



## DEDICATION

### To the Team Members of The Forest at Duke

In dedicating this issue of our newsletter to the Forest at Duke Team Members in all their varied and diverse assignments, the editors wish to join their voices to the praise and acclaim by the residents of this sheltered community for the dedication and unflinching generosity of the Team Members to the life of the residents in this time of crisis.

We are particularly aware of the sacrifices that the Team Members have been willing to make to ensure our comfort and safety, and we wish to express our thanks for and appreciation of the good work the Team Members have done, and continue to do, for our welfare.

With gratitude,

THE EDITORS OF *THE FORESTER*

### The Forester

The newsletter of the Residents' Association of the Forest at Duke, Inc., 2701 Pickett Rd., Durham, NC 27705-5610. Published monthly except July, August, and September by and for the residents:

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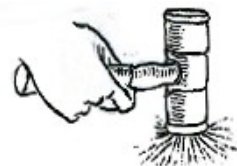
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## President's Podium



by Banks Anderson

Sequestered, bored, and haunted by what might be, there is still glad to be had at TFAD. Bright sunshine, new green leaves and flowers grace our property. Passing by mown and manicured lawns and sauntering around the pond with its unmasked fountain spewing droplets into the breeze is restorative. Tracking the medical and political responses to the pandemic also intrigues this physician. Can there be a larger market for a drug or vaccine than the entire population of the world? Pharmaceutical houses and laboratories everywhere must be racing each other to develop safe and effective compounds to attack SARS-CoV-2. If we here can stay healthy for another eight to ten months we may get defenses that will permit us once more to safely gather in an auditorium or basketball arena. Meanwhile there will be tons of medical manure loosed into our environment.

Have you followed the hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) drama? As an ophthalmologist I monitored Plaquenil patients for retinal damage. Loss of sight from large doses taken over long periods is a side effect. When a Frenchman claimed a Covid-19 benefit for this drug it attracted worldwide attention. It mattered neither to our media nor to our President that the basis for this claim was junk science. Aside from antimalarial properties, this drug has been of benefit to patients with autoimmune arthritis such as occurs with lupus. Although similarly not curative, Remdesivir developed in response to the Ebola epidemic has shown in one controlled US study (but not in a smaller Chinese study) a benefit in shortening Covid-19 disability by an average of three days. Ineffective for Ebola, the drug was found to be safe by that earlier

(Continued on Page 3)

### ***In Memoriam***

David Bruce Rubidge

May 18, 2020

## Podium, Cont'd

study. Randomized, placebo-controlled studies where the outcome evaluators do not know who received the real drugs and who was given the fake ones are the gold standards of drug research. We can expect many competitors to enter the Covid-19 market and enormous pressures on the FDA approval process.

Watching world leaders respond to the economic damage of quarantine is another daily interest. The phrase “gold standard” relates to pegging paper money to a given weight of gold. Trillions of dollars in economic relief are pouring out of Washington without any peg. Since much of the Congress and the President will be on a ballot in November, penury is not popular. But they should remember that after WW1 German democracy did not survive their massive unemployment, their hyperinflation, and reparation demands. We now have massive unemployment and avoiding hyperinflation has got to be a high priority. The conflict between lifting quarantines to heal economies and the resulting

sacrifice of high-risk citizens like ourselves is playing out in countries around the world. Sir William Osler wrote that pneumonia is a friend of the aged. Let us hope that with the help of our skilled staff we will continue to keep this friend from visiting and that we will survive and adapt. Stay tuned.

Addendum: The British medical journal Lancet published online on May 22 another observational study of 96,000 hospitalized Covid-19 patients from around the world. Of these, 15,000 were treated with the antimalarials hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine with or without antibiotics. As in the earlier US observational study there was no evidence of any benefit from antimalarials. On the contrary there was a “clear signal of harm” from these medications. This was not a randomized prospective placebo-controlled study, but if there had been a large significant benefit, the numbers are so large and the patient base and institutions so varied that it should have become evident. ¶

