Time truly does fly. In my many years at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, so many weeks, months, and years have flown by that I’ve been tempted to take as routine and even commonplace the range and vigor of our work. But the VFH is not a common place. During the first week of our fall calendar of events, I recognized yet again that there are tremendous changes at work in our world because of this unique organization.

Let me begin with Sunday, September 12, and the Folklife Showcase, which took place in the VFH courtyard. This event, the seventh of its kind, is an energetic gathering of hundreds of musicians, dancers, tradition bearers, craftpeople, and guests that I look forward to every year. I was delighted, as I know many in our humanities community are, to share such a vibrant event with my colleagues, family, and friends and to welcome so many newcomers from throughout our Commonwealth. Folklife Program Director Jon Lohman’s work in bringing these talented Masters and Apprentices together never fails to astound (p. 4.). This Sunday also marked the end of the first week for our new fall class of VFH Fellows in Residence, nine scholars who represent diverse fields and projects, states and nations in their contributions to the humanities in the public interest (p. 9).

The following day, Monday, I chaired a panel at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in an extraordinary conference on the Fiftieth Anniversary of SETI, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. That’s right: the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence. My panel focused on how and when science, mystery, and epiphany intersect. This intense, scientific conference, commendably interested in diverse perspectives on science, concluded on Wednesday with three talks on cultural, societal, and scientific perspectives on SETI. My talk was on cultural perspectives, as you might expect. After three days of immersion in astronomy, astro-physics, astro-chemistry, astro-biology, and cosmology, I had considered more questions and learned more than one can imagine about the cosmos and the
interrelations between science and the humanities. We are well beyond what C.P. Snow labeled two cultures; the questions from one are questions for the other; the influences cut both ways. Quite frankly, the sciences are leading the way, but the opportunities for the humanities to engage the conversation should challenge us all, as we recall our childhood wonder, and occasional terror, about the universe and its truly unfathomable extent and size. We still only know as far as we can see.

On Tuesday, September 14, the Virginia Festival of the Book held its Fall Foreword tent party, again in the VFH courtyard. The Festival’s annual advisory meeting is a gathering place for writers, UVa faculty and staff, donors, publishers, and community volunteers who brainstorm and help set policy for the March event, which attracts crowds of more than 20,000 to our book discussions. The Virginia Festival of the Book is now recognized as a major feature in assessments of tourism, economic development, and education. I was still at the SETI conference in West Virginia and regret not hearing the “ooh” of the crowd when the 2011 Luncheon Speaker—Jim Lehrer—was announced. A day later, the Lehrer event, which is still six months away, was sold out (p. 8, VABook ticket information).

By Wednesday, September 15, With Good Reason aired another of its weekly shows to audiences throughout Virginia. The show, “Monticello’s Jewish Hero,” was about Commodore Uriah Phillips Levy, who rescued Jefferson’s famous and infamously indebted estate. The same week BackStory With the American History Guys (p. 10) re-aired in radio markets nationwide its topical show “Looking for Work: A History of Unemployment.”

Thursday, September 16, the Board of the Virginia Foundation convened. Our September meeting, a planning meeting, served as an orientation to the Foundation’s major areas of commitment: Grants and Public Programs, Scholarship and Education, and New Media and Publications. We welcomed three new members to our Board and our new Director of Development (p. 9).

The highlight of the Board Meeting for me was the presentation by Roberta Culbertson, distilled from her decades of work in the Violence and Community Program. Violence—an ultimately unmeasurable but psychologically pervasive part of our lives—needs the tools of the humanities (literature, cultural studies, history, comparative religion) to understand how it works. I salute Roberta’s tenure and commitment to this field of study, to which she has contributed much. Her presence at the VFH

A Week of Wonders!

Continued from cover

The VFH and our partners, friends, and constituents have been busy shaping our common human story, a complex story, with so many uncommon elements that one often wonders who can pull it together. That’s our special calling.

World champion oyster-shucker Deborah Pratt and sister Clementine Macon go to the mat at the 7th Annual Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Showcase.
will be deeply missed by all of us in 2011, when she plans to retire (p. 11). While the Board was meeting, work continued on the Moton Museum and VFH With Good Reason partnership, exploring the history and legacy of the strike by African American students at Robert R. Moton High School in 1951. The 60th anniversary of the strike will be next spring (p. 6).

