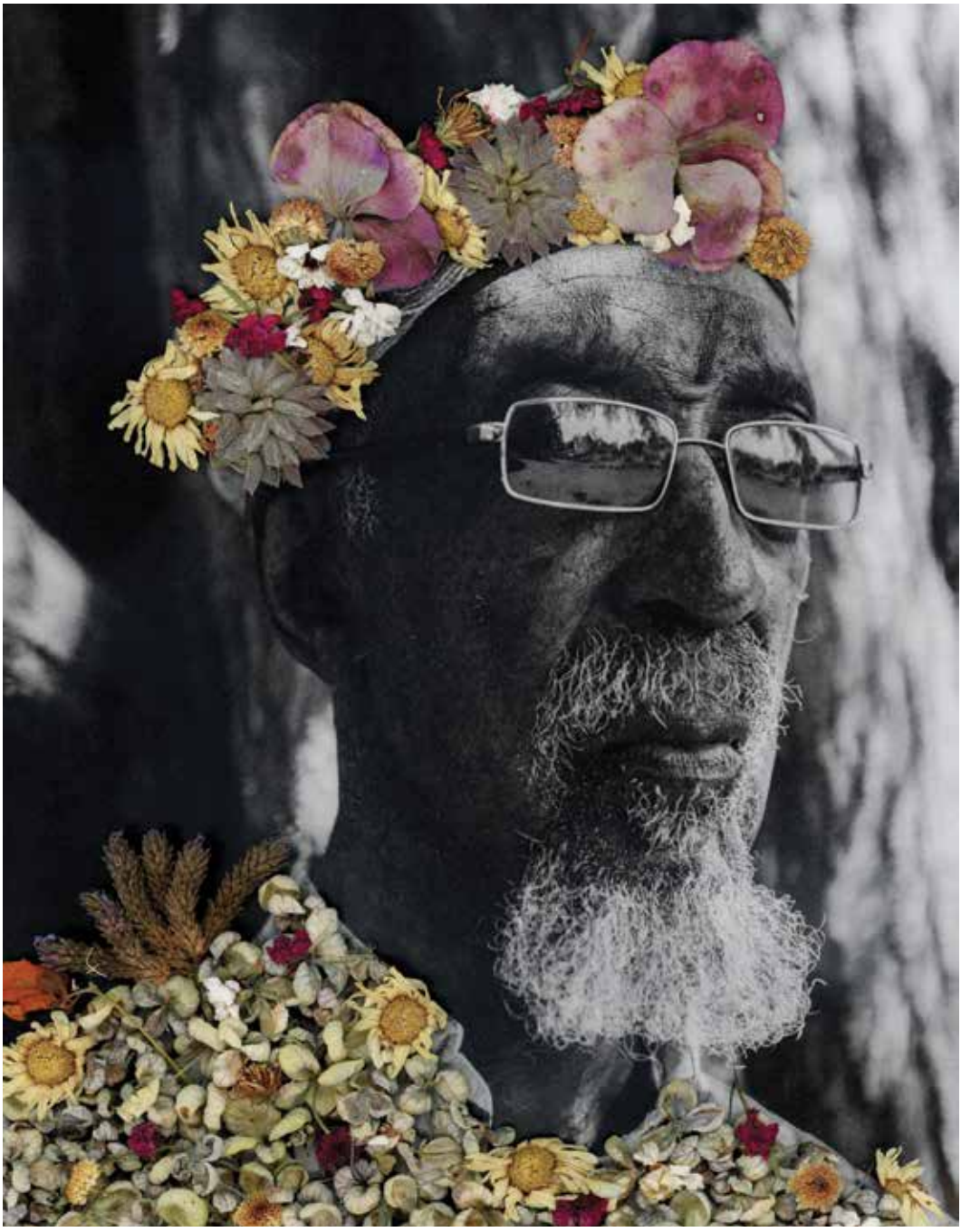
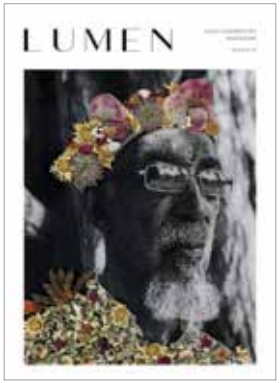
LUMEN

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MAGAZINE

Volume IV





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COVER ART BY DA'SHAUNAE MARISA

Lumen (ISSN 2998-1751) is a publication of Ohio Humanities, a nonprofit dedicated to sharing stories, sparking conversations and inspiring ideas.

Lumen aims to build and foster community through thoughtfully curated storytelling that shows the humanities at play today, highlights noteworthy humans throughout Ohio and dares to examine big questions and ideas.

It is an annual, free publication available at organizations statewide and by subscribing at ohiohumanities.org. All rights reserved.

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PHOTO BY AMY CARRUTHERS

The Importance of Memory

I recently stood in the heart of Montgomery, Alabama, where statues of Civil Rights icons grace a courtyard at The Legacy Sites. It's a collection of spaces where visitors can engage with America's history of slavery, lynching, segregation and mass incarceration, so that we can strive to more fully realize the democratic promise articulated by our Founding Fathers.

In Legacy Plaza, Rosa Parks is permanently levitating, as though she is still sitting on that bus seat she so courageously refused to vacate. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is depicted as the old man he might have become, reminding us to think about a world where he had not been assassinated so young. Plaques detail their leadership roles in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which history books consider the official start of the Civil Rights Movement.

The importance of the bus boycott and their roles as changemakers cannot be understated. Standing there pondering it made me think about the Lincoln School Marchers of Hillsboro, Ohio.

They began a daily, two-mile march to desegregate their public elementary schools more than a year before the bus boycott began. They then continued that daily march every day of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and for another five months after the bus boycott ended, ultimately accomplishing the longest sustained action of the Civil Rights Movement. Our first issue of Lumen was dedicated to the 19 mothers and 37 children who pursued this courageous effort more than 70 years ago.

Why do Americans collectively remember the Montgomery Bus Boycott and not the Lincoln School Marchers? Because for the latter, until very recently, nobody had funded the work of remembering, of capturing and sharing stories, of recognizing, of honoring.

Then, Ohio Humanities, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and private supporters like you, produced *The Lincoln School Story*, a documentary film that has now aired on PBS stations across America. It was made possible because staff and volunteers spent countless hours organizing the marchers, recording oral histories, gathering research, digitizing moldy documents and telling the marchers' stories in a variety of mediums that are now accessible to audiences across the world.

Today, our ability to preserve Ohio's stories — our memories — is in peril.

In April 2025, the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) abruptly cancelled all operating grants for the state humanities councils — funding that comprises a significant portion of our budget and has been statutorily mandated by Congress for more than 50 years to ensure that tax dollars come back to communities. It is because of this funding that we know about the Lincoln School Marchers. This is a tremendous point of pride for our state.

With these funds, we distribute hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants each year to every corner of the state, ensuring everyday Ohioans have access to low-cost and no-cost public humanities experiences. These grants support immersive living history experiences for schoolchildren, exhibitions about Ohio's World War II heroes, documentary filmmakers who bring to life stories about our shared human connection and much more. No private funder can be compelled to support every Congressional district, every county and every community: This is why public funding for the humanities is crucial.

Ohio Humanities is the only statewide funder dedicated to amplifying the extraordinary stories that define Ohio's history, culture and people. We are the state's chief storyteller, and we take that responsibility seriously.

In this issue of Lumen, we explore memory. We chose this theme more than a year ago, before we could have imagined the current challenges. Yet the theme is perfect for this moment. You will learn about a story of Holocaust survival that cascades through generations. You will meet 87-year-old artist, community leader and educator Bing Davis. You will read first-person accounts of a 9-11 hero, a grieving mother and a physician working with Alzheimer's patients.

Memory within the individual is ephemeral, fleeting. It morphs over time to become an unreliable narrator of the past. But our collective memory can be assured when we record our stories — in documentaries, exhibitions, podcasts and publications like Lumen — not just to preserve our past, but so we may face our future armed with the knowledge and experiences of those who came before us.

Rebecca Asmo
Executive Director, Ohio Humanities

There are thoughtful, brilliant humans sparking conversations and inspiring ideas statewide and beyond. Here, get personal with three of them.

By Kristy Eckert

HUMANITIES AT PLAY







3 PEOPLE TO KNOW



How do you find a needle in a haystack? Burn it down. That's the concept behind the Burned Haystack Dating Method.

It's a method developed by Jennie Young that helps women and nonbinary people navigate online dating, and it's become a worldwide phenomenon: More than 145,000 people participate in Young's active Facebook group, she's been featured in media from Newsweek to HuffPost, and her book, Burn the Haystack!*, is forthcoming from HarperCollins in 2026.*

Young is a longtime Ohioan who earned her doctorate from Case Western Reserve University and taught at The University of Akron and Tiffin University before heading to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, where she is a professor of English, rhetoric and women/gender studies.

In short, Young's Burned Haystack method suggests that when dating, narrowing out the wrong men may be the best way to find the right man. To help "burn" the haystack, she teaches women how to use rhetorical patterns to decipher deeper meanings behind the words men use on their dating app profiles and in texted conversations.

"There's a layer beneath the words," she says on her website. "We can unlock it, and we can decode it. And then things open up."

JENNIE YOUNG

WHAT LIGHTS YOU UP?

Anything to do with linguistic analysis, hence *Burned Haystack!* I'm thrilled that I've been able to take something I love to do anyway and invite a bunch of other women into dialogue about it in a way that benefits all of us.

WHAT FRUSTRATES YOU?

People working against their own best interests when it doesn't even help anyone else.

> I WANT TO USE MY ACADEMIC EXPERTISE TO HELP WOMEN LIVE BETTER LIVES.
> —JENNIE YOUNG

WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH?

I love satire, especially social satire, like *McSweeney's* and *The Onion*.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL MISSION ARE YOU ON?