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## THE SPELLING LESSON

by Arnie Lerman

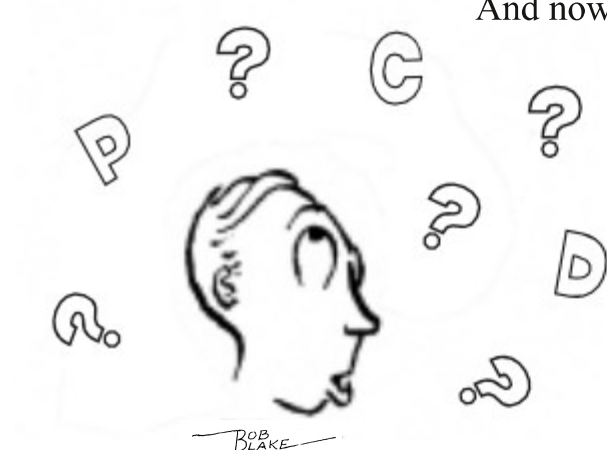
How to spell the damn word ? It begins with a “P”

Now add a conjunction that ends with a “D”.

Steal and mix three letters more

From two pronouns you adore

And now look, it appears ! Simply end with a “C”



# Library Science 101

by Carol Reese

## THE LIBRARY AND THE PANDEMIC

Fortunately, the Library was able to stay open to residents throughout March and the first half of April. Since it was the only TFAD resource still available to residents, usage naturally increased. Library volunteers often heard people remark that they were grateful that the Library was still open. During this time period, weekly circulation of the collection more than doubled, going from an average of 20–25 items per week to an average of 45–50 items.

When, based on state guidelines, the administration was forced to conclude that the Library should be closed to ensure the safety of all residents, residents were notified on April 13 that the Library would be closed on April 16. Within those few days, residents managed to check out about 150–200 books.

Fortunately, with the help of the staff from Resident Life and several resident volunteers, residents continue to use the Library resources by searching the Library's online catalog and sending a request to Resident Life staff. If available, the item(s) are delivered to the requestor.

FYI—until the Library reopens, the newspapers will be located in the Foyer.

## BOOK REVIEW

With the Library closed, I have had the opportunity to do a lot more reading (just like everyone else). One book was *Conversations in Black: on power, politics, and leadership* by Ed Gordon, an Emmy-award winning news broadcaster. Since the project began in 2012, the year Trayvon Martin was killed, Mr. Gordon has been assembling virtual conversations with black influencers on the condition of—and the issues facing—the nation's black population. His topics covered all areas of the state of Black America today. His interviewees included politicians, rappers, artists, ministers, and

academics. Their informed discussions offer invaluable perspectives.



Closing each chapter is a section of pertinent questions meant to inspire dialogue and create change on any level. If you wish to see the world through the eyes of others, I would recommend reading this book (call Number: 305.8 Gor). Hopefully, when we can meet in groups again, we might discuss some of

the questions raised, not only within our own community but inviting others to join in the conversation.

## LIBRARY ONLINE CATALOG—UPDATE

The company that maintains the Library's online catalog has moved it to a new server. If you access it by going through the Residents Association's Website you don't need to do anything.

However, if you have bookmarked it in your web browser or placed a shortcut on your desktop, you will need to update it. The easiest way is to click on your bookmark or your shortcut to bring up the database—it will automatically go to the database's new location. Then you just create a new bookmark or new shortcut and then delete the old one. Just in case you run into a problem, here is the new URL for the online database:

<https://cn3.libraryconcepts.com/?a=ForestAtDuke>  
You can copy and paste this into your browser and create your new bookmark or shortcut.