On Saturday, September 18, the VFH Arts of the Book Center held its first open house in a brand new facility, located in Ivy Square Shopping Center. The printing studio will now expand daily access for members and the public. The VABC project has been ongoing for 15 years, steadily building membership and improving access to an entire history of printing and literature through its hands-on, working studio (p. 5). Also on that day, across the state in Newport News, an important new VFH-funded exhibit on the Watermen of the Chesapeake Bay opened at the Mariners’ Museum—the latest in a long series of VFH-supported projects exploring the communities that make up the Commonwealth of Virginia (p. 7).

Finally, on Sunday, September 19, I participated in a ceremonial opening of the Igbo Village exhibit at the Museum of American Frontier Culture in Staunton. The VFH helped this initiative along with a fellowship and a grant. That day I witnessed what became of our investment in a rich depiction of Virginia history. This public recognition of early African settlers of Virginia, an international gathering, honored distinguished Virginians of Igbo heritage and their contribution to early Virginia history (p. 5).

I began with recognition that with so much going on, time flies. The VFH and our partners, friends, and constituents have been busy shaping our common human story, a complex story, with so many uncommon elements that one often wonders who can pull it together. That’s our special calling. We continue to rely on you to help us do this work. Occasionally, when I have some time to take stock of how the VFH brings the world of ideas into the daily life of the Commonwealth, I glimpse the VFH and our time here as not just flying by...but soaring.
Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Showcase

The VFH courtyard was alive with traditional arts of Virginia for the 7th Annual Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Showcase. The Showcase brings together and celebrates masters and apprentices of a wide variety of traditional folkways from across the Commonwealth for a day of music, crafts, food, and fellowship. The Showcase serves to honor those who have just completed their apprenticeships and welcome artists about to begin, as well as creating a fertile space for cross-cultural connection and a unique audience experience.

Hundreds of folks came out to taste Brunswick Stew, take in the crafts and music, and cheer on their favorite in an oyster-shucking rematch.

The Virginia Folklife Apprenticeships pair masters with apprentices for an intensive nine-month partnership to pass on Virginia’s cherished folkways. For more information, please visit VirginiaFolklife.org.

2010-11
Master & Apprenticeship Teams

Menhaden Chantey Singing
MASTERS: Elton Smith Jr., Edward Taylor, William Muse, Lloyd Hill, & James Carter
APPRENTICE: Lewis R. Blackwell Jr.
KING AND QUEEN COUNTY

Clawhammer Banjo
MASTER: Emily Spencer
APPRENTICE: Amanda Spencer
GRAYSON COUNTY

Galax-Style Dulcimer
MASTER: Phyllis Gaskins
APPRENTICE: Blue O’Connell
ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

Grist Milling
MASTER: Bill Savage
APPRENTICE: Bob Savage
ACCOMACK COUNTY

Persian Classical Music
MASTER: Nader Majd
APPRENTICE: Ali Analouei
FAIRFAX COUNTY

Flatpick Guitar
MASTER: Steve Kilby
APPRENTICE: Leah Hall
GRAYSON COUNTY

Instrument Making
MASTER: Randall Eller
APPRENTICE: Jonathan Plowman
SMYTH COUNTY

Traditional Forestry
MASTER: Jason Rutledge
APPRENTICES: Melanie Carrier and Adam B. Greene
FLOYD COUNTY

FROM TOP:
Persian classical music apprentice and tambak player Behnaz Bibizadeh.
Master of traditional forestry Jason Rutledge with his apprentice Melanie Carrier, his son, and one of the Suffolk draft horses they breed and work.
The Northern Neck Chantey Singers demonstrate the net-raising work songs of traditional Menhaden fishing.
Cheryl Maroney-Beaver of the Richmond gospel group Maggie Ingram and the Ingramettes rocks the house.