I want to use my academic expertise to help women live better lives. That's what we're trying to do through Burned Haystack, and to say I'm obsessed with the mission is an understatement.

WHAT PERSONAL MISSION ARE YOU ON?

Ditto from above. I know I should have a different answer for this one, but I truly don't.

WHY IS HUMAN CONNECTION SO IMPORTANT?

Because, number one, it's literally what makes us human, and number two, there are a lot of technologies threatening to impersonate or replace it right now. I notice that my students are intentionally confronting and pushing against this: They're putting their phones down, they're going for walks, they're teaching each other to knit. This brings me hope.

WHAT WORK THAT YOU'VE DONE ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT, AND WHY?

What I'm involved with in Burned Haystack right now has been and continues to be the highlight of my career so far.

WHO DO YOU LOVE TO LEARN FROM?

My students and the women in Burned Haystack.

WHY DO YOU LOVE OHIO?

I love the Midwest in general, for its people and its landscape and its groundedness and its unassuming nature. Ohio embodies all of that.

WHAT ARE YOU CERTAIN IS TRUE?

I think the only thing I'm certain of is that absolute certainty should probably be questioned.

IF THERE IS A SINGLE MISSION YOU COULD MOBILIZE PEOPLE AROUND, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Better and more equitable public education. I believe that it's the origin point for a healthy society, and right now in America, we need to rethink some things.

IF PEOPLE DEFINED YOU WITH ONE WORD, WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT WORD IS?

I'm sorry, I could never pick one word. My whole life is about words, and I can't choose among them. It would be like picking a favorite child and then letting someone publish it!



MIKE TURNER

As mayor of Dayton, Mike Turner helped revitalize the city's downtown, from renovating the Schuster Center to bringing in the Dayton Dragons. Then, he moved on to Congress, where he advocates for southwest Ohio and plays an integral role in national security.

Turner is a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee and a fierce advocate for Dayton's Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Over his two-decade tenure as a state representative, Turner has helped Wright-Patt — the largest single-site employer in the state of Ohio — double in size, adding approximately 19,000 jobs.

He also led the initiative to bring the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to Dayton in 2025, which introduced hundreds of global leaders to the heartland.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine applauded the NATO event and Turner: "His leadership over many, many years has been important not only for Dayton, not only for Ohio, but frankly for our entire country."

WHAT LIGHTS YOU UP?

I really love pulling groups together to try to achieve things that have never been done before.

CAN YOU SHARE A COUPLE OF FAVORITE EXAMPLES?

As mayor, it would be downtown revitalization. As a member of Congress, it's got to be doubling Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in size.

WHAT FRUSTRATES YOU?

Naysayers. People who want to tear down groups who are working hard to make things better. There's an important function for critics and skepticism, but doubters sometimes can hold communities and projects back. There's a difference between, "This is hard, and how do we do it?" and an attitude of, "We just can't."

> YOU MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE NEVER BETTER THAN ANYBODY ELSE, BUT NOBODY'S BETTER THAN YOU.
>
> —MIKE TURNER

WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH?

I'm a theater guy. I live in the Schuster Center, which is one of the projects I built as mayor, and it is the center of our community's Broadway and musical theater shows. They have excellent traveling entertainment, and I'm a frequent attendee.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL MISSION ARE YOU ON?

My portfolio in Congress — besides advancing my community — is focused upon national security. My concern is that we lose sight that we have real adversaries that want to really do our country harm. And only through our work and focus of being strong and working closely with our allies are we able to ensure that our freedoms and liberties, and the freedoms that we see around the world, are maintained.

WHAT PERSONAL MISSION ARE YOU ON?

It's a mission of service.

WHAT IS A MEMORABLE MOMENT FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD, AND WHY WAS IT DEFINING?

When I graduated from high school, my mother graduated from Wright State with her master's in education, my sister graduated with her undergrad degree in education, and my father went back to adult high school and graduated with his high school diploma. He said he was not going to be the only one in the family who did not have a high school diploma, so at 48 years old, he went back and got his diploma. Not a GED; he went to adult high school. So in 1978, every one of us got a diploma. It was important because we got to celebrate every one of us. But what my father did was extraordinary. He taught all of us something. What he did was incredibly humbling and important for himself. The high school he went to in Kentucky had closed, and he came up at 16 to Dayton and lived with his sister and worked at a restaurant until he could get a job at General Motors, and he worked there until he retired, for 44 years.

WHO IS ONE PERSON THAT MADE A POWERFUL MARK ON YOUR LIFE, AND HOW?

My grandfather — my mother's father. He only made it to the third grade. He also came up from Kentucky and worked in the steel mills in Dayton. He said to me one time, "You must always remember that you're never better than anybody else, but nobody's better than you." And with that, I've always known I can go anywhere. With that knowledge, you know how to treat everybody, but there's also not a place you can't go, because everybody's equal.

WHAT WORK THAT YOU'RE DOING ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT, AND WHY?

It has to be addressing the issue of sexual assault in the military. The system was such that the victims of sexual assault were being victimized twice — once from the brutal assault itself and secondly from the system that was failing to respond.

WHO DO YOU LOVE TO LEARN FROM?

Everybody. Everyone you run into has the ability to teach you something.



WHAT ONE STORY OR PERSON DO YOU WISH EVERY OHIOAN KNEW?

I wish people knew the story of the Huffman family and the Wright brothers (who owned a bicycle shop and manufactured bicycles before inventing the airplane). The Huffman family owned a farm up on the hill outside of the city of Dayton and loaned it to the Wright brothers for them to perfect flight. After the Wright brothers' historic flight in North Carolina, the Huffman family became the other famous bicycle family from Dayton, Ohio, as they were the owners of Huffy. The Huffman prairie that they loaned to the Wright brothers became Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. It's the largest and most important Air Force base in the world and has been involved in every airplane from the Wright brothers through stealth. The Huffman family remains important and prominent in our community today, but their humble story of both support for the Wright brothers, for the Air Force base and for our community flies under the radar.

WHAT ARE YOU CERTAIN IS TRUE?

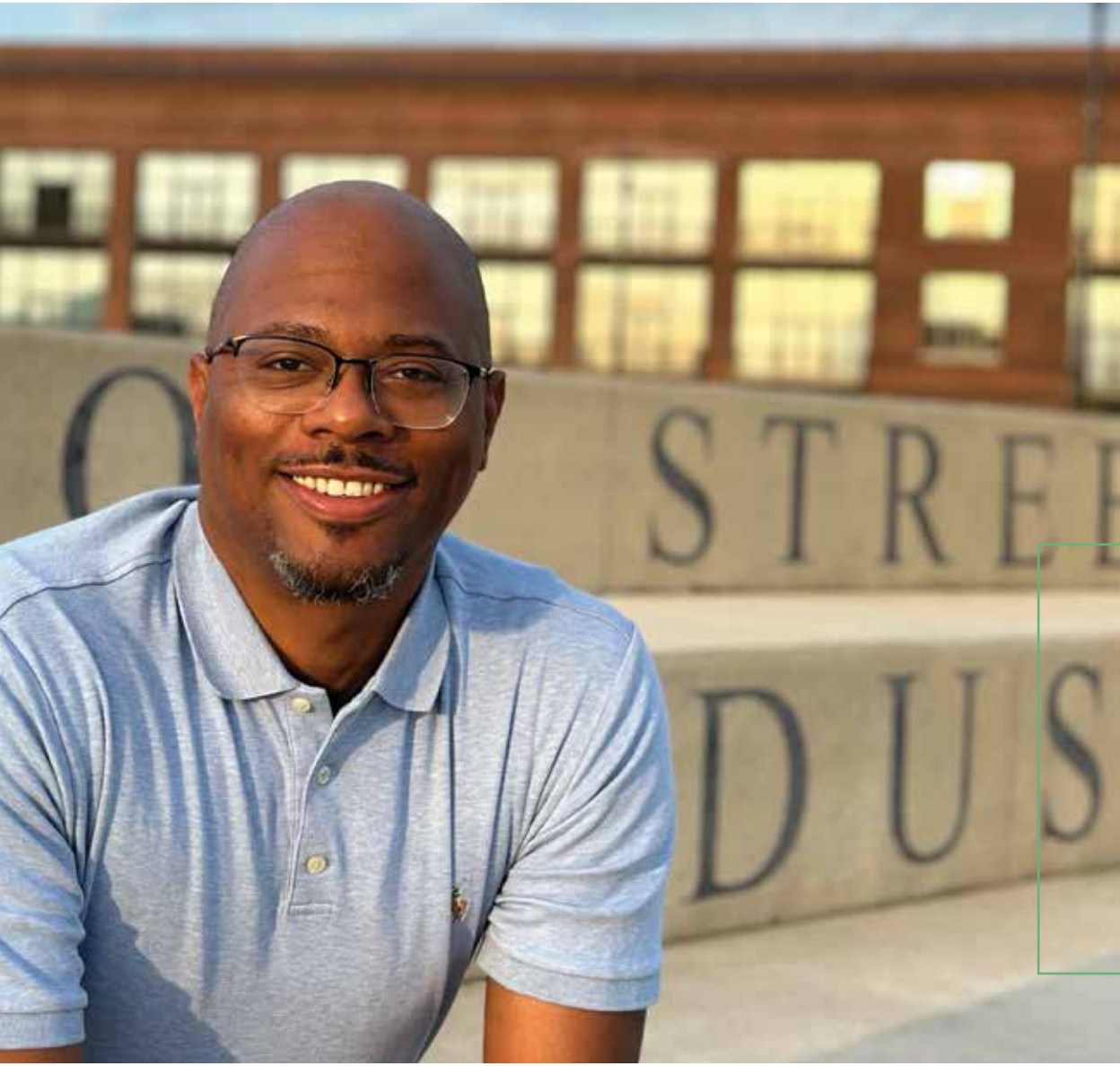
God is on his throne, and prayer changes things.

