookish” in her glasses. Anney’s reaction: “He’s a cute guy on a screen.”

While chatting over dinner, Keith discovered that Anney had a desire to support a local restaurant when she ordered food. He felt that move showed that she is kind, which is something he values in people. Anney felt similarly when Keith told her that he is more afraid of giving someone covid than getting it. “It’s important to me to be with someone who thinks and cares about other people,” she said.

As the evening went on, the conversation took a slightly dark turn. “He asked, ‘If you could know when you are going to die, would you want to know?’ I said no and he said yes, so he could plan,” Anney told me. “He’s very pragmatic.”
“If I only have a handful of days left to live, I would do more and see more, but if I have 60 more years, I have time to pace things,” said Keith. “In general, I think we should all live like you were dying,” to quote Tim McGraw.

Anney wasn’t taken aback by the morbid conversation. “I appreciate it more than talking about what TV shows we like. Let’s be real with each other. Let’s challenge each other,” she said.

Keith felt they were kindred spirits when it came to talking about their academic pursuits. “Most people glaze over, but we were more seriously interested in what the other person studied and learned,” he said. “I was interested in her writing. She has a lot of intellectual curiosity.”

At 7:30, they wrapped up the date, and Keith asked for her number and suggested going on a hike in a few weeks. While Anney was happy to exchange cell numbers, there was another number that intrigued her more. “The most interesting part of the date was when we talked about rating it,” she said. “He is a statistician, so he used a phrase like ‘confidence interval,’ and I am a professor and I believe in labor-based grading.” According to Anney, they agreed to give each other the same rating. “So if he doesn’t, then he is misrepresenting,” she said with a chuckle.

RATE THE DATE
Anney: 4.55 [out of 5]. “The conversation was good enough that I’m willing to see if we both have chemistry.”

Keith: 4.12. He had decided his rating before their discussion about an agreed upon number. “It was a good date, we got along, and a 3, while being a true average, would seem like a ding. But it didn’t reach the 4.5 wow factor.”

UPDATE
After thinking about it for a few days, Anney texted Keith that she wasn’t feeling a romantic connection but was still interested in keeping in touch if he was. Keith agreed that he too didn’t feel any chemistry. “All in all, Anney seems like a great person, but a pandemic is not always ideal for sustaining new friendships, so we shall see,” Keith said.

Vijai Nathan is a writer and comedian in Washington.
**Dataw Island**

When you cross the causeway to Dataw Island, relaxation sets in and life flows as naturally as the tide. Hailing primarily from the Northeast U.S., as well as the Midwest and California, members of this gated, South Carolina island community have some things in common—their love of the Lowcountry and their love of life.

Nestled centrally between Hilton Head and Charleston, Dataw Island is just six miles from the quaint city of Beaufort, with its historic mansions, independent shops and restaurants. The island’s 900 homes—some with private docks—are situated on 870 acres, and the community has the capacity to expand to 1,050 homes. Membership plans are flexible, with homes ranging in price from $200,000 to over a million.

Residents here enjoy two designer golf courses—“Cotton Dike” by Tom Fazio, and “Morgan River” by Arthur Hills. There are eight Har-Tru tennis courts, world-class croquet lawns, kayaking, bocce, pickleball and social clubs too numerous to mention, as well as a 33-acre maritime nature preserve and dog park.

Dataw Island’s private marina offers a full-service boatyard with dry stack and wet slip options. Just a few miles from the intracoastal, residents can enjoy deep sea fishing in minutes, as well as trips into Beaufort and nearby Edisto and Hilton Head Islands.

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**During the height of the pandemic, retirees opted ever more frequently to age in place at home.**

Anyone watching the news could see that the idea of moving to a retirement community was not only frightening, but unwise. So, retirees traded the prospect of culturally vibrant and socially stimulating later years in communities throughout the U.S. for the safety of social distancing in familiar surroundings.

Now, as more and more doses of the vaccine are administered, retirees are returning to their searches for later lives of continued learning, fun with friends, and comfortable living. They’re choosing homes that require little upkeep or are fully serviced, and offer a broad variety of amenities in communities that are close to healthcare hubs and universities. And now, even as the pandemic wanes, there is more of an emphasis on cleanliness and safety in retirement communities than ever before.

The choices are nearly limitless. Whether you want to look out over the Chesapeake Bay from your boat in Annapolis, play golf on Cape Fear, live a life of southern charm outside Charleston, or enjoy the cultural, intellectual and medical magic of North Carolina’s Research Triangle, one of the options below is likely to suit!
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Living along the scenic river and visiting the private beach club on Oak Island is a delight year-round, along with walking and biking trails, tennis and pickleball, fishing, kayaking, a lakefront resort-style pool and a future state-of-the-art fitness center and clubhouse. Casual, southern elegance blends with first-class amenities that make every day at The Bluffs a pleasure!

**BayWoods of Annapolis**

Located on the Chesapeake Bay, just minutes from Maryland’s capital, BayWoods of Annapolis is Maryland’s premiere waterfront Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC). Since 2003, they have offered gracious retirement living for the discriminating senior, and a variety of amenities and activities, directly overlooking the Chesapeake Bay.