Photos by Peter Hedlund
Igbo Farm Village Dedication
SEPTEMBER 17-19 • FRONTIER CULTURE MUSEUM, STAUNTON

BY DOUGLAS R. CHAMBERS
Associate Professor of History and Editor, The Southern Quarterly
University of Southern Mississippi

In 2005, the year my first book, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia* came out, I was contacted by the Frontier Culture Museum to serve as an advisory scholar for their ambitious new project to interpret a traditional Igbo farm village at this remarkable living-history museum in the Shenandoah Valley.

I have always had an interest in public history, and my 1997 VFH fellowship had helped me hone the larger story of the Igbo Diaspora to the Chesapeake by focusing on the connections with James Madison's Montpelier and its extended slave community. It is worth noting that when the Frontier Culture Museum turned to interpreting the lives of enslaved Africans who settled the backcountry, they resisted the facile temptation to install an “African” farm for the “Africans” from “Africa” and instead applied the same level of historical specificity and attention to detail as for its other interpretive farms, which is the museum’s hallmark. I like to think that my research on the importance of Igbo in early Virginia history, which the VFH supported at a critical moment in my early career, and my scholarly work since, helped provide the research basis for selecting Igbo to interpret the contributions of Africans to early American history.

At the dedication ceremony, it was a proud moment for me, both as a historian and as a Virginian (currently displaced to Mississippi), to see how our academic work—so often publicly undervalued in these tough budgetary times—can have a real impact on the public and on our shared civic life. The Igbo Farm Village is now a “site of memory,” and I am proud that I had a small part to play in helping it come alive.

Please visit the Frontier Culture Museum to learn more about the Igbo Farm Village and visit their website for more information: FrontierMuseum.org/Westafrica.html.

Virginia Arts of the Book Center Takes New Step

BY KEVIN MCFADDEN

If you’ve attended the annual VABC Raucous Auction—now a regular feature of the autumn art scene in Charlottesville—perhaps you’ve seen or even purchased a print professionally mounted by Creative Framing/The Art Box. The VABC has taken a new step with these longtime business sponsors, suppliers, and supporters…we’ve moved in!

In August, the VABC, a community of artists and writers that offers programming within the VFH Center for the Book, moved its presses and equipment to the Ivy Square Shopping Center to occupy a new creative space (“Art on Ivy”) in the former site of the Art Box, just downstairs from the store’s new location. This nonprofit/for-profit partnership now offers expanded hours and public access so that the VABC can better fulfill its mission as a hands-on art and humanities studio.

The convenience of finding paper, printing supplies, and framing expertise just upstairs is already a hit with the membership. The space features an attractive, newly remodeled gallery and classroom area that the general public should see for the first time at the November 12 Raucous Auction. Consult the website, VirginiaBookArts.org, for event and workshop information. Or drop by!
The Moton Student Strike: 60 YEARS LATER
BY DAVID BEARINGER

In April 1951, a group of African American students at Robert R. Moton High School in Prince Edward County organized a strike to protest the inferior and substandard school facilities provided for the county’s black students.

Attorneys with the NAACP filed suit on their behalf, not merely to gain improved school facilities for these students, but as a broader challenge to the prevailing “separate but equal” doctrine; and thus to the laws and customs that supported segregated public education throughout the South.

The long chain of events that followed led to the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954; to the five-year closing of the public schools in Prince Edward County beginning in 1959; and ultimately, to the desegregation of public schools both in Virginia and nationwide.

The story of the student strike and its aftermath is one of the great stories of Virginia’s history—a story of courage, strength, and persistence against what seemed at the time like overwhelming odds. For more than two decades, the VFH has worked to help make sure this story is universally known—and its meaning understood—by all Virginians.

Much of this work has been done in partnership with the Robert R. Moton Museum in Farmville, where a new permanent exhibit of national stature will open on the 60th anniversary of the strike. The Museum is located in the former high school building where the events of April 1951 took place.

In preparation for this anniversary, VFH and the Moton Museum are working in partnership to produce two With Good Reason radio features exploring the history of the student strike and its legacy.

The first of these two half-hour programs will focus on the strike itself, its leader Barbara Johns, the orchestrated legal challenge to segregated public education, and the period of “massive resistance” to court-ordered desegregation from 1954-1959.