IF THERE IS A SINGLE MISSION YOU COULD MOBILIZE PEOPLE AROUND, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Get involved in your community.

IF PEOPLE DEFINED YOU WITH ONE WORD, WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT WORD IS?

Hopefully they would have to use more than one word.


STRE
DUS

The lake waters that surround what is now Cedar Point were once, for many, the final leg of the Underground Railroad. Slaves who had been placed in oak barrels would be tossed from a train into a marsh. Captain Thomas McGee — who was often questioned under suspicion of illegally aiding fugitives — would pick the slaves up and row them to freedom on the Canadian side of Lake Erie.

His is one of nine stories that people can now hear on Sandusky's new Underground Railroad walking tour — a self-guided, two-mile journey with nine stops. Each stop includes signage with a QR code that leads to emotional audio narratives.

The tour is a passion project spearheaded by Marcus Harris and funded in part by Ohio Humanities as part of America250 — the upcoming celebration of the nation's 250th birthday.

Harris is the diversity and economic opportunity manager for the city of Sandusky. He was walking by the lake one day when he stopped to admire a sculpture of a family reaching out to Canada toward freedom. He read the sculpture's notes about the many individuals who contributed to the Underground Railroad effort.

"I had this overwhelming feeling of pride and joy and the deep heritage," he said. "I thought, 'How do we elevate these stories?' This is really about bringing them to life."

MARCUS HARRIS

WHAT LIGHTS YOU UP?

Service to my community. That's where I find joy. My nonprofit work with Second Harvest, with the United Way of Erie County — I get excited about that. I'm also a gamer. I'm a late Gen Xer, a child of the 80s. I'm a fantasy role-playing gamer. Right now, I'm really big on Marvel's Rivals. And I love Spiderman. The newest version of PS5. NCAA Football 2025 — I've won a couple of national championships.

WHAT FRUSTRATES YOU?

Not seeing people live up to their fullest potential.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL MISSION ARE YOU ON?

When it's all said and done, I want to leave this world better than how I found it and to empower others and open doors of opportunity for them.

WHAT PERSONAL MISSION ARE YOU ON?

I want one of those fuzzy robes. I want to have my little fuzzy beret. I want my doctorate. It will likely be a doctorate of political science with a focus on economics. I like data. I like to wonder, "How can I show evidence of that?"

WHY IS HUMAN CONNECTION SO IMPORTANT?

Everything begins and ends with human connection. We all want the same things in life: We want our children to do better than us. We want to have a secure home. We want to be successful. We want to leave the world a better place. The only way we can move past the differences that are surface level is human connection. It's talking to each other, listening to each other and honoring each other's experiences.

WHAT IS A MEMORABLE MOMENT FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD, AND WHY WAS IT DEFINING?

I remember being asleep in my bed as a child and being awakened by my grandmother. She said, "Come downstairs. You need to watch this." It was the Tiananmen Square incident. She said, "You have to know what's going on in the world. You can't shy away from it — the good and the bad."

WHO IS ONE PERSON THAT MADE A POWERFUL MARK ON YOUR LIFE, AND HOW?

It all begins and ends with my grandmother, Ada Harris. She loved me. She poured into me. Everything that I accomplished in life is because of what she did for me and exposed me to. Taking me to different places. Traveling. Making me read the encyclopedia. When I said I didn't have homework, she said, "Take a volume, and read it." Making me do an Easter speech and a Christmas speech. I am eternally grateful for her love and guidance in my life.

WHAT PROJECT THAT YOU'VE LED ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT, AND WHY?

This Underground Railroad project. The opportunity to elevate the history of my hometown and contribute to our state's celebration of the 250th birthday of the United States of America. This is something I'm extremely proud to be part of.

WHO DO YOU LOVE TO LEARN FROM?

The elders. I love to sit and listen to people who have more experience and who are older than me. They could be a CEO or vice president or a retired high school cafeteria worker. My grandmother said, "There's nothing new under the sun." The more we can learn from those who came before us, the better we are.

WHY DO YOU LOVE OHIO?

Ohio has it all. If you love the natural world, we have that. If you love water, we have that. If you want to go skiing, we have that. If you love the brights lights and big city, we have that, too. The aviation corridor in Dayton. There is this Midwestern stereotype of people being friendly. But it's authentic. I remember going to Detroit and smiling at people on the street and saying hi, and people are like, "You're not from here, are you?" And we say pop. It's not soda! (laughing)

WHAT ONE PERSON DO YOU WISH EVERY OHIOAN KNEW?

Jesse Owens. He went to Germany and pushed back against the narratives that were coming out of Nazi Germany right in Hitler's face. He did a lot just by running a race. But then, after he was celebrated on the world stage, he came home and still had to deal with Jim Crow in America. It was this dichotomy. People need to know that and understand if we don't know our history, we'll be doomed to repeat it.

WHAT ARE YOU CERTAIN IS TRUE?

That we're all the same: human beings. We all want to be loved. We all want to be acknowledged in that we are equals. There is none that is greater or lesser than. I know in my soul that this is true.

IF THERE IS A SINGLE MISSION YOU COULD MOBILIZE PEOPLE AROUND, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Economic opportunity. If we can provide the opportunity for people to pursue a sustainable wage, they can then start to indulge in the arts, indulge in their passions and their dreams.

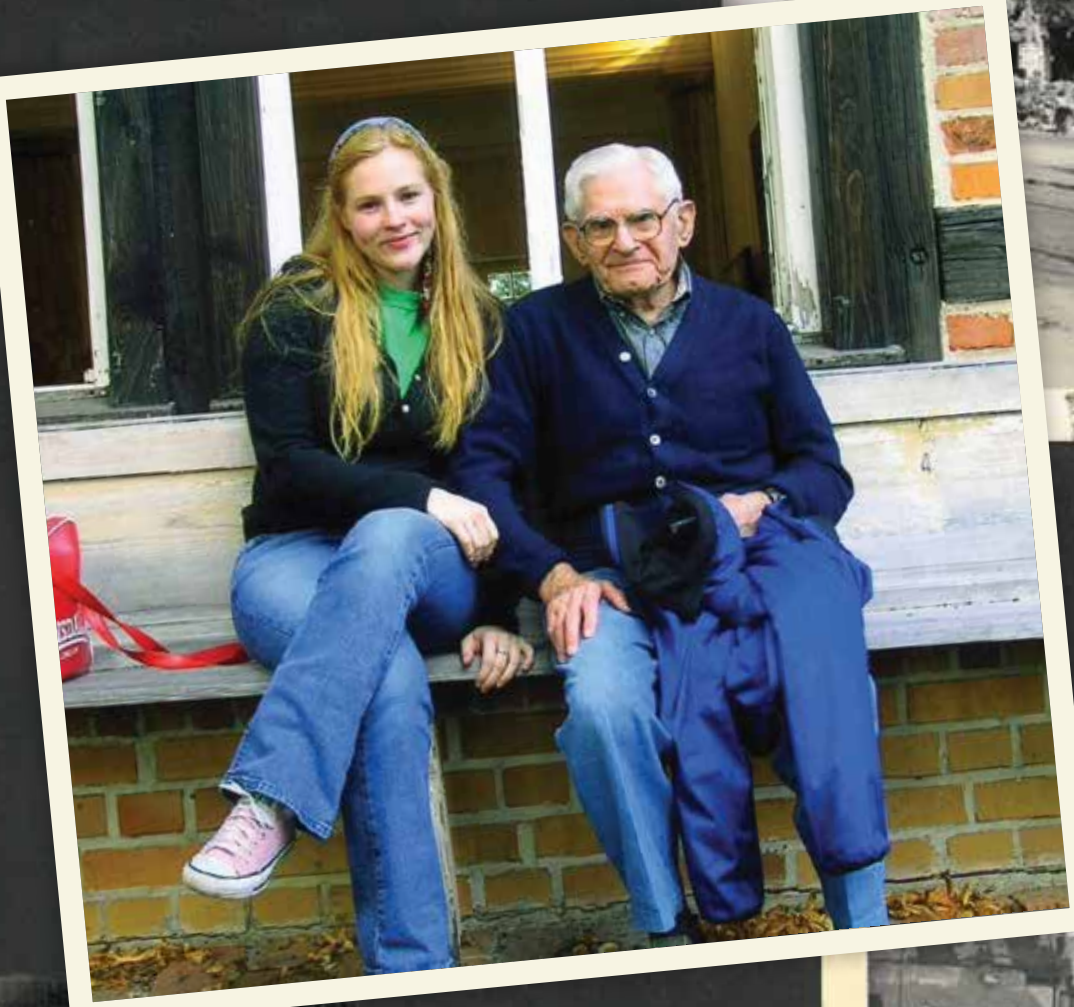
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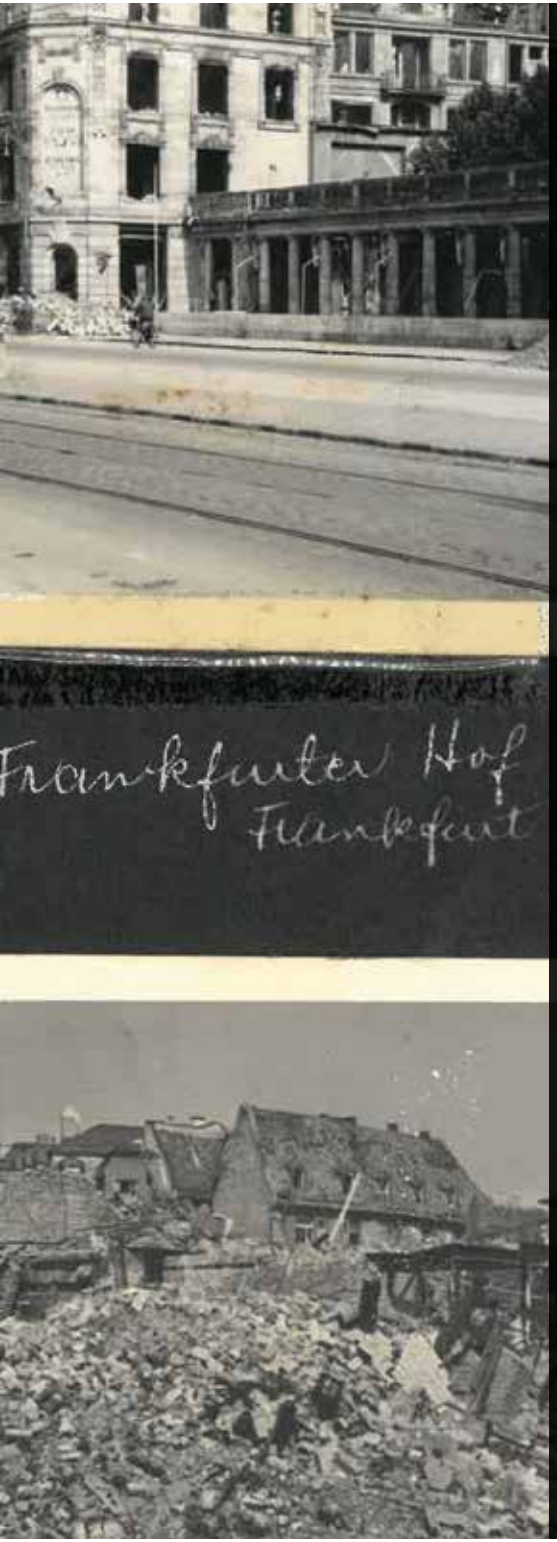
Compassionate.