A win for us all. ♫



## Covid Cats

by Banks Anderson

### Prologue

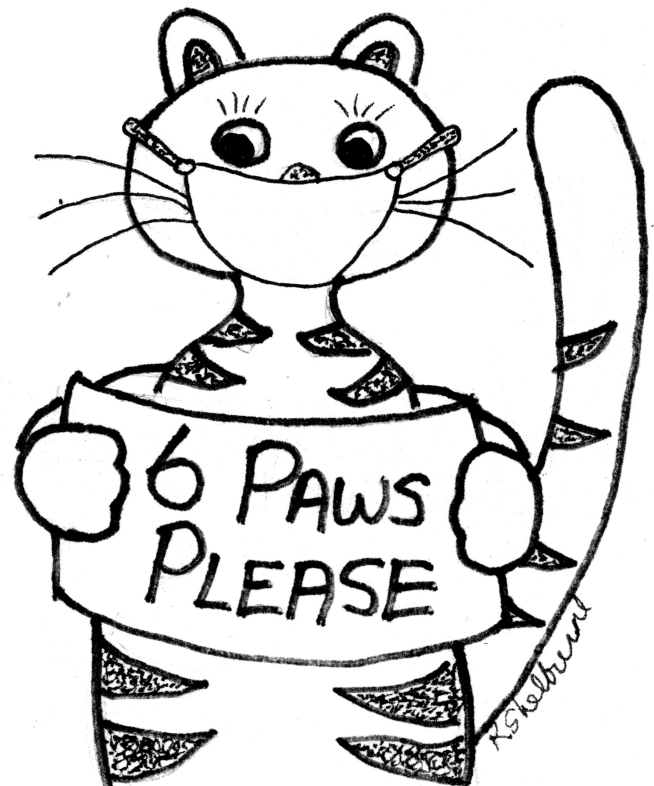
*Ailurophiles, I am one of those who says domestic cats are a big waste of fur. This is because I once was so allergic that the cats in TV Meow Mix ads caused me to sneeze and when I was courting my future wife, Nancy, her roommate's cross-eyed Siamese would attack my ankles from under their couch. You may tell me that "the fur will fly" because of this. I know what you mean because when I turned into my drive one night the headlights revealed the air to be full of fur with hair up as high as the second story. Two Toms with claws bared were fighting. It was awesome. Fur can fly. Cat lovers please sheathe your claws and indulge me in this bit of schadenfreude.*

Metropolitan New York early in 2020 was a world hotspot for the spread of the SARS CoV-2 virus causing Covid-19 disease. The Bronx zoo has a collection of big cats and a keeper developed Covid-19. About the same time their four-year-old Malaysian tiger, Nadia, developed a cough. The tiger did not seem sick but her cough was definitely unusual. She had been tended by that keeper who later developed Covid-19. The obvious question was did the tiger have Covid-19? Taking a nasal swab from a coughing tiger requires more than the usual personal protective gear. The tranquilizer gun was hauled out and, while Nadia was briefly sleeping, nasal samples were taken and sent to a Cornell lab. They tested positive for SARS CoV-2. In short order three other Bronx tigers and three lions developed coughs but none looked sick. Samples from their stools were positive for the virus as well as a sample from another asymptomatic tiger. All eight are doing well.

The University of Wisconsin in dairyland has one of the world's premier veterinary schools. Some of you may remember Warfarin, aka Dicumerol, aka Coumadin, the drug they discovered named for WARF, the Wisconsin Animal Research Foundation. Researchers there wondered that if big cats could be

infected by and shed human virus, could the same be true of little cats? There had been previous reports of SARS-CoV-2 in domestic cats. They inoculated three domestic cats with human virus. The results, reported in the May *New England Journal of Medicine*, were that the three cats were easily infected and within three days all were shedding virus. Moreover three well cats individually housed with each of the inoculated ones also quickly developed infections. By the sixth day, all six cats were shedding virus. Their shedding continued for six days. Cat to human transmission was not investigated and none has been documented ... YET. None of the six cats became seriously ill. All eventually tested negative and none died.

Although you might be a serious cat lover, I would advise you not to shelter in your household the cat of a friend who was taken to the hospital with Covid-19. I myself continue to practice social distancing with all cats. 🐾

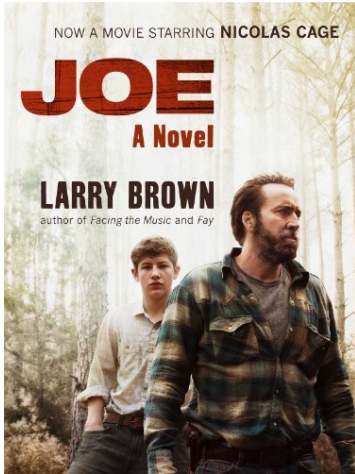


## BOOK REVIEW

## **Joe** **A Novel**

by Larry Brown  
(Algonquin Books, 1991, 360 pp.)  
by Judy Jo Small

Shannon Ravenel discovered the writer Larry Brown in 1987 when, as an editor for Algonquin Books, she read one of Brown's short stories in *The Mississippi Review*. Certain she'd found a great talent, she contacted him and helped launch his career, publishing his first collection of short stories, *Facing the Music*, plus several novels and nonfiction works.