The second program will focus on the personal decisions that families in Prince Edward were forced to make, once the County made its decision to close the public schools; the costs borne by individuals and families, white and black; the power of citizens (in this case, teenage children) to effect change; the long-term impact of these events on race relations in Prince Edward; and the role of the Museum in interpreting this difficult history in the present day.

Following their broadcast as With Good Reason features, the two programs will be edited into a single one-hour show suitable for nationwide broadcast and made available to public radio stations throughout the country.

Elliot Majerczyk, the Associate Producer of With Good Reason, will produce these programs in cooperation with Moton Museum Director (and former VFH Board member) Lacy Ward and other members of the VFH Media Programs staff.

The roots of this project reach back to a series of interviews, recorded by VFH at the dedication of the Civil Rights Memorial on Capitol Square in Richmond in July 2008 (see VFH Views, Fall 2008); several of those who were interviewed then will also be featured in the upcoming programs.

As the Civil Rights Movement was taking shape nationally, local events in Virginia were helping to define it. And these events, in turn, were being shaped by the transformation that was happening nationwide.

But at the same time, what happened at Moton in the spring of 1951 is, essentially, the story of a community and the forces that divided it—a story about change of monumental scope that began in a high school auditorium, and about the impact of these events on a small rural county and the people who lived there.

With Good Reason programs are broadcast each week on all public radio stations serving Virginia. Check the VFH website for information on broadcast times for these and other With Good Reason programs, VirginiaFoundation.org.

ABOVE: Barbara Rose Johns was sixteen years old when she organized a student walkout at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia.
Photo courtesy of the Richmond Times-Dispatch and Encyclopedia Virginia

RIGHT: The Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville was built in 1939 to accommodate 180 students. It was the first public school for black students in Prince Edward County.
Photo courtesy of the Richmond Times-Dispatch and Encyclopedia Virginia
It’s a tricky business, setting out to represent a group of people and a way of life by photographing them; and the pitfalls are many, especially when the photographer is not part of the community he (or she) is trying to represent.

So much has been written in recent years about the watermen of the Chesapeake region, and about the pressures—economic and otherwise—that are making life and work on the waters of the Bay and its tributaries more and more difficult every year.

By now, most of us have probably heard that harvests are down; regulations are increasing; and that many third, fourth, fifth-generation watermen (and women) are leaving behind a way of life they love and would gladly continue if they could.

Some people think this is a tragic loss. Others say it’s just inevitable change.

Some believe the watermen are victims—of poor land-use upstream, of lawmakers and bureaucrats in Richmond and Washington, of people who don’t know the water or understand the cycles of life. Others think the watermen have brought it on themselves, by over-harvesting.

The truth is elusive and complicated. It’s easy to form opinions, and it’s also easy to be confused.

Most of all, it’s easy for the rest of us to know to tumble into the quicksand of nostalgia and sentiment. It’s as easy as it is dangerous to romanticize, to create monolithic images—stereotypes—of the watermen based on thin slices of “information” about them and on what we imagine, or would like to imagine, a group of people to be.

One antidote to this, maybe the only antidote to it, is to look past (or beneath) the monolithic images, beyond the stereotypes, at the lives and the faces of individuals—in this case, of individual watermen. And that’s what makes a new exhibit of photographs by Glen McClure currently on display at the Mariner’s Museum in Newport News so important—and so unusual.

VFH supported this exhibit and a related publication with a grant awarded in June 2010. It includes sixty-five portraits, some printed larger than life-size, depicting watermen and women from nineteen communities around the Chesapeake Bay (fifteen of them in Virginia), together with short biographical sketches that reveal something of each waterman’s personal story.

McClure says the idea for this exhibit actually came to him back in 2002, when he was in Chincoteague, on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, photographing for another documentary project called A Random Portrait of Virginia.

Eventually, he began working with Bob Behr of the Chincoteague Cultural Alliance and with Neil Kaye, the co-founder of the Tangier Island Museum & Interpretive Cultural Center, and later with the staff of the Mariners’ Museum as the project picked up momentum.

Behr and Kaye were both instrumental in working with VFH to create the Eastern Shore Museums Network; and the Mariners’ Museum has received several grants from VFH in the past.