> "THE MORE WE CAN LEARN FROM THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE US, THE BETTER WE ARE."
> —MARCUS HARRIS

BACKGROUND: German cities decimated by bombs during World War II are shown in a photo album of Holocaust survivor Simon Strauss. FOREGROUND: Simon sits with his granddaughter Miriam Terlinchamp on a trip to his German homeland.

All photos courtesy of Miriam Terlinchamp





Haunt & Hope

One Family's Holocaust Story

By Rabbi Miriam Terlinchamp

The sound is so foreign I can't tell what it is at first, but someone, or something, is in terrible pain.

I throw off my covers, bound out of bed, flick on the lights and run towards the sound. Years later, I'll know this feeling as a mother, hearing my baby wail from the other room, wondering, praying, hoping that she is OK. But tonight, I'm 25 in a loft apartment in Berlin, 5,000 miles from home, and it's not a baby crying: It's my 89-year-old grandfather, Simon, screaming.



Simon, at right, stands with his mother, Jenny Strauss, and brother Ernst

He's sitting in the kitchen in a rumpled white undershirt and boxers, blood dripping from his shins. His hands are on his knees, palms up, as his whole body shakes with tears that are coming from a place much deeper than his paper-thin skin.

Not knowing where to start — his hands or the blood — I choose instead to hold his face, thumbs brushing his tears.

"What is it?" I ask. "What did you do?"

He sobs as blood pools in his drooping socks.

It's OK that he cannot answer. The questions are really for me.

What did I expect, bringing him here after all these years?

Growing up in Wachenbuchen, a small town outside Frankfurt, Germany, Simon Strauss always dreamed of going to Berlin — the big city. When he was old enough, the Nuremberg Laws were already in place, and being Jewish landed him a different sort of travel, to a concentration camp, rather than a tourist visit. Seventy years later to the month, I thought maybe enough time had passed, and we, grandfather and granddaughter, could take that once-in-a-lifetime trip he had dreamed about so long ago. And yet, here we are, one night in, bleeding in a kitchen in the middle of the night.

We should never have come here.

"I was wrong," I tell him.

I busy myself, cleaning his wounds and the

table leg, telling him the plan. From now on, we will spend our trip taking boat rides, seeing art and eating ice cream. Nothing sad. No museums. No cemeteries. Just the fun stuff.

This time, he is the one who reaches for my face, turning my chin so I can see him. As our eyes meet, he speaks to me in his assured, sweet, wise voice.

"Miriam, that's not how this works," he says. "No matter what we do, the nightmares will come anyway."

'Don't you want this dirty Jew out?'

By 1937, life had changed dramatically for the Strauss family. Their patriarch had served in the German military during the First World War, but the adage of "German first, Jew second" no longer felt like a protected identity.

The oldest son, Ernst, was the first to leave. He married a woman, sight unseen, in New York City, establishing a foothold for the rest of the family to potentially join him in North America. His brothers Simon, 19, and Lou, 14, remained in Wachenbuchen with their mother.

Then, the local villagers, their neighbors and one-time friends, burnt down the Jewish school in town, and it was clear that even the youngest Jews were not safe.

At that point, there were strict visa restrictions for Jews, and getting out — to anywhere — required miraculous intervention. For a minor, there was really only one option to escape Germany, and that was through The Kindertransport, an organized rescue effort that worked to relocate Jewish children from Nazi-controlled areas in the months before WWII began. Lou could go to Palestine, they said.

Simon tried assuring his younger brother it would be a good spot. He shared stories of farming, community and late-night singing with fellow Jews. But to Lou, it sounded miserable and far away. Their father had died of cancer when Lou was just a baby, and Simon, with his gentle manner and easy way with words, was his comfort his whole life. How could he leave everything he knew for this strange land?

It was a delusive question and a false choice, of course. Even then, before the Jewish population knew of mass graves, pogroms and the final solution, they knew that the only way through this war was to get the hell out of Germany.

Simon took Lou to the local Gestapo to get his papers signed. The Gestapo tried shutting the door in the boys' faces. "We're closed," he barked. "Come back in a week." Simon knew if Lou's papers weren't signed within 48 hours, he would lose his place on the ship. "No," Simon pleaded. "We need these signed today." The agent tried slamming the door again, but Simon stuck his foot in its way and leaned into the Gestapo's face.

"Don't you hate Jews? Don't you want this dirty Jew out of your country?" he said. "If you sign this paper today, this dirty Jew will never be back."



Simon's uncle Ludwig and other extended family members are shown being deported in a photo Simon found when he went through Nazi files

The Gestapo signed the papers.

Soon, Simon was walking Lou down the pier to a bobbing boat bellowing thick smoke. Lou begged to stay. Whatever the fate of his family, he wanted to be with them. Simon forced him aboard anyway.

Twelve days later, the ship docked in Tel Aviv, and Lou wobbled down the gangplank with a small bag of clothing and a photo of his mother. Never had he felt such heat. And the noise? The noise was the sound of hundreds of voices, thick accents trying their best to manage the rough consonants of the Hebrew language.

"Papers!" an officer demanded.

In one swift motion, Lou's card was stamped, and a Karabiner 98K bolt action rifle was jammed into his hands.

At 14, Lou went from German war refugee to Israeli defense soldier.

I'll tell you the end first: Everyone dies.

Almost everyone, at least. Ernst, Lou and Simon are the only members of the family who survive the war and are three of a total of four Jews from their town who survive. They won't know this truth for decades.

The price of survival is different for each of them.

Ernst burrows his way into religiosity, removed from the realities of war; he sees himself as someone who escaped rather than as a survivor. Germany is a place he left, and New York is where he started again, and not much energy needs to be spent on why.

Lou never forgives Germany for her sins. He does not wish to return to sort through ashes or smile at tense, apologetic neighbors. He wants nothing to do with any of it.

Simon, though — Simon forgives. It's the way he finds his faith, his love for humanity, his hope. He wants to return to Germany. Speak with those broken friends. Knock on the door of his childhood home. But it will be 30 years until he tells anyone of the horrors he saw.

For each brother, safety and sacrifice are painful twins. The journey from human to dehumanization and, finally, back to human is impossible to articulate. There are no words for the moment when each of them realized they were not German, American or Israeli; they were Jews, which meant that they would never be truly safe. This knowledge is embedded in each man, passed unknowingly to their descendants: Safety requires a price that only some of us are lucky enough to pay.

'Where are the Jews?'

Simon was working in his office when he heard the glass shatter. The Gestapo were taking batons to windowfronts and dragging men into the street toward barking dogs and beatings. The soldiers yelled as they entered the small workroom.

"Wo sind die Juden?!" they demanded.

Where are the Jews?

Slowly, the co-workers Simon had worked beside for years raised their fingers, pointing out the Jews who sat beside them.

Simon and men from the synagogue, his school, his work and the butcher shop his mother ran were forced into the street. With the precision Germans are known for, they corralled their captives into wagons and then train cars. Those who did not comply, and even many who did, were beaten.

It was Nov. 9, 1938 — Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass. The coordinated antisemitic attacks across the country included massive arrests of Jews for only the reason that they were Jews. Thirty thousand men were taken to camps that day, Simon among them.

The next day, the Nazi Party issued an "atonement tax" to the Jewish community of 1 billion Reichsmark, thus beginning a rapid succession of ever more draconian anti-Jewish laws throughout the country.

Fifty years after Kristallnacht, Simon would start to tell the story of his survival. He submitted video testimony to the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum in Washington, D.C., served as a docent and Holocaust educator at the Houston Holocaust Museum and sat for interviews for the Spielberg Project and countless others who wanted to hear his story. But in all of those talks and writings, and even in private with his family, Simon could only share the briefest of moments from the months he spent in Buchenwald Concentration Camp. His emphasis was on survival. On his luck of getting out and away.

Only in limited moments, like after a nightmare, would one hear of Romani being forced to dance themselves to death, of hangings and beatings and random firing squads and fear.

Between 1933 and 1941, concentration camps were centralized containment spaces for prisoners who were not indicted for a crime by a judicial process. They primarily served as forced labor camps. Nazi leaders started with political subversives and then moved on to detain all manners of people, including those who were Romani, LGBTQ, disabled and Jewish. In 1941,

forced labor camps became unofficial death camps — though official death camps also existed.