At BayWoods, you’ll find the largest retirement apartments in the area, ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 sq. ft., all set on 14 acres of beautifully landscaped grounds. BayWoods is a co-op CCRC, owned and run collectively by the residents.

At BayWoods, residents are vibrant and active. Stroll the boardwalk and pier, or swim in the Bay from the dock. Attend lectures by visiting scholars from neighboring St. John’s College or take in a Dartmouth Series lecture. You will enjoy fine cuisine in our restaurants, or simply relax on your balcony and watch the sailboats glide by.

BayWoods is proud to provide its residents with unsurpassed service and hospitality. They are well known for their amazing short-term rehab
program and wellness services throughout the community. Residents are able to enjoy the many fitness opportunities and healthcare services offered on a daily basis.

Come discover the BayWoods lifestyle today!

**Forest at Duke**

So, what does Sharron Parker love most about living at Forest at Duke? "It’s the people,” she says. “They’re super friendly and interested in lots of intellectual activities.”

Sharron, 73, an artist, and her husband Ken, 80, a computer scientist, moved to the Durham, North Carolina retirement community from Raleigh seven months ago. They researched retirement-living options for 12 years before choosing their two-bedroom cottage at the Forest at Duke.

“We don’t have any kids, and that’s one reason we thought we should make plans for our old age, because no one else would be looking out for us,” Sharron says. “These days the Parkers look out for themselves. Ken works out at the Forest at Duke’s gym and rides his bike on local trails. He hones his mental focus by taking classes at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), Duke University’s learning-in-retirement program. Right now, he’s studying mathematics, geology and the periodic table of the elements. “The days are more active. There’s more going on, and I’m busier than I was, I think,” Ken says of his new life at the Forest at Duke. “We’ve gotten to know a number of people, and we’ve kept a lot of friends in Wake Forest and Raleigh, who come over for lunch or dinner.”

Sharron spends her days making art in her studio, entering competitions and having shows. She knows she has lots to choose from whenever she wants a change of pace. “We really appreciate all the possibilities here—classes, trips, movies, parties,” she says, “just so many fun things to do.”

**Destination: BayWoods of Annapolis**

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- Secondly, Size of the community. Choose a setting that serves your needs without over population. You need to access all of the services easily. Enjoy a neighborhood feeling from the residents and staff as well as a lovely campus.

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7101 Bay Front Drive, Annapolis, MD 21403
OF QANON
Masculinity, spirituality and the strange convergence of counterculture and hate

BY MARISA MELTZER

THE NEW AGE ROOTS
OF QANON

Masculinity, spirituality and the strange convergence of counterculture and hate
I didn’t choose New Age culture. But I grew up in a college town in Northern California in the 1980s, where the ubiquitous Grateful Dead stickers, crystal shops and tarot card readers suggested that the 1960s ethos of self-discovery never ended. Psychedelic accoutrements and people who self-identified as seekers were normal to me — and so I craved mainstream American culture. I rebelled — mildly — by eating Domino’s pizza at sleepovers and idolizing the nihilism of 1970s punk.

It turns out that I didn’t entirely resist it. In the past decade or so, my fluency in the world of New Age culture, wellness, woo-woo (whatever you might call it) became a professional boon as a journalist. These ideas were taking off once again, especially among women who are White and middle-class, which I also am. I understood that world and had a lot to say about it. While on assignment I’ve gone to menstrual huts and tea ceremonies; I’ve gotten massaged by boa constrictors and I’ve meditated at sound baths. I’ve greeted this all with professional curiosity, something between an open mind and a world-weary arched eyebrow.

On Jan. 6, along with the rest of the country, I followed the news of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and the prominence of Confederate flags, nooses and other symbols of the far right. Like many others, I took note of the so-called QAnon Shaman: 33-year-old Jake Angeli, born Jacob Anthony Chansley, of Arizona. He was bare-chested and covered in Nordic tattoos, at least one of which, the Valknot, is a Norse symbol sometimes associated with white supremacy. But he was also, infamously, wearing a headaddress fashioned from buffalo horns and coyote skin — elements associated with the American West that seemed to telegraph a pagan spirituality. I’ve been around a lot of White people who have adopted a mishmash of pagan and Indigenous signifiers as a New Age aesthetic. It’s a cringeworthy and offensive display of appropriation that I don’t endorse, but it’s common in that world.

After the attack on the Capitol, news reports unearthed that Chansley was a founder of something called the Star Seed Academy (in a certain New Age vernacular, a star seed is a higher being). The Facebook page for the venture, before it was taken down, read: “Star Seed Academy creates leaders of the highest order! We help people to awaken, evolve and ascend! Are you ready to be a leader? Are you ready to ascend?” Recently, Chansley’s lawyer, Albert Watkins, told me in a statement that his client “is deeply spiritual. His spirituality is serving him well as he traverses the pending federal charges.” He added that Chansley has “a personal commitment to Ahimsa,” the principle (found in Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism) of doing no harm.