This collaboration between the Chincoteague Cultural Alliance, the Museum on Tangier Island, and the Mariners’ is in itself unusual, and one of several reasons we were drawn to support the exhibit project.

The results are extraordinary. McClure’s photographs are impressive—technically, and in the ways they reveal and respect the character of the individuals they represent.

The strength of these portraits is undeniable. Together, they bring the rest of us as close as we can probably ever come to an understanding of who the watermen of the Chesapeake really are, and of the lives they’ve chosen.

They also break old stereotypes of The Watermen to smithereens.

The exhibit, Endangered Species: Watermen of the Chesapeake, A Photographic Journey by Glen McClure will be on display through May 2011 at the Mariners’ Museum. After that, it will travel to Tangier Island, Chincoteague, and other communities around the Bay.
Virginia Festival of the Book celebrates seventeenth year

By Susan Coleman

The 17th annual Virginia Festival of the Book will bring together writers and readers once again this spring, March 16-20, 2011. Festival organizers are planning a full range of events for readers of all ages throughout Charlottesville, Albemarle County, the University of Virginia, and Piedmont Virginia Community College.

As always, most events are free and open to the public. Whether you are a fan of poetry, short stories, mysteries, fiction, or children’s books, the Book Festival has something for readers of all ages. Annual favorite events will return, including Publishing Day, with a series of programs focusing on the publishing world; the Crime Wave programs featuring mystery and thriller writers; and Saturday StoryFest for children and their families.

Tickets for select events such as the popular Crime Wave Luncheon, featuring Kathy Reichs (author of the Temprance Brennan “Bones” series), the Leadership Breakfast (formerly called the Business Breakfast) with David Shenk (The Genius in All of Us), and the Authors Reception are available online at VABook.org. The Festival Luncheon with Jim Lehrer (author of 20 books, including his most recent, Super) is sold out, but hopeful ticket buyers can place their names on the wait list (see sidebar).

Additional speakers will be announced in early December. After the new year, author and schedule information will be updated frequently on the VABook.org website, so keep returning to see what’s new. You can also subscribe to the Festival’s e-news by clicking on “About VAbook” on the website. And become a Facebook friend of the Festival to get some inside scoops on the schedule!

Keep watching online at VABook.org for more details. See you at the Festival!

TICKETED EVENTS
Purchase online at VABook.org

Festival Luncheon with Jim Lehrer
Thursday March 17th • 11:45 AM
Tickets sold out.
Festival is accepting names on the wait list.
Sponsored by the Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport

Crime Wave Luncheon with Kathy Reichs ($50)
Saturday, March 20 • Noon
Sponsored by Read It Again, Sam Bookstore

Leadership Breakfast with David Shenk ($30 or $350/table)
Wednesday March 17 • 7:30 AM
Sponsored by Northwestern Mutual Financial Network
Media Sponsor WHJ The Community Idea Station

Authors Reception ($35)
Saturday March 19 • 6 PM
Sponsored by The Miller School of Albemarle

You can also subscribe to the Festival’s e-news by clicking on “About VAbook” on the website. And become a Facebook friend of the Festival to get some inside scoops on the schedule! Keep watching online at VABook.org for more details.

The Leadership Breakfast, formerly the Business Breakfast, will be a chance for community leaders to network and enjoy a topical author.
We all enjoy and benefit from the VFH. What we enjoy and how we benefit depends on our specific interests, locale, or affiliation. We have another common opportunity: to share in the VFH’s present and future vitality by contributing to The Annual Fund.

Gifts to The Annual Fund provide critical, unrestricted support statewide, across all VFH needs and programs. Many VFH donors provide restricted support for specific programs. Now we need to build a broad base of supporters who give unrestricted support for all programs and operations. Broad participation in The Annual Fund has become a requirement of all foundations and corporations considering major initiatives.

This year, the VFH Annual Fund goal is $100,000 in unrestricted gifts and a significant increase in new supporters. When you review the enclosed Honor Roll of Donors, you will be proud of their high regard for VFH programs and their extraordinary generosity. To join The Annual Fund, please use the enclosed envelope or visit our website at VirginiaFoundation.org.

