

THE GADFLY

Let Me Count the Ways • 02

Injustice in Healthcare • 03

Mitchell Gallery: New Exhibit • 04

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Photo by Shayna Jenkins

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Founded in 1980, the *Gadfly* is the student newsmagazine distributed to over 600 students, faculty, and staff of the Annapolis campus.

Opinions expressed within are the sole responsibility of the author(s). The *Gadfly* reserves the right to accept, reject, and edit submissions in any way necessary to publish a professional, informative, and thought-provoking newsmagazine.

The *Gadfly* meets at the Naval Academy. Wear your dress whites.

Articles should be submitted by Friday at 11:59 PM to sjca.gadfly@gmail.com.

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Let Me Count the Ways

Jerry Januszewski Counselor

When I was a little boy I learned numbers long before I could identify letters. I went around "reading" numbers and speaking them aloud wherever I saw them, probably driving my parents crazy, though they never let on. Counting was the closest thing I had to a superpower. It also represented a connection to the wider world and access to something grand out there that existed before me. Of course, I had no concrete grasp of that at the time. I just liked numbers.

One day I parked myself at the kitchen table and stayed there until I counted to one thousand, after which my patient mother rewarded me with a "Wow! Very good, Jerry." In my memory it was a monumental achievement that felt like it took all day, though I now know it couldn't have taken longer than 30 minutes.

Another memorable experience with a number has yielded benefits to this very day. I was sitting alone on my bed with a large book, a dictionary I believe, reading the page numbers and searching for hidden numbers within the scribble-scrabble definitions. I came to page 444.

I said aloud to myself, "I'm four years old and this is my number: 444." And so it was. 444 was my number for life. Sure enough, since that day I've been inclined to speak aloud to myself the number 444 at random times. A year or longer may pass without my thinking of it, and then, in line at the bank or eating dinner with friends, out of muddled thoughts will arise, clear and bright, the number 444. Then, in respectful solidarity with my younger self, I give soft utterance to my number: 444. My old friend 444 is fearless; it even came to my mind unbidden at the altar on my wedding day.

I never force myself to remember the number, never schedule an utterance, and I never fret that it will go away for good. Like the wind and the Holy Spirit, 444 comes and goes on its own mysterious timetable. The moment appears and I acknowledge that it is a pure moment for me, strangely stabilizing and free from anxiety. I always smile inwardly.

The mystery of 444 has not stopped me from attempting to assess its psychological or even spiritual significance for me. I easily rejected the "primeval self" hypothesis that this was a vestige of superstition. My relationship with the number had nothing in common with obsessive-compulsive behavior. I wouldn't call it a "higher power." I never pursued it and, present or not, it never coincided with agitation of any kind. 444 is a delightful curiosity that suggests to me how important a sense of continuity in life is.

The realization and feeling that I am the same person as that little boy sitting on the edge of a bed with a dictionary imparts a welcome self-respect and compassion for myself; outlooks that I intuit are integral to my experience of a meaningful life.

Both sides of my family have researched our ancestral origins. Feeling connected to a distant grandmother, who ran a farm in Poland in the 19th century, or sympathizing with the legal travails of a rascally great, great grandfather in Italy stirs my soul in a way that's hard to define. I like being connected to them. What decisions did they make that affect my life today? What decisions am I making today that will affect the lives of others 100 years from now? I like being connected to them too. This is somewhat mind-blowing and pleasing to ponder.

I might extrapolate this train of thought to wider society. The study of The Great Books, organized chronologically as they are, represent continuity with our cultural past, our intellectual and spiritual development as a race, and our connection with our younger selves as a civilization. You could say reading and re-reading *The Republic* or *Genesis* or *King Lear* is a 444 of sorts for Western Civilization; touchstones of continuous development, memory and meaning; each reader a present link between the past and the future.

I also derive meaning from knowing some of the smaller fragments of our culture, such as idiosyncrasies of the founding fathers of St. John's College. For example, Stringfellow Barr was a strong advocate of admitting talented students to the College before they graduated high school. He said, "The only thing you learn in the last two years of high school is how to dance!" This is not earth-shattering information, but it helps me feel closer to Stringfellow Barr. In its small way this brings greater meaning to my experience at the College.

Speaking out the seemingly trivial "444" whenever it calls to me allows me to feel closer to the boy I was. This makes it easier to accept myself as I am now, since that boy and I are one and the same human being. It is so odd and wonderful to me that life is like that; that a small, obscure moment over 50 years ago can transcend my hardships and find lasting purchase in my soul in such a beneficial way. ♦

From the Editors:

Wanted: four missing pages of the *Gadfly*. If you find any thoughtful thoughts, musical musings, or opinionated opinions lying around, please return them to sjca.gadfly@gmail.com; we miss them. Dearly. They were our forefathers'.