As a devotee of QAnon — the sprawling set of false claims that have coalesced into an extremist ideology deemed a domestic terrorist threat by the FBI — and a freedom fighter for Donald Trump, Chansley was my ideological opposite; yet there was also a lot about him that was familiar. It felt shocking and suggested serious flaws in a culture I thought I understood: a fine line between the kind of zeitgeist-y, sensitive New Age-guy version of masculinity, and something more nefarious. The idea of spiritual lineage is too generous to bestow on Chansley, but he represents a growing pipeline between New Age male spirituality, new masculinity movements and QAnon. This pipeline is one of unlikely connections and strange bedfellows, of mixed martial arts fighters and poets, evangelical Christians and yoga teachers.

In 2009, Charlotte Ward, an independent researcher on alternative spirituality — religious beliefs outside of conventional groups — began to notice a hybrid of conspiracy theory beliefs and New Age culture cropping up online. Two years later, she co-wrote a paper titled “The Emergence of Conspirituality” in the Journal of Contemporary Religion. She and co-writer David Voas, a quantitative social scientist at University College London, noted an emphasis on patterns and connections in both conspiracy culture and alternative spiritual beliefs. Nothing is as it seems, and nothing is an accident. “These worldviews make public and personal life respectively seem less subject to random forces and therein lies part of their appeal,” they wrote.

Ward and Voas defined “conspirituality” as a “politicospiritual philosophy based on two core convictions” — one core to conspiracy theories and the other rooted in New Age belief systems: “1) a secret group covertly controls, or is trying to control,
the political and social order, and 2) humanity is undergoing a ‘paradigm shift’ in consciousness. Proponents believe that the best strategy for dealing with the threat of a totalitarian ‘new world order’ is to act in accordance with an awakened ‘new paradigm’ worldview.”

In our cultural moment, when baseless claims about both a rigged election and the dangers of vaccines hit Americans almost simultaneously, there has been renewed interest in Ward and Voas’s decade-old paper and, specifically, the idea of conspirituality. (During the week I interviewed Voas, he had three other similar interviews lined up.) With the image of Chansley in animal horns and fur leading an attack on the Capitol, conspirituality was more than an idea in an academic paper or on the Internet. It had become our shared reality.

When I was about 10 years old, my mother became interested in the idea of the divine feminine, specifically centering spirituality on women rather than the patriarchal notion of a male god. She had never shown interest in spirituality before but dived in with, well, a religious fervor. She took me to a screening of the 1989 Canadian documentary “Goddess Remembered,” about goddess worship in ancient European culture and its potential as a renewed spiritual movement. Judging from the attendees of the goddess fairs in hotel ballrooms I was also taken to, this was a fairly White, progressive and privileged group of women. It served as a kind of spiritual extension of the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s, parallel to feminism.

Men soon started to realize that they, too, had a gender to consider, and the men’s movement took off in the ’70s and ’80s. It
manifested in three expressions, says Cliff Leek, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Northern Colorado and vice president of the American Men’s Studies Association: “You get pro-feminist [men’s] groups that do work around reproductive health and sexual violence; and, on the other end of the spectrum, men’s rights groups that say, ‘We are gendered and the system is out to get us.’ The middle way is the mythopoetic: tying masculinity back to the sacred and mythological.”

The prevailing figure in the mythopoetic movement is the poet Robert Bly. In 1990, Bly, who was in his 60s (he’s now 94), published “Iron John: A Book About Men,” which includes lines like, “Where a man’s wound is, that is where his genius will be.” Bly’s idea, told through Jung-influenced archetypes and fairy tales, was that men had been robbed of true masculinity via emotionally withholding fathers who raised soft sons. With some reflection — and maybe some banging on drums with other dudes in the forest — they could reclaim their inner Zeuses and thrive.

The book was sometimes the butt of jokes, but spent over a year on the New York Times bestseller list. It was so popular and so part of the New Age canon that I bought a copy as a teenager. I thought it seemed a bit corny, like the kind of thing long-haired aging hippie dads of my friends might enjoy. But I read it because I knew it was an element of a cultural conversation that I wanted to be a part of.

The spirit of “Iron John” can still be found in mythopoetic men’s groups. Take, for example, Embodied Masculine, a men’s community that offers retreats and coaching. (A representative of the company declined to comment for this article.) The retreats promise a lot. “In this meticulously held circle of men, you will be both met with compassion and called to deepen,” one description reads, accompanied by images of mostly White men patting each other on the shoulder or sitting atop rocks. “Your embodied presence will expand, your relationship to consciousness will deepen, and the sword of your integrity will sharpen. You will be challenged, nourished, and given the tools and brotherhood you wish you had found years ago.” Sounds enriching, but the wording around Embodied Masculine’s retreats for women has a distinctly anti-feminist flair: “Women, we’ve reached a point in history in which many of you are equalling and surpassing men in earning, personal growth and spiritual capacity. ... And yet, there is a longing deep in your heart for something more.”

“As soon as we tie masculinity to spirituality, we turn masculinity into something ‘sacred’ as well as distinct and exclusive of women,” says Leek. “I’m not entirely sure that is something that can be done in a way that doesn’t reinforce or naturalize inequalities.” These retreats seem to be encouraging strong behavior from a group — White, ruling-class men — who are already the most privileged in our society. But you also see this core message about strong men in socially conservative packaging. There’s a fear of women getting too powerful and a veneration of the housewife that, frankly, reminds me of the Proud Boys, the alt-right group with a history of violence that believes women are best left at home raising children.