Become a part of The Annual Fund—our crucial common ground.

VFH Welcomes New Board Members

Ted DeLaney, a fourth-generation native of Rockbridge County, Virginia, was born and reared in Lexington, Virginia, earned a bachelor’s degree from Washington and Lee University, and his Ph.D. from the College of William and Mary. During academic year 2009-2010, Ted was a Fellow at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities where he worked on his manuscript about school desegregation in western Virginia. He is presently an Associate Professor and Chair of the Washington & Lee University Department of History, and is also the Harry E. and May Jayne W. Redenbaugh Term Professor. Ted is particularly interested in the history of discrimination in the United States.

Dr. Emma Violand-Sánchez retired in July 2007 from the Arlington Public Schools and now serves on many public boards and councils, including the Arlington School Board, the Commonwealth of Virginia Council on the Status of Women, the Virginia School Boards Association, and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. She received a senior scholar Fulbright Award as a consultant for educational reform in Bolivia and was the recipient of the James Hunter III Human Rights Award. Emma earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Radford University and her Ph.D. from George Washington University.

VFH 2010 Fall Fellows, their affiliations, and projects are (front row, from left to right) Deborah Lee, Public Historian and Independent Scholar, Trouble the Water: Antislavery Activism in the Upper Potomac Borderland; William Freehling, VFH Senior Fellow, Lincoln’s Growth—and America’s; Drew Smith, Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Black Churches, Political Influence, and the New Public Square; Beth Taylor, Independent Scholar, Paul Jennings and the Right to Rise; Corinne T. Field, UVa, The Politics of Adulthood in America, 1792-1939; Michael Jarvis, University of Rochester, At the Crossroads of the Atlantic: Bermuda and the Beginnings of English America; Paula Seniors, Virginia Tech, For Freedom Now: African American Woman Racial Activists (1958-1994); Mae Mallory, the Monroe Defense Committee and African American Woman Soujourner’s of the Grenadian and Nicaraguan Revolution; Martien Halvorson-Taylor, UVa, The Pharaoh’s Palace and the Bed of Ahasuerus: Memory, Diaspora and Identity in the Hebrew Bible; and Marika Preziuso, University of London, Mapping the Lived-Imagined Caribbean: Postcolonial Geographies.

Elizabeth Piper joined the VFH as Director of Development on October 6. She previously served as UVA’s Associate Director of Development, Historic Preservation, where she created a major giving program for historic preservation at the University. Prior to her work in historic preservation, she was Senior Leadership Gifts Manager at the San Francisco Opera, and Corporate Events Fundraising Director at the American Heart Association in Oakland and San Francisco. She graduated from UVA with a B.A. in history. Elizabeth is a native of Baltimore, MD, and a champion of the arts on both local and national levels. Among her passions are hiking, gardening, Virginia wine, and her Corgi dog.
That’s it for our show. But as always, the conversation continues online. Visit our website and tell us how your grandparents, and their parents, met one another. And while you’re there, tell us what topics you’d like to hear us explore on future shows….”

So ends another episode of BackStory with the American History Guys, the VFH-based public radio program that explores the historical context of contemporary issues. But in the same breath, another episode is born. After airing this particular show (a Valentine’s Day special about “bundling” in Puritan New England, a sampling of 19th century personal ads, and a scholarly interview about the origins of “dating”), one listener suggested a show about the deep background of evolution vs. creationism debates. The idea sat well with BackStory’s historian-hosts, Peter Onuf (“18th Century Guy”), Ed Ayers (“19th Century Guy”), and Brian Balogh (“20th Century Guy”). “In the Beginning: Science and Religion in America” was broadcast this fall.

BackStory looks to its audience not as passive receptors, but as active participants in the production process. When a new show topic is agreed upon, producers post a description of its main themes on the show’s website, along with an appeal for additional questions from listeners. Similar appeals are posted to Facebook, Twitter, and outside listservs and blogs. The producers cull through the feedback and invite authors of the most interesting questions to join the History Guys on the phone when the show is recorded.