One day recently, she lent me a copy of *Joe*. By the time I'd read the first dozen or so pages, the sheer power of Brown's writing had practically taken my breath away. The prose is direct, vivid, honest, neither sentimentalized nor sensationalized. This is stark realism, with pellucid descriptions of Southern landscape and pitch-perfect dialogue.

The story is gripping. *Joe* is set in rural Mississippi, in our own time. All the characters belong to the lower classes. Those with jobs sometimes work on and off. Others are defeated and debased. Economic hardship is general; some exist in direst poverty. Many rely on alcohol to dull their distress. Guns are part of their culture. Shootings happen.

At the most desperate level is the Jones family, destitute migrant workers who have picked crops in Texas, Florida, and Georgia. Homeless, they arrive and settle in a long-abandoned house. The father is brutal, vile, and violent. He beats his wife and children and scrounges, steals, and kills to get alcohol. He has sold their infant son, and the mother is despondent, broken. The older daughter awaits a chance to run

away. The younger daughter is mentally not right, unable to speak. The remaining son, Gary, is illiterate but honest and hardworking, determined to earn money to feed his family. He dreams of buying a car. He is a thoroughly sympathetic character, and the driving force of the plot is his relationship with Joe Ransom.

Joe works for Weyerhaeuser, a wood products company, leading a crew that kills trees with poison. He feels bad about killing trees but needs the money. He's a decent sort of guy, flawed but mostly likable. He's divorced from his wife, a waitress, because she couldn't stand his drinking and philandering. He refuses to change: as he says, "Ain't nobody gonna run my life for me." He has done time in the penitentiary for assaulting a cop and doesn't want to go back there but won't stop breaking laws when he feels like it. Still, he can be kind and generous. He gives Gary a job, buys food for Gary's family, sells him his old truck for a bargain price, and becomes something of a father figure for the boy. For a time it seems that Joe might "save" Gary. In one particularly lyrical passage, they are "two kindred souls."

The book ends with a shocking tragedy. Joe avenges a brutal crime by committing a crime that will almost surely land him back in the pen.

The reader is left thinking. How will Gary fare? What has Joe taught him? Not how to read, but how to have sex (with whores) and how to get drunk (while driving) (without a license). This portrait of backwoods Mississippi is also a portrait of a troubled America. The themes are poverty, economic inequity, the destruction of nature, gun violence, alcohol abuse, the justice system, neglect of children, abuse of women—and human nature. ¶

*Judy Jo Small, an English professor specializing in American literature, retired as Professor Emerita from North Carolina State University.*

## The Nobel Prize That Almost Was

by Don Chesnut

Professors of Medicine Robert Lefkowitz in 2012 and Paul Modrich in 2015 were awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry and to date are Duke's only Nobel prize winners. The present article shows that a kinder history could have provided Duke with its first Nobel Prize perhaps some 60 years earlier.

After Trinity College became Duke University in 1924, the task of the various departmental chairs was to build their departmental faculties. In the case of the Duke Chemistry Department, this job fell to Paul Magnus Gross who had come to Trinity College in 1919. Gross became well known in education and was a central figure in the early Duke administration. The Paul M. Gross Chemistry Building was named after him (later to be known as Gross Hall).