“The wellness and spirituality world is very parallel to the evangelical Christian world, especially when it comes to the messaging around masculinity,” Leek explains. “The mythopoetic aspect of the men’s movement is very much rooted in patriarchal notions of chivalry and men as protectors and warriors. Evangelical masculinity is basically identical.” He wasn’t surprised to see the QAnon Shaman beside evangelical groups at the Capitol. QAnon, with its fixation on pedophilic conspiracies led by Hollywood and the liberal elite, can give a certain kind of man in search of purpose a way to feel like a literal protector.

Last year, Matthew Remski, a writer and co-host of the “Conspirituality” podcast, was reporting a story on QAnon for the Canadian magazine the Walrus, and he interviewed Lamont Daigle, founder of a Canadian QAnon spinoff group. During the
interview, Remski noted to Daigle that he talked about his political journey as if it were a spiritual journey. Daigle responded, Remski told me recently, that it all started with “Iron John.”

I emailed Daigle to ask how “Iron John” had influenced him. He wrote back praising the book’s view of pre-industrial history, including the tradition of fathers passing down a trade to their sons. “Apprenticeship” was lost and is/ was for bonding,” Daigle wrote. “As ‘Iron John’ was suggesting, the love unit most damaged by the industrial revolution has been the father-son bond.” His view of society today is much darker: “From what I’ve seen on the streets and stage of this New World Order agenda in the last year, fierce protective men have been noticeably absent, and the women are standing up stronger and more vocal.”

All of which fits with Remski’s analysis of this subculture. “There’s a kind of iconicographic romance between swole but New Agey male figures who are taking supplements and staying disciplined, and women who have deep connections to the divine,” he says. “There’s a righteous and holy and sacralized sexuality, an immunological radiance around the holy couple.” I know exactly the type of couples he’s talking about. I see them on Instagram espousing the know-your-strength relationship consciousness taught at the Embodied Masculine retreats, and in the vulnerable but divine masculinity of “Iron John.”

I think of the macho wellness dude as epitomized by the comedian-turned-podcaster Joe Rogan, who sells mugs and tube socks that read “conquer your inner b----” and Hindu-deity-inspired T-shirt designs. (I reached out to Rogan, but his representative did not respond.) Then there is the pandemic-era bro upgrade to the mythopoetic archetype — which is how you find MMA fighters like Tim Kennedy on the podcast of comedian JP Sears, with both men arguing that we’ve overreacted to covid.

A vast landscape of lost people — who need a belief system to guide their actions — constitutes promising terrain for someone seeking to attract believers, proteges or followers (online or otherwise). The central figures in this subculture “are guys who don’t know how to manage their charisma,” says Remski. “They are burdened with unwarranted confidence amplified and recycled by social media until it’s habitual but also viral.”

Jules Evans, an honorary research fellow at the Center for the History of Emotions at Queen Mary University of London, has investigated the history, philosophy and psychology of well-being. In an article for Medium called “Nazi Hippies: When the New Age and Far Right Overlap,” Evans wrote about how leading members of the Nazi party in the 1930s and ‘40s were followers of alternative spirituality and medicine. “There was an idea that western culture has lost its way and we need to return to traditional sources of wisdom, whether that be Hinduism or Sufism or traditional gender roles,” Evans told me. It’s a concept that’s popular today with the alt-right. “There is an overlap,” he says, “between New Age and far-right populism in traditionalist thinking, that the West has lost its way with feminism, multiculturalism, egalitarianism, and we need a return to order.”

In December, an NPR/Ipsos poll asked respondents whether they believe the myth behind QAnon: that “a group of Satan-worshipping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media.” Seventeen percent said it was true, and 37 percent said they didn’t know. It would be easy to write this off as simply a mass lack of critical-thinking ability — and that is certainly part of it — but when Jeffrey Epstein, whose friends were some of the most powerful people in the world, was charged with sex trafficking involving underage girls, it’s easy to see how someone might be tempted to blur the line between real-life corruption and conspiracy theories.

“Conspiracy theories are going to attach to how we already see the world,” says Joseph E. Uscinski, a professor of political science at the University of Miami who researches American conspiracy theories. They are representative of people’s concerns at the time: the Bavarian illuminati of the 18th century, the Freemasons in the 1930s, the JFK assassination in the 1960s.

I have a sense of how women in the wellness world can fall down these rabbit holes. Alternative spirituality “is related to issues that are thought to be of greater concern to women, such as self-care or connectedness,” Voas told me. “This is thought to be upbeat and optimistic in its orientation — which is a contrast to conspiracy theory, which is darker, more pessimistic, more political, about secret forces controlling things behind the scenes.” And yet, alternative spirituality and conspiracy are, in the end, united by a narcissistic idea: that there are things in the world crying out for explanation and that you alone are unraveling the truth. As Voas puts it, “The central point is that we have, in our society, competition between trust and doubt.”