The explosion of Web 2.0 has created new opportunities for audiences to participate in the creation of the media they consume; in the case of BackStory, it helped create that audience in the first place. The program benefits enormously from the popularity of podcasting. Despite Backstory’s radio roots, most episodes have been downloaded between 20,000 and 40,000 times, and through collaborations with HISTORY.com, the Virginia Department of Education, and ITunesU, thousands of high school teachers are receiving special BackStory podcasts created specifically for classroom use.

BackStory’s emphasis on web-based production and distribution does not come at the expense of its commitment to terrestrial broadcasting. Individual episodes have aired on nearly 200 public radio stations, including stations in more than half of the nation’s top 50 radio markets. But as Americans of all ages turn increasingly to the Internet for all their media needs, the BackStory team will be waiting with open arms. After all, they believe that the program’s central mission—to make the study of history relevant and accessible to a broad range of listeners—is not simply a matter of tone; it is also a matter of technology.

Listen to “A 100-Mile Thanksgiving” at WithGoodReasonRadio.org.
Dear Friends,

After more than 21 years at the VFH, I will begin training in 2011 for a new career as a hospital and hospice chaplain.

I am proud of my years at the VFH, and deeply grateful for a life lived among respectful, kind, and brilliant people. I am grateful for my many chances to grow up here, and for the opportunity to research violence from a humanities perspective.

When the VFH took on the study of violence, everyone from NEH grant reviewers to Board members said, “You’re doing psychology and social work, not what we do here!” But Rob Vaughan and a few Board members stood by the topic as important, even if they were not sure where we could take it. Then, as people from around the world came here to study violence as “scholars of their own experience,” the case became clear: the humanities—history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, and cultural studies—are the very language of survival, and tell the truth of violence. If we want to know violence fully, not only its phenomenology and its pathologies but its nature, we must look to the humanities, where survivors pose and wrestle with the questions violence burns into their hearts and minds. When one’s world collapses, when one is in desperate pain at the hands of another, when fear and hatred rule the day, only humanities questions are relevant: who am I in this world? What must I do?

I count myself among the very lucky few in the world: I have worked in a place that has made a difference. However small our steps have been, the VFH has helped to open the new field of violence studies, and has focused that field on the humanities. In a world fragmenting into warlords on one hand and hegemony on the other, with cash, scarcity, and weapons in between, the humanities just might keep us sane, if not safe.

I know William Carlos Williams is right:

It is difficult

to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

—from “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower”

The years I have spent at the VFH have been like those in which I raised my children: full of thought and challenges, and mistakes, but also forward movement. They have gone by almost as quickly. My years here have defined my adulthood, and allowed me to contribute to the world of ideas and emotions to which I long ago committed myself. They have even let me grow older in a gentle mountain place not unlike my grandmother’s. I would never ask for more. Slap me if I do.

— Roberta A. Culbertson
Director, Center on Violence and Community

Please write, call, or email for a copy. TTC, as it is affectionately known, is a publication for those facing difficult times. A collection written by those who have known such times and sought to figure them out, or to help others understand what happens, TTC offers insight, inspiration, and even hindsight.

TTC 3 is our largest ever, and features several well-known poets from across the nation, as well as some who are published here for the first time. Here are beautiful poems, thoughtful essays, and heartfelt discoveries; here are also powerful photographs to enlighten, lift, and brace the soul. We are deeply grateful to the nationally known photographers who have allowed us to combine their work with prose in ways that deepen both.

TTC is offered free of charge to hospitals, clinics, women’s shelters, prisons, veterans’ centers, and other places where people facing tough times find themselves. They are also made available through the VFH to individuals. TTC is made possible by donations; if you would like to help us print more and look forward to more issues, please donate to the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. For more information on TTC, e-mail vfhinfo@virginia.edu or call 434-924-3296.

Alhazen of Basra

If I could travel a thousand years back to August 1004, to a small tent where Alhazen has fallen asleep among books about sunsets, shadows, and light itself, I wouldn’t ask whether light travels in a straight line, or what governs the laws of refraction, or how he discovered the bridgework of analytical geometry; I would ask about the light within us, what shines in the mind’s great repository of dream, and whether he’s studied the deep shadows daylight brings, how light defines us.

— Brian Turner
from Tough Times Companion
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