Starting with another Trinity College colleague (Robert Wilson), Gross built the department up to 12 full time faculty between 1928 and 1939. Two members of this group deserve special mention: Frances Brown and **Marcus Hobbs**. Frances Brown came to Duke in 1931, having earned her PhD at Johns Hopkins. She was the first woman faculty member in the department and likely one of a very few female faculty across the nation at that time. Marcus Hobbs was appointed to the faculty in 1935, having received all undergraduate and graduate degrees from Duke, and, indeed, spent his entire professional career at this university. Marcus served two terms as departmental chair, was provost, and was very instrumental in getting the Research Triangle and its institute (RTI) started. Marcus was a resident here at The Forest from 1993 to 2007. Of special note to us is the fact that Marcus' niece was married to Steve Fishler, Anita Holt's predecessor as TFAD's CEO and president.

This particular time in Duke's history is well documented in **Robert Durden's** excellent book *The Launching of Duke University 1924-1949* (Duke

University Press, Durham and London, 1993). Bob, too, was a resident of The Forest from 2000 until 2016.

But the most notable in this group and the point of emphasis for this article was Fritz London who was appointed Professor of Chemistry in 1939 and later held a joint appointment in the Department of Physics. London was internationally recognized at the time he came to Duke, best known at that time as the developer (along with Walter Heitler) of quantum mechanical valence-bond theory. London was also responsible for the quantum mechanical understanding of dispersion forces (later called London forces) that allowed neutral species to stabilize and form liquids and solids

London had been forced from his position at the University of Berlin by the Nazi regime, and before finally coming to Duke had spent time with Enrico Fermi in Rome, and at the Institut Henri Poincaré with Irène Joliot-Curie (Nobel prize in chemistry, 1935), daughter of Marie Skłodowska-Curie (Nobel prizes in physics, 1903, and chemistry, 1911).

London's attention turned more and more toward low temperature physics during the last half of his tenure at Duke. His emphasis on this field can be seen by noting his list of publications beginning around 1947. He was given a joint appointment with Physics in 1949 and, indeed, spent more and more of his time in the Physics Department rather than Chemistry. London was the first theoretical physicist to suggest that superfluidity was intrinsically related to the Bose-Einstein condensation. It has been said that his predictions on low temperature solids deeply influenced the development of the field of superconductors, quantum fluids and quantum solids.

London was made a James B. Duke Professor in 1953, the highest academic honor the university can

(Continued on Page 8)



## Nobel Prize...

(Continued from Page 7)

bestow, and was awarded the Lorentz Medal in the same year. The Lorentz Medal is a distinction awarded every four years by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Science; London was its fifth recipient. Eleven of the 23 award winners later received a Nobel Prize. The Fritz London Memorial Prize, first awarded in 1957, was created to recognize scientists who made outstanding contributions to the advances in the field of low temperature physics.

The Nobel Prize is not awarded posthumously. But most people who knew London and his work believe he would have been a worthy recipient had his life not been cut short at the relatively young age of 54. Rather than having to wait until the 2010s, Duke could well have had its first Nobel winner nearly 60 years earlier.

I close with a personal story that sheds some light on London's person. I was an undergraduate senior chemistry major at Duke in 1954 and a member of the Undergraduate Chemistry Club. On late Friday afternoons we had tea with the faculty in the main lobby and London, though his home was now mainly in Physics, usually came. His office in Chemistry was just inside the main front door off the lobby. It was a large office filled from top to bottom with books, as might well characterize that of a theoretical scientist. A small group of undergraduates was standing in the lobby with London on a particular Friday afternoon when one of our group in a very pleasant way said: "Professor London, I look in your office and see no test tubes or flasks nor any other chemical paraphernalia. What is it that you do?"

London, smiling, replied in a soft voice: "I think." And that he did! ☸

*Don Chesnut is Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at Duke and a frequent contributor to this newsletter.*

## TWENTY YEARS AGO IN THE FORESTER

### Old Folks Are Worth a Fortune

by Pauline Gratz

Old folks are worth a fortune. With silver in their hair, gold in their teeth, lead in their feet, and gas in their stomachs.

I have become a lot more social with the passing of the years. Some might call me a frivolous old gal. I'm seeing five gentlemen every day.

As soon as I wake Will Power helps me get out of bed. Then I go see John. Then Charley Horse comes along. When here, he takes a lot of my time and attention. When he leaves, Arthur Itis shows up and stays the rest of the day. He doesn't like to stay in one place very long so he takes me from joint to joint. After such a busy day I'm really tired and glad to go to bed—with Ben Gay. What a life!