But before that, when the concentration camps were not yet centers for mass murder, there were a handful of ways one could be released, and almost all involved money.

Such was the case for Jenny Strauss.

With one son in the United States and one son in Palestine, Jenny was bereft that the son who remained behind, Simon, was incarcerated at Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Bravely, she went to the Ortgruppenleiter, the local Nazi Party leader. Jenny appealed Simon's case. She was a widower, she said. She needed her son.

No problem. All she needed to do was procure a one-way ticket out of Germany for Simon. Oh. And "sell" her house and all she had to a "pure" German. This was no easy feat. Visas out of the country for Jewish people were virtually nonexistent, and Jews were prohibited from using money. So even if she could miraculously acquire a visa for Simon, produce the money for a ticket and secure travel out of Germany, she would still need the help of a non-Jew to purchase the ticket — in a place where it was the townspeople, not the German soldiers, who had destroyed the Jewish children's school. Finding someone willing to risk their life for her son would be virtually impossible.

We don't know just how Jenny did it. It's one of those links in this story that is vague and so wondrously beyond the bounds of possibility that it feels like the only way to explain it is as an act of God. Jenny found a way to sell her home and buy her son a one-way ticket to Shanghai. Simon was pulled out of Buchenwald and sent directly to the docks, where he was placed aboard a ship that was heading to Britain and eventually China.

Jenny was picked up by the Gestapo shortly thereafter. Sixty years later, a grandchild would find her name on a transport list and finally know her fate: She spent 18 months in multiple concentration camps before dying at Auschwitz.

Sometimes, when I close my eyes, I imagine my great grandmother Jenny.

I've only seen a few pictures of her. Broad shoulders, dark hair pulled back sensibly, a gentle smile, my same cheekbones.

I think of the despair she must have felt when she realized Simon was taken. I think of the courage she conjured to do something about it. I think of the hope it required — the belief that in the face of uncontrollable evil, of certain destruction, perhaps one act might actually make a difference.

Hope is the greatest form of faith.

She must have been smart, or at least savvy enough to wrangle that ticket for Simon. She also must have known the price she was paying. The objects might have been a house, ticket and money. But the true price was a life for a life.

Jenny never knew if her sons survived. Or that each went on to have children,



Simon's mother, Jenny, sold their home in Wachenbuchen, shown here, and sacrificed her life to save his

grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Or, that each of us, in our own time and generation, would find ways to return to her front door, to the place of sacrifice that gave us life.

Sincerely, Simon

Simon never made it to Shanghai. In London, he was pulled out of line by a woman he referred to as Lady Paget. He helped around the house and yard in exchange for a place to sleep and eat. Simon found that he was adept with languages, quickly becoming fluent in English and making securing sponsorship in the United States easier.

Three months after arriving in New York City through Ellis Island at 27, Simon joined the U.S. Army. It was his duty, he believed, to do his part in fighting Hitler. Also, at the time, military service guaranteed him American citizenship.

So, less than 18 months after leaving Germany as a refugee, Simon found himself back in Germany as an American soldier. And he was not just in Germany, but in Frankfurt — a short bike ride away from his home village. When villagers saw him return in an American GI uniform, they were scared, thinking he was there to retaliate. But he only did one thing that might have been considered an abuse of power: He broke into the Nazi archives to search for photos of his family members being deported.

Simon's knowledge of the area and comfort in switching between languages made him useful. He helped his fellow



Simon, at right, with a member of his United States Army unit, became pen pals with American Red Cross volunteer Miriam Silverman, whom he eventually married

soldiers write letters home in his lilting, artful penmanship. And with no one home to write to himself, he found a pen pal in New York through the American Red Cross. Nearly every day, Simon wrote a letter to his pen pal, Miriam. They were careful. There was no word yet for Holocaust, no language for what he had been through. So, Simon spoke of liberation, of taking children candy, of finding photographs of family. And Miriam, a child of Russian immigrants, stayed cheerful, brightly reporting hopeful moments and things to look forward to on his homecoming.

Miriam had many pen pals; writing to them was likely part of her job. But there's something special about Simon. He would be the only one she eventually arranged to meet.

There was no time to be a survivor.

In New York, and then in Houston, Simon needed to be an American first and a Jew second. Only somewhere far down the identity line was the quiet, unmarked label of what he had been through.

It was the height of the glorified American melting pot. West Side Story was real life, and it was groovy to be foreign, so long as you also fit in. Jews were preoccupied with eschewing the backward regulations — some formal, some not — that kept them from joining country clubs and swimming pools, restricted their admittance into universities and prevented those who were doctors from practicing in hospitals with quotas that had already been reached. As Americans, Jews

wanted equal access to the American dream, so they stood alongside Black citizens in the civil rights movement, fighting together for a more civil and just society.

This wasn't about what we, as Jewish people, had been through; this was about training our eyes on our new home and identity as Americans.

This was true behind the closed doors of American Jewish religious life, too. Jewish theology, as Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg said, went from a Godly covenant to a voluntary covenant. Faith became a choice. According to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in Lonely Man of Faith*, we told one another that our loss was because God's face was hidden. Other theologians wrote that the Divine was now found between humans, not a displaced hope in the heavens. No one was coming to save us.*

Where was Simon supposed to put all his pain? His stories?

He married, started a business, joined the synagogue men's group and worked out every day with his "early bird" calisthenics crew.

One would think he just moved on. But that's not the way human beings work.

It was there in the names. Simon's oldest daughter, Davida, named for his father, David. The middle child, his son Gary, named for his mother, Jenny. His youngest, Nadine Minette, named for his aunts, Natasha and Mina. Who their namesakes were and what happened to them was unknown to his children for most of their lives.

For Jews, the definition of heaven and hell, of where people go when they die, is quite nebulous. Often, Jewish people simply say that souls return to God. But what we can control is how we remember those souls in our own lifetime. In the Jewish Ashkenazic (Northern and Eastern European) tradition, there is a belief that if you evoke the deceased's name, you help keep their memory alive, thereby keeping them with God — bringing them closest to the Jewish notion of heaven. In this spirit, there is a tradition to name children after those who have come before them, ensuring that each time we say our child's name, we call their namesake into the world as well. So it was for Simon.

Each time he called out for his children, sheer miracles against the backdrop of his family loss, he was also praying for the resting souls of his beloved: every breath, every utterance a commitment of gratitude for his survival.

Going home

Reparations for Holocaust survivors started for some in the late 1950s, but it wasn't until the German Reunification Act in 1990 that a plan for German reparations became widespread. The program was called Wiedergutmachung, meaning "making the good again." It included financial compensation for survivors, truth-telling, outlawing the Nazi Party, erecting monuments and memorials and committing to education.

As part of these efforts, German survivors were invited to return to visit their places of origin as guests of the German government.



Simon and his brother Lou walk in a park in Germany during a return trip when city officials apologized for the attacks on their lives

It would be another 35 years before an official apology and memorial would stand in the Strauss' hometown, but it was a chance for Simon to return home — not as a refugee or a soldier, but as a visitor, and an American at that, now safe from the perils of his home country.

His older brother, Ernst, was uninterested. He was in New York, living a traditional Jewish lifestyle. What could he gain by returning home?

Simon's youngest brother, Lou, also lived in New York and was disgusted by the idea of returning. He avoided all things German, from cars to electronics to food. If it was German, he didn't want anything to do with it. Lou's response was common among American Jews.

Simon, however, ever the romantic, believed that people and a country could change. He convinced Lou to travel with him back home.

Lou and Simon flew to Frankfurt. They met with officials who solemnly apologized for the attacks on their lives. They met with old neighbors who cried through the conversations. They walked their old street and peered into the once-destroyed and now-rebuilt school. They went to their old home and knocked on the door. Though the residents of their old home knew that Lou and Simon were returning — everyone did — the men were met with silence. A glint of swept back curtain from the window indicated that someone was home, just not for Simon and Lou.

There's a photograph that was taken on that trip: The brothers are walking side by side, cameras draping from their necks, strolling through a park of fallen yellow and orange leaves. It looks so peaceful. Until one realizes it's a park where deportations were held, alongside a cemetery that was vandalized, in a city that turned them in, in a country that sought their people's annihilation.

I cannot conceive of what my grandfather's inner life must have been like after liberation, after the war was over, in the States and reconnected with his brothers.

His trauma must have felt like a wound just barely closed over, still sticky with healing. Maybe he thought that if he tried to access it, to touch it even just a little bit, it would open the whole thing — and everything would fall apart.

That's how I reconcile why he couldn't speak about what he'd been through. How, as loving and gentle a man as he was, he was imperfect, too.

You cannot raise children in silence.

When we are in survival mode, there's nothing to do except put one foot in front of the other. But, once we are safe, that mode of survival stops being of service to us, instead blocking us from vulnerability and relational connection. There is a consequence to avoiding our trauma, to letting it sleep in our past, until one day it screams from us in the middle of the night, awakening us all.

Unthinkable loss

When Simon's term of military service was up, he was sent back to New York. This time, it wasn't just his brother waiting for him; his pen pal, Miriam, was there, too.

Where he was thoughtful and gentlemanly, Miriam was quick-witted and social. She was used to the speed of the city, and Simon was happily swept along at her pace.

Madly in love, they married.

Simon decided it was time to plot out their future — to find a way out of the grimy city and chase the dream of a house, children, safety and independence. He wanted a fresh start. He picked Houston, Texas, as the next boomtown in America.



Simon and his wife, Miriam, in 1947, just before moving from New York to Texas



Simon, Miriam and their children enjoy traveling the country in the early 1950s

Somehow, it actually worked. After a few fits and starts, Simon launched a company selling bulk coffee. Miriam helped him every day at work, and by night she volunteered for a Zionist social group and the synagogue. She seemed to collect all the city's wayward souls around her dining room table.

Three children arrived, healthy and strong. They attended Jewish summer camp and played baseball.