An article last year in the European Journal of Social Psychology called “An exploration of spiritual superiority: The paradox of self enhancement,” by Dutch behavioral scientists Roos Vonk and Anouk Visser, found that “the road to spiritual enlightenment may yield the exact same mundane distortions that are all too familiar in social psychology, such as self-enhancement, illusory superiority, closed mindedness, and hedonism (clingling to positive experiences) under the guise of alleged ‘higher’ values.” This spiritual form of narcissism reminds me of Chansley’s language on Facebook around star seeds. According to Evans, it’s derived, in a copy of a copy kind of way, from an idea in Gnosticism — a collection of beliefs from early Christian sects, popular in alternative spirituality, that there are spiritual aliens who are different species: “You are from another planet, you’ve fallen into this prison of the material world, and you’re working to ascend to your true home. It’s an extreme expression of spiritual alienation and spiritual narcissism.”

I am guessing Chansley probably wanted to achieve notoriety for his ideas — and that a desire to stand out is part of the reason he chose such a bizarre costume to wear to an attempted coup. He is, to use a term popular on the Internet, a spiritual version of a clout chaser.

But I don’t want to tease anyone for their spiritual ideas, even Chansley, who has been charged with six federal crimes and awaits trial. Rather, I’m interested in the larger question this raises about contemporary masculinity. What void is this filling? If QAnon provides an easy answer for a small but steady group of men, we should think about what a healthier spiritual alternative looks like. “Whatever it is, it should be offline for starters,” says Remski. “It could focus on community service, but at the very least it should be built in the neighborhood, not on the consumer workshop circuit. The last thing the ex-QAnon man needs is a leader or a group commodifying his recovery or monetizing his confessions or emotions.” Remski has already noticed a rise in men’s groups based on spiritual bodybuilding, sacred real estate and supplement pyramid schemes. “I guarantee,” he predicts, “that within the year a pair of bros will start up a [multilevel marketing business] that sells QAnon recovery products.”

Marisa Meltzer is a writer in New York. Her most recent book is “This Is Big: How the Founder of Weight Watchers Changed the World (and Me).”
The Rosa Parks of D.C.

Half a century before the civil rights movement, Barbara Pope boarded a train and challenged Virginia's Jim Crow law.

In August 1906, Pope boarded a train at Union Station and traveled into Virginia, in the process challenging Virginia's Jim Crow law requiring segregation on trains and streetcars. She soon gained the support of Du Bois and his Niagara Movement, a precursor to the NAACP. And her case became one of the first steps along the path to the end of legal segregation — leading the way toward the NAACP's hallmark 1954 Supreme Court victory in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

Chinn, who works as executive director of the nonprofit Middle Passage Ceremonies and Port Markers Project in Jacksonville, Fla., now draws a connection between the widespread protests following George Floyd's death last year and the stand that Pope took more than a century ago. In both, Chinn says, "you're seeing a movement and tactics and strategy in its formative stages."
BY DAVID A. TAYLOR

Half a century before the civil rights movement, Barbara Pope boarded a train and challenged Virginia’s Jim Crow law

ANN CHINN grew up hearing family stories that her grandmother’s sister Barbara Pope had been a published writer. But recollections were short on details; it was so long ago. Chinn, 74, only knew that her great-aunt wrote stories.

In fact, Barbara Pope, a D.C. native, ranks among the most stunning forgotten American lives. She was, in addition to being a high school teacher, an author of fiction about social change at the turn of the 20th century, and her literary voice was celebrated on the international stage by no less than W.E.B. Du Bois. Her stories probed relationships among men and women, Black and White, with a modern voice and a sharp eye for detail and character. In her story “The New Woman,” the main character is a smart, industrious and beautiful Black woman who asks her husband if she can clerk for him in his law office, as she did for her father. “The bargain was that you would practice law and I take charge of the home,” she tells him, “but neither of us must be selfish, and each will call on the other for assistance when needed.”

But perhaps her greatest accomplishment was the stand she took against racism in transportation nearly 50 years before Rosa Parks’s bus ride: In August 1906, Pope boarded a train at Union Station and traveled into Virginia, in the process challenging Virginia’s Jim Crow law requiring segregation on trains and streetcars. She soon gained the support of Du Bois and his Niagara Movement, a precursor to the NAACP. And her case became one of the first steps along the path to the end of legal segregation — leading the way toward the NAACP’s hallmark 1954 Supreme Court victory in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

Not long after her case, she left the public stage amid personal troubles and would become remembered mainly among scholars — more of a footnote in history than a history maker. Almost the only place you can find Pope’s work is in the Library of Congress on microfilm. In 2015, however, literary historian Jennifer Harris wrote a profile of Pope for Legacy, a journal of American women writers, that aimed to bring Pope back into the spotlight. Harris used her archivist investigator skills to unearth Pope’s fiction and seek out her story from surviving family members, including Chinn.

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Pope was born in 1854 and grew up in a progressive family in Georgetown’s Black community. She began a teaching career in 1873 and taught for a year at Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute. She also advocated for reforms in the District’s Colored School System.

In the 1890s, Pope, who never married, started publishing fiction. Du Bois included some of her stories in an exhibition he organized for the Paris Exposition of 1900 that presented Black Americans in their own words and images. (A beautifully illustrated volume based on that exhibition came out in 2019 as “Black Lives 1900: W.E.B. Du Bois at the Paris Exposition.”) In those years, the Black community of D.C. was divided between Booker T. Washington’s supporters and younger backers of Du Bois. Against her father’s wishes, Pope in 1906 joined the Niagara Movement. She was among its first female members.