P.S. The preacher came to call the other day. He said that at my age I should be thinking about the hereafter. I told him I do—all the time. No matter where I am—in the parlor, upstairs, in the kitchen, or down in the basement—I ask myself,

"Now, what am I here after?" ☸

[This piece was first published in *The Forester*, Volume 6, issue 9, June 2000, page 9]

### Pauline Gratz

Pauline Gratz (1924–2000) earned a doctorate from Columbia University in Human Ecology and Physiology and joined the Duke School of Nursing in 1969. She taught the renowned Human Ecology course of which a former student said, "Her exams were legendary; they took every minute of the three-hour allotment. You even had to study for her open-book tests." She was beloved by students and received the Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching Award an unprecedented two times—in 1975 and 1982. She retired as professor emerita in 1985, moved to The Forest in the mid 1990's, and almost immediately joined *The Forester* as an editorial assistant. She wrote a regular column "Here's to Your Health." Her last column and the above piece were published in June 2000, two months before her death.

The photo shows Pauline front and center in a 1980 protest march with students and faculty.



## Thank you, Kim and Steve!

by Shannon Purves

On September 25th, TFADers will wave goodbye to Kim and Steve Williams, wishing this very special couple all the best as they move from a combined 32 years of hard work on our behalf to a well-earned, happy retirement.

Planning to sell their house in Durham (Dunbarton), they are right now in the process of looking for the perfect spot in Landrum, SC, a quaint mountain town where Kim will be close to her daughter and grandkids and only about three hours drive from her mother, Jean Prevost. Where does Jean live? TFAD, natch!

How did The Forest become “home” to this family? How did two Yankees, both of whom had experienced very sad divorces, end up sharing a happy marriage to each other and two careers at a retirement community in North Carolina?

We'll start with Steve, who has the longer history at TFAD. Born in Detroit and raised in eastern Tennessee, he married young and raised four kids.

In the 1980s, he was living in Georgia where he co-owned a company that built and reconditioned equipment used in the petroleum industry. When he sold his share of the business to his co-owner, he and his family moved to Raleigh where his wife had accepted a position as a teacher. He remembers it was the year of the “hanging chad” in the 2000 presidential election. He took 30 days off before starting a job search in the Triangle. One day while driving through Durham, he happened to be on Pickett Road where he passed The Forest at Duke gates. He liked the looks of the place, backed up, turned into the entrance, checked in at the front desk, asked about jobs, was interviewed and hired on the spot by Jim Thompson. He has been part of the maintenance team ever since and, more recently, managing it.

And Kim? She was born in Methuen, MA, grew up in Andover, MA, moved to Tryon, NC, married a



southerner and raised one daughter. After divorcing, she was invited to visit an old friend, Margaret, at her house on the North Carolina coast. At the end of a nonstop seven-hour drive (Margaret's very poor driving directions) to Topsail Beach, she arrived at Margaret's house where she met Steve, another of Margaret's friends who was staying there while he renovated a neighbor's cottage. When she first saw him standing in the doorway of Margaret's den, Kim says she remembers saying to herself, “Whoa! That sure is one pretty guy!”

So that was the beginning. They spent three wonderful days together, then Steve went back to Durham and Kim returned home to Polk County. They had been dating long distance for about a year, when Kim gave up the long distance job search, and in 2008 found, through Steve, a great job in the accounting department at The Forest. They got married in 2009, and a year later, Kim persuaded her mother, Jean Prevost, to move to a fourth-floor apartment at TFAD.

Asked if they want to share a funny TFAD story before they leave us, Kim and Steve smile broadly at one another, then both reconsider and shake their heads. Kim says, “I signed confidentiality documents.” Steve compensates by saying, “Well, twice in my 20 years here, I dressed as a female—once as a female turtle dove, and once as a fashion model.” Oh, guys. How we will miss you! ☘



## CAROL'S CORNER

## Lauren Young

by Carol Oettinger

Lauren's many duties are grouped under the heading Digital Marketing Specialist. She is in charge of The Forest at Duke website/Facebook page. She writes articles and shares photos and items of interest about The Forest and people who live here—a pleasure to residents as well as attracting potential residents.