Despite the blistering heat, Simon grew plants in the backyard of their three-bedroom home on Wigton Street. He danced with Miriam in the kitchen. He wrote her love letters, still. And he brought her gold charms to hang on a bracelet.

She cooked his favorite foods, wore a blue dress that made him blush and mobilized the women at the synagogue to give back to the community.

They traveled with their children to the Grand Canyon and Colorado. Simon's youngest didn't even hear his German accent. American was their way of life.

At the end of the Biblical story of Job, after he has lost everything — his home, his friends, his wealth, his family — God blesses Job by doubling his gain over his losses. As though more children, more wealth, more friends can make up for the pain of losing them in a miserable game of divine chance. For Simon, maybe those years in the Texas sun, being his own boss, living openly as a Jew and birthing healthy children felt like a doubling of riches — a reward for being a person of faith and hope.

Maybe he even allowed himself to believe he was getting his happily ever after. But this isn't that kind of story.

Miriam became sick — something to do with her heart.

And at 44, she died, leaving Simon to raise their young children as a widower in 1960s Texas.

He handled Miriam's death the way he handled all the unrighteous loss that came before it. But worse.

It's one thing to take everything from a man. It's a whole other thing to make him feel like he's returned to life, that he is safe, that he is blessed and then to rip that second chance away, too.

Simon burned her pictures. He gave away her clothes. And the name Miriam and the stories that went with her were silenced in their home.

Simon continued to be a loving and kind father, and he remarried a few years later.

But his will to make change and his ability to return from loss was lost. Until the day his youngest, Nadine, just 8 years old when her mother died — the girl who was raised with only whispered stories, the one forbidden to ask questions, the daughter fiercely loyal to her father — had her own baby.

The baby arrived on an auspicious date in the Jewish calendar: Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

When Simon heard that Nadine was in labor, he fled the synagogue in the middle of services and rushed to her bedside.

He reached for Nadine's firstborn.

"What is her name?" Simon asked.

Nadine did not flinch.

"Miriam."

No one could say my name without thinking of my namesake.

They saw in me all of those forgotten stories — the hidden price of survival. And so it felt like I was born with two souls: both the new Miriam and the past Miriam, in a singular body.

It helped, I'm sure, that I was blond and dimpled, joyful and obsessed with my grandfather. It was as though I knew, even as a baby, that I belonged to him more than anyone.

On Fridays, we'd go to Sabbath services together, just the two of us. We'd sit towards the front, where he'd sing loudly. We'd walk the hallways and look at old pictures — one that included my namesake. He'd point her out to me, sharing tiny morsels of memory.

It was Miriam who taught him to love Judaism and who encouraged them to join a synagogue.

He'd also tell me of loss and how it was my job, as this third generation, to make up for the suffering in the Jewish world.

"Jews," he'd say, "are responsible for one another."

And then we'd have cookies covered in rainbow sprinkles and join the rest of our family for dinner.

‘This. Could. Happen. Anywhere.’

The stories didn’t stop with Miriam.

There was a great unlocking that happened for Simon with the birth of his grandchildren. He started to tell his stories. All the silent lumps of pain emerged, first as a trickle and then as a flood.

By then, there was a name for what he had been through: the Holocaust. There was a nation for Jews in case they ever needed to escape: Israel. There was a day recognized worldwide that memorializes the suffering of his people: International Holocaust Memorial Day. A famous Jewish screenwriter offered a call to document survivors’ stories. There were photos. There were museums. The time to come forward had arrived.

This part of the story — of survivors silencing their experience for several decades — is common. Many second-generation survivors were raised with little knowledge of what caused the nightmares in their parents’ dreams, their obsession with scarcity or their nervousness around men in uniform. But when their grandchildren were born, it was clear that they had survived.

Simon traveled to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. He donated his photos and scraps of evidence. He sat for interviews. He made a three-hour testimonial video for the Shoah Foundation — the first encounter that most of his family had with the details of his story.

Memory became a hobby. He loved volunteering at the Houston Holocaust Museum, where he became a popular docent. A great storyteller, he’d lean in towards the end, emphatically pointing at the visitors with each word:

“This. Could. Happen. Anywhere.”

He believed it. Germans were not born wicked. Germany as a country was no worse or better than the United States. The moment we dismissed the stories of survival as something that occurred once upon a time in a faraway land, he knew, we relinquished our accountability to our fellow man.

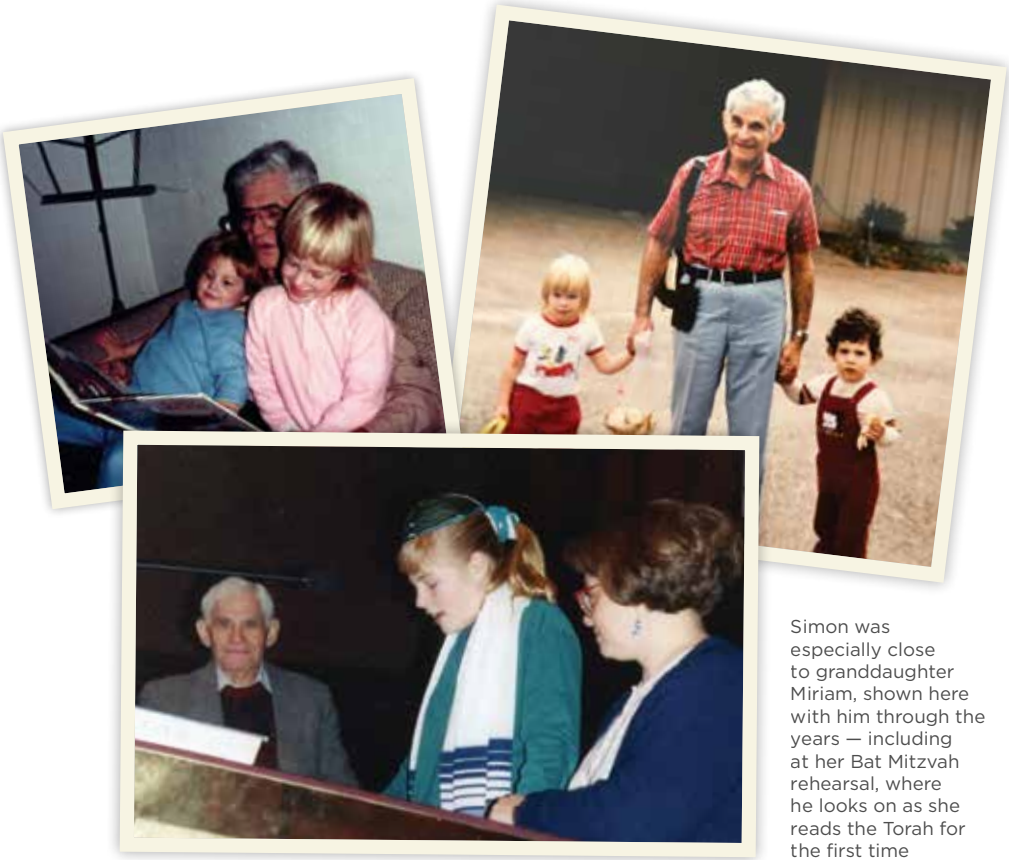
Never Again.

That’s the mantra we were taught. But never again for who?

Because the effort to make us Americans first and Jews second meant we didn’t believe that God chose us as more precious than any other. We believed that all people were precious and of equal worth.

Yet we couldn’t ignore the elements that separated us from others: food, culture, holidays, lifecycles, community and a nation-state that was both our home and not our home. These were core identity markers.

Every Jewish child has a memory of being asked if they have horns or told they’re going to hell or shushed about debating the existence of Santa Claus. Many of us have stories of violence, marginalization and exclusion. We are taught from our earliest days not to trust our safety, to be wary of those who seem threatened by our differences. Our synagogue



Simon was especially close to granddaughter Miriam, shown here with him through the years — including at her Bat Mitzvah rehearsal, where he looks on as she reads the Torah for the first time

and schools are militarized, with locked doors and armed security. After all, it's only a matter of time until they come for us again.

The universal love of humankind constantly bumps up against the needs of particularized identity. The hardest part is that neither belief is more accurate than the other. All humans are created equally and contain a spark of the Divine. And Jews are a historically hated people who have known and will know terror in every generation.

There is no sparing a Jew this struggle.

Nor does it justify trauma-based reactions that do not keep us safe but rather create more pain. Nor does the general security of Jewish identity in America equate to safety from violence.

In the best of worlds, Never Again means never again will there be people pulled into the streets and beaten because of their religion. Never again will there be blind eyes to mass murders, immigration quotas for refugees or men with raised torches screaming, "Jews will not replace us."

Never again is a vision of a redeemed world. A hope that somehow the cycle of terror and targeting will break. And that the generations that come after us will inherit more love and possibility than trauma.

Please God, in our time, may we live up to the prayer of Never Again.

Haunted

The phone rings late in the night. It's the senior care facility. Simon, now in his 90s, is having one of his nightmares. He doesn't scream in these nightmares. He's silent. But they call his daughter, because they can't get him to stop marching in place.

Simon's daughter throws on a pair of sweats and her coat and drives through the rainy night to be with her father. When she walks into his room, his eyes are open, but they are focused somewhere far beyond this room. Simon stands in his blue pajama bottoms, gripping onto the counter to support his aging body, marching rigidly and unblinkingly in place.

"Dad. It's me — Nadine," his daughter says. "I'm here."

He doesn't seem to register the human now beside him as his child.

Nadine slowly pries each of her father's fingers from the edge of the counter. Once free, she holds his hand and leads him to his chair.

Simon will live to 93. In the months before his soul is unleashed back to God, he will have nightmares most nights. And during the days, he will have visions — people now gone, places now destroyed.

We've made it through five days in Berlin — sightseeing by day, nightmares by night.

Tonight is Friday, the Sabbath, so we find a synagogue to join for the evening prayers.