Her pathbreaking train ride toward a Virginia hot springs resort that summer didn’t start as a statement. When Pope went to buy her ticket, she simply wanted a peaceful ride, she told the
ticket agent. She “had been annoyed before” by Virginia’s Jim Crow rule and “didn’t want to be annoyed that way” again, according to her testimony in court records.

She boarded at Union Station and saw the “colored” compartment was cramped and its seats faced backward. She took a seat in the main compartment instead. After they crossed the Potomac into Virginia, a White conductor came and said she had to move. She refused. He threatened her with arrest. She refused again. When the train stopped at Falls Church, Pope was escorted off by constables and detained for hours at the mayor’s office. Even after posting bail, she was held for public humiliation in the train station, waiting for her hearing. The mayor set up a kangaroo court in the station. Pope was tried for “violating the separate car law of the State of Virginia” and fined $10 plus court costs.

Two weeks later, at the Niagara Movement’s annual meeting at Harpers Ferry, W.Va., Pope’s case was on the agenda. The group of more than 50 considered whether an appeal to overturn her conviction could be a test case. As an interstate traveler, was she subject to Virginia’s Jim Crow statutes? Du Bois had doubts about using the judiciary for social change — just three years earlier, he had written in “The Souls of Black Folk” that to place Black Americans “in the hands of Southern courts was impossible” — but the group at Harpers Ferry voted to fund Pope’s appeal in the Virginia circuit court anyway.

Few were surprised when Pope lost her appeal that October at an Alexandria circuit court, but with Niagara’s legal support, she took the case to Virginia’s Supreme Court of Appeals. In early 1907, that second appeal triumphed when the higher court annulled the initial judgment. “This means that the NIAGARA MOVEMENT has established that under the present statute Virginia cannot fine an interstate passenger who refuses to be Jim-Crowed,” Du Bois explained in an April 1907 fundraising letter.

Du Bois included the court’s full statement with his letter, and the Niagara Movement followed up with a civil suit demanding $50,000 in damages. In June 1907, the civil trial opened in D.C. The jury voted in Pope’s favor but awarded her just one penny. Still, the decision by the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia — which had both local and federal jurisdiction until Congress separated those powers in 1973 — showed that interstate travelers could successfully challenge Jim Crow in federal court.

Pope’s fortunes, however, took a turn for the worse. She lost her job and suffered from insomnia. One evening in September 1908, at age 54, she walked out onto Lovers’ Lane, beside Montrose Park in Georgetown, pinned a note addressed to the coroner to her dress, and hanged herself. The note said she felt her brain was “on fire.”

Jennifer Harris writes that the stigma around suicide helped erase the public record of Pope’s contributions: “[I]t was considered impolite to discuss suicides, so her story — and stories — faded into obscurity.” Nevertheless, historian Deborah Lee, who has studied Pope and the Niagara Movement, says that Pope, along with Du Bois, created “a cornerstone of the 20th-century civil rights movement.”

For her part, Ann Chinn is heartened that her great-aunt’s story is coming to light. “I hope that it will encourage researchers and historians to look for others lesser known but just as impactful,” she told me. “It’s not just the Malcolm Xs and the Martin Luther Kings. It’s your mother, your father, your teacher — those people whose names will never go into recorded history.”
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David A. Taylor is a writer in Washington.
Want some fun takeout? You’re in luck.

Takeout used to be all about the contents of the bag. That changed last year, as eateries, particularly restaurants that weren’t seating diners, were forced to rethink the way food left their kitchen for a customer’s home. In the absence of a server — someone to extend a welcome and introduce you to a place — packaging became a chance to extend hospitality.

Carryout from Lucky Danger, the American Chinese takeout that opened in November in Mount Vernon Triangle, elicits a grin as you unpack it. The sturdy round compostable containers and white rectangular cartons are so attractive, there’s no need to transfer their contents to serving dishes. Just as sweet, the packages come with labels identifying what’s inside (“These are Oranges” describes some citrus wedges) and a tiny cartoon figure. A restaurant with a sense of humor! Even the thick napkins show flair.

Chef Tim Ma made three requests of the branding firm he enlisted to shape his pop-up, which operates out of Prather’s on the Alley. “Timelessness was important,” he says. The menu also had to be fun. “Privately,” says Ma, “I’m a goofy person.” Hence his call for a mascot. The eventual menu, retro in red and white, asks customers to play safe — “No Mask, No Honor, No Service” — and reveals the character of Lucky Danger. The mascot turns out to be 10 or so little chefs in animal costumes — Dragon Boy, Shark Boy, Lion Boy, etc. — some of whom customers get to know from a sheet

Mapo tofu and kung pao chicken are two of the highlights on the menu at the pop-up takeout Lucky Danger, which is a collaboration of chefs Tim Ma and Andrew Chiou.