Lauren was born and grew up in Durham. She went to Northern High School and to Salem College in Winston Salem. She always knew she wanted to be a writer. She wrote for the college newspaper and the literary magazine. Her first job after college was as a front desk agent at a hotel in Raleigh. She moved to Cincinnati when the hotel transferred her to a branch to do the same work. She then went on to work at a

staffing agency for government military bases and health care facilities. Her favorite job, ever, was writing life books for children in foster care at Hamilton County Family Services.



She had met her husband, Mark, who lived in Cincinnati, on the internet when she was 14. They remained friends for ten years. During that time Mark had gone into the Navy and was stationed on submarines.

They met on the internet again and

Mark took leave to come meet Lauren in person. They decided to go on with long-distance dating until he got out of the Navy, after which he went back to school. When he finished, he got a job in Durham, and they were married here. They have two sons, Jeremy and Miles.

She found her TFAD job on the internet and came here in May of 2019. Lauren likes the work she is doing here and says, "The residents are my favorite part of the job." We are glad to have her here doing her numerous helpful things and being a loved part of our Forest Family. 🌿



# The Worship of God as Mother in Hinduism

by Umesh C. Gulati

*It is fitting in early June, a time between Mother's Day and Father's Day, holidays celebrating human parents, to consider how the familiar parental roles appear in religious traditions. Umesh Gulati provides examples from Hindu traditions in India.*

— The Editors

The Hindus of India look upon God not only as Father but also as Mother. The four major modern denominations of Hinduism (and their supreme deities) are Vaishnavism (Vishnu), Shaivism (Shiva), Shaktism (Devi), and Smartism (five co-equal deities). In the first two of these traditions the supreme deities are the males Vishnu and Shiva, in the third the female Devi, and, in the fourth, five co-equal male and female deities. But these supreme beings are not alone. For example, Vishnu has a consort, Lakshmi (Goddess of prosperity), who appears alongside him, and there are other deities in the tradition. The different deities represent different qualities of reality.

The male deities Vishnu and Shiva are father-like. They are masterful—watchful and just rulers that demand obedience. Vishnu means that which pervades everything, while Shiva means pure consciousness. The deities do not reside outside the cosmos, sitting behind the clouds, pointing out our sins, and handing down judgments. Rather, they are the support and inner guides of all beings.

In the *Sakta* tradition of Hinduism the supreme deity is Devi, the Divine Mother—sometimes with the different names Durga or Kali to convey distinctive qualities. Devi is conceived of as the universal *Sakti* or Primordial Energy, and the whole universe is the expression of that *Sakti*. She brings forth this world from within Herself, protects it, and finally reabsorbs it into Herself at the time of final dissolution.

The deities together become our very Soul. The Divine Mother is within our hearts. She is our very own, our *Atman* or Self (or Soul). Her love is unconditional. She cannot forsake Her children. That describes the Mother-heart of Devi. Because her quality pervades the universe, the Hindus call Her *Jagadamba*, the Mother of the world.

If God is love, as many scriptures say, then this value is present in all beings, but more intensely in the

females of all species, having the greatest courage to protect their offspring, even at the cost of their own lives. Therefore it makes great sense to visualize the Divine Mother as the embodiment of love. Sankaracharya, India's great eighth-century philosopher, sings in one of his hymns, "O Mother of the Universe, what wonder is there if You have full compassion on me who am enveloped in a succession of sins! For a mother never forsakes her son."

While biological motherhood is exclusively a feminine privilege, spiritual motherhood is the privilege of all humanity. The *Devi Mahatmayam*, the scripture that sings the glory of the Goddess, gives us this universal dimension of the mother-heart pulsating in the hearts of all men and women. One of the verses of that scripture sings, "That Devi, who exists in all beings as mother, I salute Her again and again." Another sings, "That Devi, who exists in all beings as compassion, I salute Her again and again."