Also missing: any photographs or poems or cartoons that document the woe some tale of the Johnnie in his natural habitat (except Ms. Jenkins, who remains a paragon to us all). ♦

Corporate Greed and Injustice in Healthcare

Len Sive, Jr. GI

John and Donna McShane, citizens of Alberta, Canada, spend part of each year on vacation in Arizona in their mobile home. In 2012, while vacationing in Arizona, Donna developed a bad cough; she was advised to go to the Western Arizona Regional Medical Center, in Bullhead City, for an examination. Since she had health insurance from AMA, which is owned by Manulife Financial, both Canadian companies, there was no hesitation in recommending that she enter this regional hospital for tests.

During her five-day stay at the Western Arizona Regional Medical Center, she underwent some tests, none of which proved conclusive; and even spent 2 days in isolation for fear that she might have tuberculosis. (She didn't.) After a five-day uneventful stay in the hospital, she was released, with only a prescription for steroids for her troubles. Her total bill: \$105,000!

That's not the worst of it. Her insurance company, AMA, obviously not wanting to pay this bill, said that they had "found an error" on the McShane's insurance application form regarding prescription medication, and as a consequence nullified their policy, making the McShanes, who live on \$30,000/year, liable for the entire amount! This is an all-too-common trick employed by insurance companies to avoid honoring a policy, in which large outlays need to be paid. And, unfortunately, they usually get away with it.

What are the notable points here? First, a simple mistake on an application, found only after a large outlay was required, was used as a pretext for cancelling their policy—although no such problem had been found so long as the McShanes were paying into AMA. But as soon as AMA was faced with honoring their contract, then suddenly the McShane's application came under the closest scrutiny and—surprise—was found wanting.

Secondly, it is nothing short of obscene that after only five days in a hospital—though not in the ER or ICU, and not involving multiple surgeries, limb replacements, organ transplants, or other expensive procedures—the hospital could charge her \$105,000. Given what Donna McShane underwent—or perhaps one should say what she didn't undergo—such a huge bill is simply incomprehensible.

Years ago I worked in a hospital in the Northwest and became good friends with one of the ER doctors. He was in charge of organizing lectures for the physicians at the hospital. For that year's lecture, he invited a well-known physician from an Ivy-League medical school who was an expert on hospital pricing. What my friend relayed to me was unbelievable. The costs of an open-heart surgery were arbitrarily set—"picked out of the air"; in this case \$5,000 per heart-valve. Not because it really cost that much—it didn't. None of the costs he mentioned were actually grounded in reality. They were simply arbitrarily decided upon.

Let's examine this \$20,000 per day expense more closely. I checked on the Internet. An average overnight stay at a not-for-profit hospital was \$2,000 and for a for-profit hospital, \$3,170. These prices put into stark relief

the absolute unreality of the hospital's \$20,000 price tag.

On the other hand, when health care is left up to insurance companies, cases like the McShanes are rife; for the insurance company's sole concern is how much profit it can make; the health of patients is always of secondary importance.

This is why health care is one of many aspects of our modern life that the federal government must take complete charge of—*contra* the Republican party's no-government-at-all platform—in order to serve the greater interests of the nation. Infrastructure, including the development of mass transportation systems and the repair of thousands of bridges, gas and electricity for homes and businesses, the funding of new forms of energy, well-maintained streets and highways, conservation, worker health and safety, the establishment of a livable minimum wage, affordable medications—these

are some of the areas in which, for the sake of our nation's health, safety, and welfare, the federal government needs to take control. Corporations, with their eye exclusively fastened on profit, are unfit to control these vital sectors of our common life. The CEO of Exxon/Mobil put it memorably when he said, "I don't care about America, I care only about Exxon." That's what makes corporations so dangerous!

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Chapter 13, states: "The true statesman... wants to make his fellow-citizens good" That is, or ought to

be, the true aim of every politician. Today, however, the only thing politicians care about is how to make their corporate clients richer, how to extend the corporation's power into every crack and crevice of our modern life—but clearly not how to make citizens "good." Yet until and unless we elect men and women who do fully subscribe to Aristotle's view, such manifest injustice as has struck the McShanes must continue to wreck and ruin the lives of countless others—all the while making the 1% even richer, more powerful, and more callous.