LUCKY DANGER 455 I St. NW. No phone. luckydanger.co. Open for takeout and delivery 4 to 9:30 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Prices: Appetizers $4 to $10, main dishes $6 to $9 (small) and $10 to $18 (large). Family-style meals $40 (serving two to three) and $75 (serving four to five). Delivery via DoorDash. Accessibility: Wheelchair users may be challenged by a series of two doors leading to the vestibule. No restroom availability.
of stickers in each bag.

As for the actual food, the inspiration for Lucky Danger comes from the chef’s uncle, Paul Ma, who ran a storefront turned restaurant in Yorktown Heights, N.Y. Now closed, Paul Ma’s China Kitchen was part of a 2019 exhibition at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History: “Food, Transforming the American Table.” The event brought multiple generations of family members to Washington to reminisce. Similar to his uncle’s business, the D.C. takeout specializes in American Chinese food, which Ma, 43, defines as “food that immigrants from China brought over and essentially updated for the American palate,” and adapted using common or cheaper Western ingredients.

Things like crab rangoon, he says, which “isn’t recognized in China.” The notion of crab (real or imitation) and cream cheese stuffed into a spring roll wrapper and fried to a crisp was popularized by Trader Vic’s, the chain of Polynesian-inspired watering holes with roots in the San Francisco Bay area, and also lives on today at places including P.F. Chang’s. The warm and wispy, rich and creamy version at Lucky Danger is a delightful throwback to America’s love affair with all things tiki, which coincided in the 1940s and 1950s with mainstream acceptance of American Chinese spots.

Ma’s portfolio includes the Eaton hotel, home to American Son, and Laoban Dumplings, the source of Lucky Danger’s delicious dumplings, stuffed with ground pork and Chinese chives. The day-to-day presence at Lucky Danger is co-founder Andrew Chiou, 32, who comes to the project from the closed Momo Yakitori in the Northeast D.C. neighborhood of Woodridge. Both chefs are the children of Taiwanese immigrants; Ma was born in Arkansas and Chiou in Texas.

Their menu at Lucky Danger is a mash-up of standard-issue Chinese takeout fare along with a sprinkling of dishes that Ma and Chiou remember their parents ordering off menus written in Chinese when they were kids. Read: hot and sour soup, kung pao chicken and broccoli beef, but also pig ear salad, mapo tofu and flounder with pickled cabbage. The selections slip in reminders that the chefs are both steeped in technique. Their fried rice sets the bar for the staple in Washington, made as it is with duck breast — rubbed with spices including star anise and coriander and cold-smoked with tea leaves — and confit duck legs. Succulent shreds of duck help fill the carton with glossy rice, shredded yellow egg and sweet minced carrots. “We can’t help ourselves,” Ma says about the fancy-fication of fried rice.

The chefs’ experience and standards translate to American Chinese food that’s true to its roots and superior to much of the competition. One reason the kung pao chicken doesn’t linger long on my table is because every part of it shows TLC. The peanuts and peppers are first toasted with dried garlic. The vegetables are uniformly diced. The sauce — made by caramelizing sugar, then adding soy sauce — gets made to order, and it sweetens chicken that’s twice fried.

Ma and Chiou also know some dishes don’t need much tinkering. While they experimented with sweet-and-sour sauce, going so far as to swap in fresh cranberries for different brands of ketchup, they ultimately concluded that “Heinz is the signature flavor of sweet and sour,” says Chiou.
Admittedly, a few dishes are no better than the ones you get from places for the sake of convenience rather than execution. Lucky Danger’s beef and broccoli is equal parts soft meat and sodden vegetable.

But the majority of the choices beat what you get from takeouts without name chefs. I’m thinking now of braised flounder swimming with tangy pickled cabbage, soft leaves alternating with crisp ones. And orange beef. Lucky Danger uses a lesser cut of meat — bottom sirloin — but scores each piece twice, in part to catch the sauce, and breads the bites in a combination of cornstarch and wheat flour. The unusual brightness of the dish is due to oranges being peeled just as they’re needed. Salt-and-pepper shrimp stars sprinky seafood in a jumble of sliced jalapeños and smoky-sweet onions. A category called “Veggies Mostly” includes a mapo tofu that comes out punching and wok-singed green beans tossed with soy sauce and garlic.

Thirsty? Lucky Danger has you covered, with a line of canned cocktails, including Duck Sauce. That’s tequila lit with Sichuan peppercorns and subtly fruity with lemon and peach.

Don’t shoot the messenger, but it takes patience to taste the place. For now at least, orders, tied to pickup times, can be made only online, beginning at 10 a.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Scrambling to secure one of the 62 slots feels like playing whack-a-mole. An online FAQ gently lets down eaters with dietary restrictions: “If you are on a gluten-free, soy-free, and/or sesame-free journey, then we just weren’t meant to be. It’s not you, it’s us!!” And once you’ve placed your order, there are “no refunds, no modifications, no soup for you (unless you ordered soup).” And you should, by the way. The duck bone broth, paired with thin rice noodles and crisp with scallions, fairly hums with ginger. Billed as an appetizer, the restorative is best experienced at the end of a meal, says Chiou.

Preordering is good for the business, in that the operators know exactly how much food to prepare, and for when, a drill that also benefits customers, says Chiou. The process also minimizes waste.