We pick the New Synagogue Berlin. With its golden dome, the synagogue on Oraienburger Strasse is so majestic that it could pass for the Alhambra. Inside, on the first floor of the synagogue, the ruined entrance and rooms remain demolished. Its desecration is preserved as a reminder of what it means for such an ornamental sign of Jewish life to survive in Berlin.

Upstairs, we pass through a room that at one point held 3,000 seats for concerts, lectures and religious worship. It is dark — so far away from its time of glory. The original Torah scrolls, furniture and books all were burned on Kristallnacht, that same fateful night Simon was taken.

We turn and enter a smaller room. The eyes of 40 people watch us, an old man and his granddaughter, finding our place in the third row.

No one has to say anything. They know who we are and why we are here.

The service begins, and Simon's spirits lift for the first time in our visit. He knows the music. He sings unabashedly. When we reach the Veshamru prayer, his favorite, he turns to me and smiles widely.

"Vessshhhhamru," he draws out the words, slinging them like a bar song instead of liturgy.

The first word means "guard" or "keep," a line plucked from Exodus 31:16. It's a prayer about the Sabbath as a gift from our ancestors to future generations.

I'm reminded of the poet Ahad Ha'am, who wrote, "More than the Jewish people have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people." I grasp my grandfather's knuckled hand tightly.

How true that's been for us.

Years from now, I will become a Rabbi. And years from then, I will bear a daughter who I will name for this man — a beautiful creature whose namesake cannot be called back into the world enough. But that is for later. Right now, the prayer is coming to an end.

Simon, however, keeps singing, sounding out another round of the chorus.

Confused, the congregants turn around and look at us. I gesture to Simon's hearing aids. Maybe they failed?

But that's not it. Or, maybe it is. But it doesn't really matter, because Simon sings that chorus a third time, and then a fourth, until the whole community is singing over and over again.

"Veshamru," he sings, his eyes closed, his praise loud.

It is there, in the resounding chorus of Jewish strangers, in the rubble of a synagogue covered in gold, in a city and country that bent to destroy us, that I understand who I am: a link in a chain of witness.

Behind the Story



Rabbi Miriam Terlinchamp, who lives in Cincinnati, is the executive director of Judaism Unbound and the host of the Tales of the Unbound *podcast. She served as senior rabbi at Temple Sholom in Cincinnati for 13 years and is active on several boards and committees within the Cincinnati community.*

Editor's Note: This story has been told as accurately as possible based on information, research and stories passed through three generations of the Strauss family.

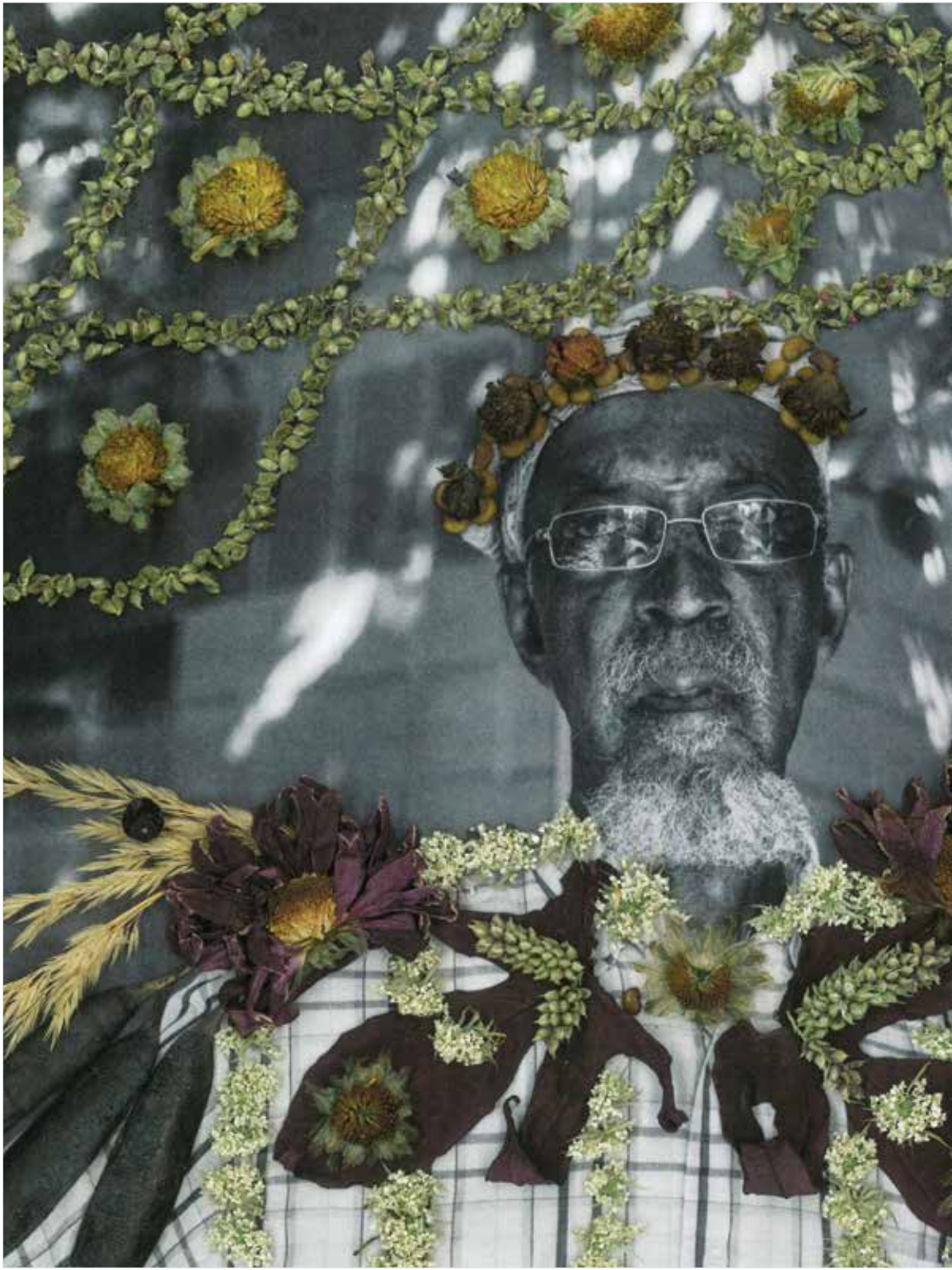
Door To Door: A Podcast

When Simon returned to his childhood home in Germany — the home his mother sold, along with her life, to save him — the owners refused to answer the door. For generations, the family went back. And with each visit, the door remained unopened. Until 2024.

In *Door To Door: A Pilgrimage Across Generations,* a podcast funded in part by Ohio Humanities, Rabbi Miriam Terlinchamp shares her family's story. Through five episodes, which include interviews with the family's late grandfather and other family members, she examines how successive generations have metabolized Simon's experience, legacy and trauma into identity, hope and possibility.

The podcast explores bigger topics, too, including these and more: What does it mean to remember? How do the significance of memories shift over time? What are the ties that bind?

Find Door To Door at **www.JudaismUnbound.com/DoorToDoor**, on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts.





The Art of Genius

Ohio artists Hanif Abdurraqib and Da'Shaunae Marisa share a glimpse inside the studio — and soul — of legendary Dayton artist, educator and community activist Bing Davis

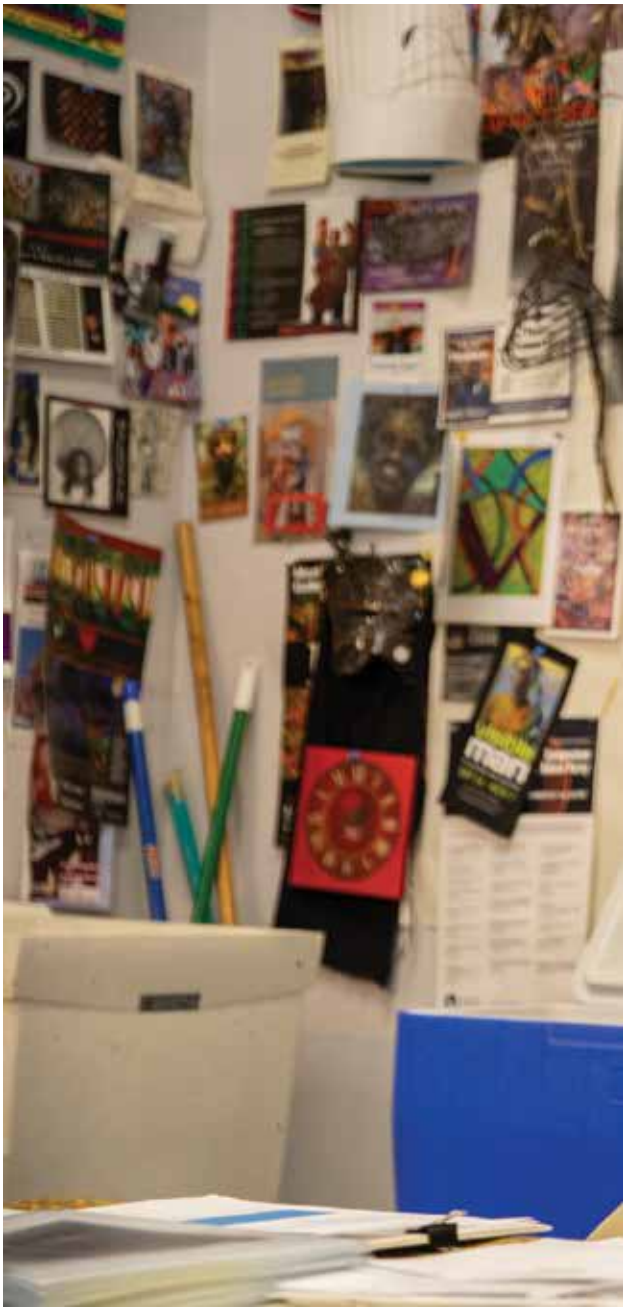
Story by Hanif Abdurraqib
Photos and artwork by Da'Shaunae Marisa

The street has a history greater than its burning, but it did burn, once. Black people were thrown against its brick walls, once. Thrown on its concrete, pepper sprayed and beaten with police batons.