Goodness or profit, democracy or oligarchy: that's our modern era's strict either/or. We are in a fight-to-the-death. Either we win and reclaim democracy for America or we lose and become mere slaves of the oligarchic Corporate State. The choice is ours to make. ♦

“ Either we win and reclaim democracy for America or we lose and become mere slaves of the oligarchic Corporate State. ”



Q: If virtue is not a swarm of bees, how do we explain honey? ♦

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday 9/23

Kunai Soccer

4 PM

Fencing

4 PM

Wednesday 9/24

Ultimate Frisbee

W v. H, 3:45 PM

G v. D, 3:45 PM

St. John's Chorus, Great Hall

7 PM

Friday 9/26

Kunai Soccer

4 PM

Fencing

6 PM

Lecture, FSK

8 PM

Saturday 9/27

Ultimate Frisbee

G v. W 1:00 PM

S v. D 2:30 PM

Sunday 9/28

Soccer

G v. H, 1 PM

S v. D, 2:45 PM

If you would like to see your event on the weekly schedule, please email sjca.gadfly@gmail.com.

Annapolis Collects:

The Mitchell Gallery Celebrates 25 Years

Lucinda Dukes Edinberg Art Educator, The Mitchell Gallery

Whether you are continuing your time at St. John's or joining the community for the first time—welcome to another academic year! The Mitchell Gallery has opened the season with the exhibition, *Annapolis Collects: The Mitchell Gallery Celebrates 25 Years*. This special exhibition was curated by four prominent members of the local art community, including Jim Cheevers, Chief Curator of the United States Naval Academy Museum; Tom Dawson, owner of Dawson Gallery; Joni Jones, Director of the Banneker-Douglass Museum; and Nadja Maril, noted local writer. Each of these curators selected artifacts and works of art from local institutions and individuals, across a broad range of time periods, mediums, and styles.

There are many objects worth discussing, but I am particularly attracted to a volume by George Smith, titled, *The Laboratory; or, School of Arts: Containing a Large Collection of Valuable Secrets, Experiments, and Manual Operations in Arts and Manufactures, Highly Useful to Gilders, Jewelers, Enamellers, Goldsmiths, Dyers, Cutlers, Pewterers, Joiners, Japanners, Book-Binders, Plasters, Artists, and to the Workers in Metals in General; and in Plaster of Paris, Wood, Ivory, Bone, Horn and Other Materials*. Admittedly, the title says it all, but the book's origins and continuing editions are fascinating.

The School of Arts was part of a genre of secret recipe books of practical chemistry for the layperson. It was also valuable to artisans and housekeepers, because it included the technology to distill spirits, compound dyes and paints, and to concoct medicines, perfumes and cosmetics. Basically, there was a little something for everyone.

Much of the original text has been translated from a German volume of secret recipes, *Der Curieusen Kunst-Und Wreck-Schul*, which had been published in multiple editions dating from 1696-1782. (Although, having been published, it would not appear to be very secretive.) George Smith, the author and editor of the Laboratory School of the Arts, first printed his recipe book in 1736. It proved so popular that it was updated and reprinted. We have on view the 1775 printing, fourth edition, which includes 6 plates, two of which are folding; a new section on "Artificial Fireworks," which gave the author much pride; and the first to contain a section on perspective. His book was so revered, its contents and explanations were updated as new methods and discoveries were brought forth, even after Smith's death. It is worth noting the significant shift in the public's view towards using chemistry for industrial and recreational use.

The book we have on view was owned by William Faris (1728-1804), a noted Annapolis silversmith. Many of Faris's handwritten notes are neatly inscribed in the book's margins. Faris had his home, tavern, workshop, and garden at 25 West Street and had an ad in Annapolis' newspaper, the Capital Gazette, which read, "William Faris, Watch and Clockmaker at the sign of the Crown & Dial near the Church in Annapolis."

When Faris died, the book was purchased at an estate sale by another noted local silversmith, William McParlin (1780-1850). (One of McParlin's ladles is on view next to one created by Faris). All of these artisans and objects were neatly tied together by marriages and professional relationships. Faris was married to Priscilla Woodward, niece of another silversmith, and McParlin married a niece of Mrs. Faris's. (By the way, McParlin's son was a graduate of St. John's College). Among other associated objects in the exhibition is a silhouette of Priscilla created by Faris and a prominent tall case clock, which was a joint venture between Faris and the equally known Annapolis cabinetmaker, John Shaw (1745-1829).

My descriptions here do not begin to reflect the artistry of these craftsmen and artists. Contemporary sculptures and paintings round out the exhibition of antique maps, Francis Scott Key's Last Will and Testament, an ivory portrait of Key's brother-in-law and the first songster that included "The Defence of Ft. M'Henry" ("Star-Spangled Banner") published in 1814, as well as a letter from George Washington to St. John's College President John McDowell regarding his grand step-grandson's academic future at St. John's College.

The gallery is open Tuesday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. and the hour before Friday night lecture, 6:45 – 7:45 p.m. Find relief from academic pressures and read Smith's book about *aqua fortis*, red calcined vitriol (colcothar) and other "ponderables." ♦