That said, indoor kiosks are part of the finessed plan for the second branch of Lucky Danger, expected to open in late April in Arlington’s Westpost shopping center (formerly Pentagon Row). Ma has tasked his branding team to come up with an “escape room” aesthetic. Stay tuned. Washington’s Lucky Danger will stay where it is until the end of the year, until Prather’s reopens. Lucky for locals, Ma plans to find another spot in Mount Vernon Triangle.

Chiou sounds proud to pay tribute to American Chinese cooking. “Tim and I are having fun, with food we have roots to,” says the chef, who describes Lucky Danger as filling the gap between modest and fancy. To which I can only add, pass the fortune cookies and party on.

Chef Andrew Chiou ran Momo Yakitori before co-founding Lucky Danger.

KEY TO THE PREVIOUS SECOND GLANCE
MARCH 28

1. Reversed
2. Moved over
3. In blue
4. New icons
5. Seeing three
6. Shortened
7. No handle
8. Missing piece
9. More tea
10. Smaller rest
11. Green folder
12. Taller

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE
“BODYBUILDING,” MARCH 28

1. Fesures
2. North
3. Sustain
4. Sroup
5. Summy
6. Lipton
7. Gems
8. Vogue
9. Sees
10. Relax
11. Siren
12. Phat
13. Asen
14. Pro
15. Asin
16. Asin
17. Stupe
18. Coats
19. Keled
20. Ladies
21. Garments
22. Spaked
23. Pries
24. China
25. Lember
26. Nator
27. Fused
28. Fuses
29. Fuses
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62. Fuses

PHOTOS: FOOD BY SCOTT SUCHMAN; ORIGINAL SECOND GLANCE PHOTO BY WASHINGTON POST READER DAN WOOLLEY
Colorful window

By Randy Mays

Find the 12 differences in the photo of a kitchen window in Kensington, Md., in November.

Puzzle Answers

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

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One wish, two wish, red wish, blue wish

In a park in the city of Lickety-Split / Stands a statue that's gotten a wee little bit / Contentious these days / Due to whom it portrays: / Morton McTavish McGonigal Thnitt.

Back in Thnitt’s time this was just called “Split City.” / A place run by Splitties with no care or pity / For Lickies, a people who there, too, did dwell, / But lacked the connections to be treated well / (Though they were cultured and pleasant and witty.)

Splitties all lived in the city’s West End / Not many had even one Lickie friend. / The Lickies worked hard but they weren’t merry — / They’d no money to sample the yummy-tum berry / And other delights on which Splitties would spend.

Thnitt was a Splittie. He owned a nice car. / But he was a deep thinker, with vision afar. / He said that if Splitsville was ever to thrive, / For the town, over time, to even survive / The city’s two castes had to be on a par.

First, he said Lickies just needed a smidge / Of more pride in themselves, to build them a bridge / To a time of prosperity, when spirits might lift / With pride in their families, pride in the gift / Of their kids: Say, putting their art on the fridge.

Then Thnitt thought a Thought that arrived with a whoosh! / He’d noticed the city’s plush Murgatroyd bush / a ratty old thing that grew wild, but just might / Work to make Lickies and Splitties more tight. / That bush, Thnitt decided, would feel fine on the tush.

A factory rose, to make pillows for sittin.’ / They were fluffy and foofy and soft as a kitten. / And Lickies and Splitties were working as one, / Side by side, brush by brush, their future’d begun / With urges to prosper they all had been bitten!

By the time old Thnitt died his stature was tall. / People were happy and having a ball. / Lickies and Splitties respected each other / They were acting like friends, like sister and brother. / All was just swell, till everything fell, at the start of last fall.

The kerfuffle began with the Lickie, McSnerdz / Who discovered that some of Thnitt’s earliest words / Condescended to Lickies. There could be no doubt / The man was a faker, a brute and a lout. / “That statue must go,” he said. “It’s for the birds.”

Lickies agreed! Splitties, not one little bit! / Curses occurred. Folks had a fit. / And then from above, way up in a cloud, / Came a big lightning bolt (It sounded real loud.) / And right there, and right then, stood M.M.M. Thnitt.

He said in a voice that was sad but dramatic, / “Expunging one’s history seems problematic” / Splitties applauded! “We knew it!” they yelled. / But Thnitt raised a hand. Their joy he quick quelled. / “McSnerdz has a point, too. He’s no fanatic.”

“My words may have sometimes been lacking in feeling. / I may have been driven by caste-conscious zeal-ing.” / Lickies applauded! Thnitt had taken their side! / Hand raised again, Thnitt said, gimlet-eyed / “That’s not the solution that I am revealing.”

Then, he was gone, with a boom, bang and squawk / And Lickies and Splitties stood there in shock. / What was he saying? What had they just seen? / What, just precisely, did that old man mean? / Was Thnitt saying simply that we needed to ... talk?

“No!” screamed the Splitties in voices quite high! / “We are right! You are wrong! You all should die!” / The Lickies, they answered in similar vein. / Imprecations were flung, again and again, / And from up in the clouds came a single, sad ... sigh.

Email Gene Weingarten at gene.weingarten@washpost.com. Find chats and updates at wapo.st/magazine.
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