The first step to obtain enlightenment is to become aware of our true nature, which according to Vedanta (a philosophy derived from the ancient texts of Upanishads) is divine and immortal. According to the Bhagavad-Gita (a Hindu scripture derived from the Upanishads), Atman (called sometimes Soul) is the real nature of all beings, human and otherwise. No weapon can cleave the Atman, nor fire burn it, nor water wet it, nor wind dry it. Because the qualities of each deity pervade the universe, the Atman or the Self of one is the same Self of all. Beings and things differ in names and forms only; the same Reality is the ground of their existence. In short, Vedanta proclaims the divinity of everything, unity in diversity, universal brotherhood of humankind and nature, and harmony among religions. ♀

*Umesh C. Gulati (M.A., University of Delhi, India; Ph.D., University of Virginia) worked as an economist for the government of India for eight years; taught economics, international business, and cross-cultural courses at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, for 32 years; and is now professor emeritus. Umesh and his wife, Usha, have been living at The Forest since 2012. Both are active at the Spiritual Center of the Vedanta Society of North Carolina.*



## Politics and Conversation

by Ellen Baer

There was an unwritten rule where I grew up: you don't talk about religion or politics in polite conversation, especially at the dinner table. Even when I was older, I continued to follow the rule out of habit or out of my own preference for avoiding conflict. The exception is when I'm in the company of like-minded people, and then religion and politics are favorite topics. The more like-minded the company is, the better, especially in this election year where so much divides us.

I was thinking these thoughts before the coronavirus struck with a vengeance, and now there's no problem with meal time conversation since the shared table has become a casualty of the virus; but we remember how it was. Once a week for several years I've had lunch with a group of women friends whose views mirror my own, and we talk about how good the folks on our side are and how bad the others are. We laugh at jokes about the other side, and, when we leave our echo-chamber and go back into society, we feel that this kind of validation is healthy and appropriate. But sometimes I wonder. Once, several years ago, my husband Phil, a veteran crossword puzzler, found a word that sent him to the dictionary. Now we run across it often. *Anomie* means "a collapse of the social structures governing a given society" and also "the alienation experienced by an individual or a group in such a situation."

My great-grandfather was a U.S. Senator back in the day when oratory was a skill and a virtue. He was a supporter of President Woodrow Wilson and his dream of world peace through a League of Nations. The debates on the issue were often contentious and sometimes heated. But typically lawmakers kept their language respectful, even elegant. Then, after vigorously opposing one another, they would often go have a drink together. I doubt that happens today when insults are more likely to cross the aisle than invitations. I won't even mention tweets because in great-grandfather's day they related only to birds and whistles.

The best prayers go beyond time and place, and here's one by Tom Ehrich, an Episcopal priest who used to write a column that appeared in the Durham newspaper. He offered a prayer for all of us before he

left North Carolina and moved to New York. "Where we don't agree, let the manner of our disagreeing be an example for overheated partisans to follow. Where we fail, let our confessions inspire contrition among the powerful. Where we succeed, let our humility give true credit. Where we cringe at the beliefs of others, let our tolerance and magnanimity show the way to peace."

The first time I read those words, I was thinking I should set an example for THEM to follow. But the truth is: I myself am an overheated partisan! I need to practice what the Buddhists call "deep listening," which is listening without arguing, while really trying to hear what the other is saying. This is the key to understanding, which is important whether or not it leads to agreement. I also need to practice the Buddhist principle of non-attachment to a particular outcome, because, if my candidates lose, I'm going to suffer a lot of anomie. But, no matter what happens, we are all going to need humility and tolerance and magnanimity—and the willingness to listen to people on the other side because, truthfully, there's no "us and them." We are one nation, so we are all us. Our interconnectedness has never been so great and so obvious as it is in these days of COVID-19. Our lives really are in each other's hands.

Long before his reputation was damaged by accusations of bad behavior, Garrison Keillor was one of America's favorite humorists and storytellers. I still like what he said in 2004 after that particularly divisive election. "What will reconcile us is what has always restored our sanity, and that is the plain pleasures of the physical world, our common love of coffee, the world of apples, the movement of birds, the lives of dogs... music, dancing to music..."

I hope we'll have dinner again, you and I. Maybe we'll disagree, but wouldn't it be wonderful to be together? Someday we may even dance. ☿

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