Looking east down Third Street in Dayton, it would be hard to, upon a glance, distinguish the histories of triumph and violence, but they are here, embedded in the architecture that looks, at a glance, like the architecture almost anywhere. In 1966, Lester Mitchell was killed in a drive-by shooting, witnesses saying the shooter was white. The uprising began shortly after,

protesters clashing with police in the early morning light falling over west Dayton, spilling into downtown. In 1967, there were more uprisings, and in 1968, in the aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination, there were even more, right on this street. Fire set to buildings, a display of rage, anguish, and a hopelessness, but also a firm statement, in a city gripped by white flight, a black neighborhood left to survive on its own, and its residents, whether intentional or not, insisting that if they can't live free on their side of town, no one can.

Dayton, today, remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States, but just this small stretch of street tells multiple stories at once. Yes, the story of flames and fights with police. But also, writer Paul Laurence Dunbar's childhood home is just a few blocks beyond view. Just a few blocks beyond that are the homes of an untold and unnamed bunch of guys who played in funk bands that never made it too big beyond this city, but making it here was all they ever wanted anyway. There's the field where the Wright Brothers first assembled an airplane, before disassembling it and driving it down to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, for the first flight. And right directly in front of that field, there is a small brick building, largely nondescript from the outside, but on the inside, it houses the studio of Bing Davis. And not only his studio, but, in many ways, an archive, pillars of a legacy that stretches over six decades of teaching, of artmaking, of mentorship.



Bing Davis doesn't care much for email, which you will find out when you attempt to email him, and he'll reply, warmly and politely, insisting you call him instead, at the studio. And when you call the studio, you'll catch him, and he'll answer the phone as if you are old friends, and he's been waiting on your call for a long time.



Davis, 87, laughs in his Dayton art studio, where he still practices and teaches regularly

It isn't much different when you ring the bell right outside the locked door of his studio. Before you can hear the faint sound of the bell echoing for too long beyond the glass, Davis is at the door, almost as tall as the door frame itself, smiling, welcoming you in like a long-lost friend, speaking as though the two of you have already been in conversation for hours.



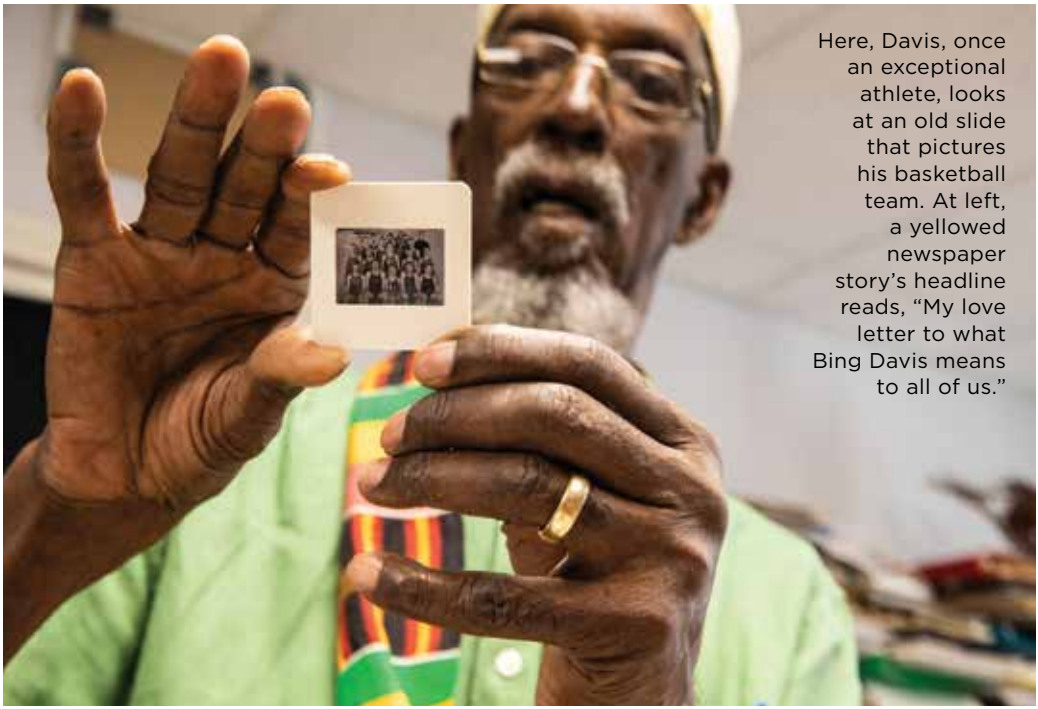
"You know, the city let this street sit dormant after we had that… disturbance in '68," Davis starts right in on the history of where we stand. "Few years ago, they started to reclaim it. Made it a 'historical' neighborhood. This whole area is a very, very important place. A place where a lot of things happen."

Davis was present here, on this street in 1968, when the uprisings unfolded. He was teaching at a high school less than a mile down the road. When the uprising began, local politician C.J. McLin, who also owned a funeral home, summoned Davis along with other artists and young black professionals in the community to his funeral home, and swore them in to a group called The White Hats. It is as it sounds: The group members were given white hats, primarily so that if the police spotted them, they knew not to shoot. Their goal was to get the young and angry black folks to stop looting, to attack the crisis in another way.

"I remembered this series of paintings called The Great American Hangup that were straight and going 100 feet across the floor, and silk bags hanging in between the paintings of body parts sprayed black and stuffed in these bags. Or making clay vessels with faces coming out and voices yelling. I saw that, and it affected my work. I was teaching in a predominantly white school at the time, but it didn't matter. It didn't change."

He pauses and sighs quietly.

"This is what I was seeing and feeling. I insisted to these people, to my people: You have to see what I see. The world has to change."



Here, Davis, once an exceptional athlete, looks at an old slide that pictures his basketball team. At left, a yellowed newspaper story's headline reads, "My love letter to what Bing Davis means to all of us."

Bing Davis was a child, and then man, of many interests before he found art, though art was always the machine, the engine humming in the background.

At a formidable height of around 6'5", he was first a basketball star and a track star. He'd been groomed for athletic success at a young age, though art was in the background. He insists that, even with all of his athletic success, when he was asked what he wanted to be in fifth grade, he said an artist, "because I always knew that what gave me internal satisfaction was making stuff."

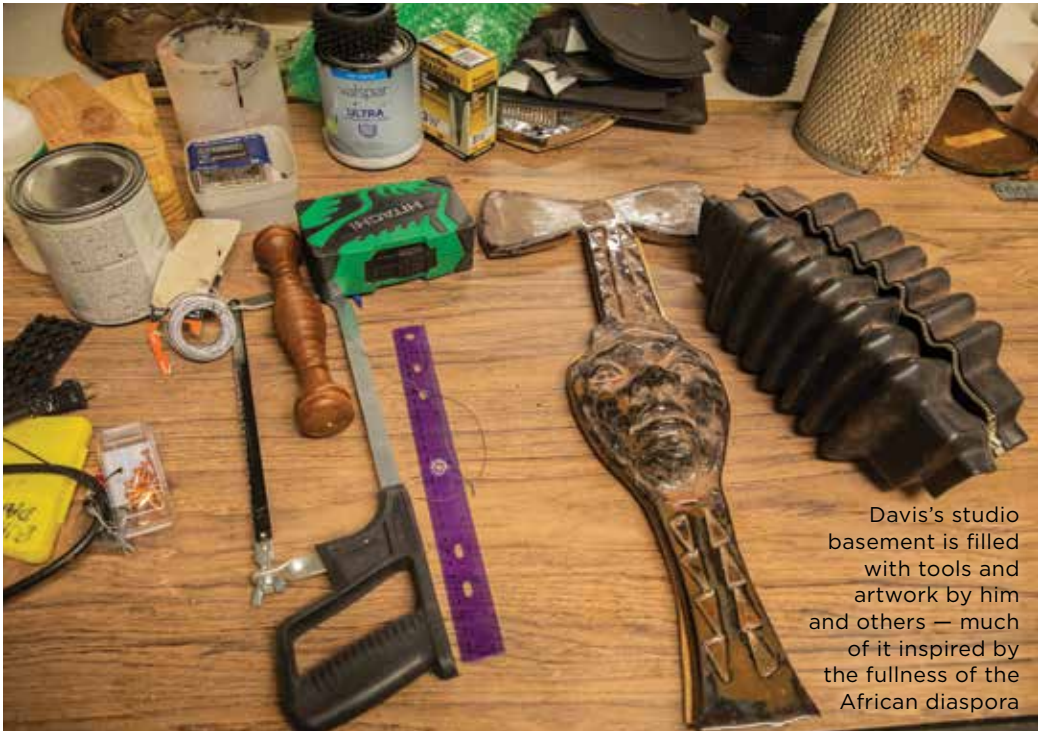
His father was an athlete, but he was also a gospel singer, in a group that toured around the Midwest. This collision of interests and influences meant that the younger Davis was skilled enough to get a basketball scholarship to DePauw University in 1955, where he majored in art education, and in the process, he joined a singing group, the El Vireos. By the late '50s, he had graduated with his degree at the same time the El Vireos were being courted by record labels, one of which signed them to record a few songs and cut a record.

"When I graduated, I was going to just bounce around a couple years and rest my brain from all that schoolwork and just have fun before going in to work. And we had the record released in April or May," Davis says. "But then, one of my guys got married, and the other one joined the Navy. So I was without a band and was scrambling to get it back together when Dayton schools called me. Said, 'Hey, we hear you're an art education major, and we got a real special art program that's overloaded. Can you pick up the overload for a year?' "

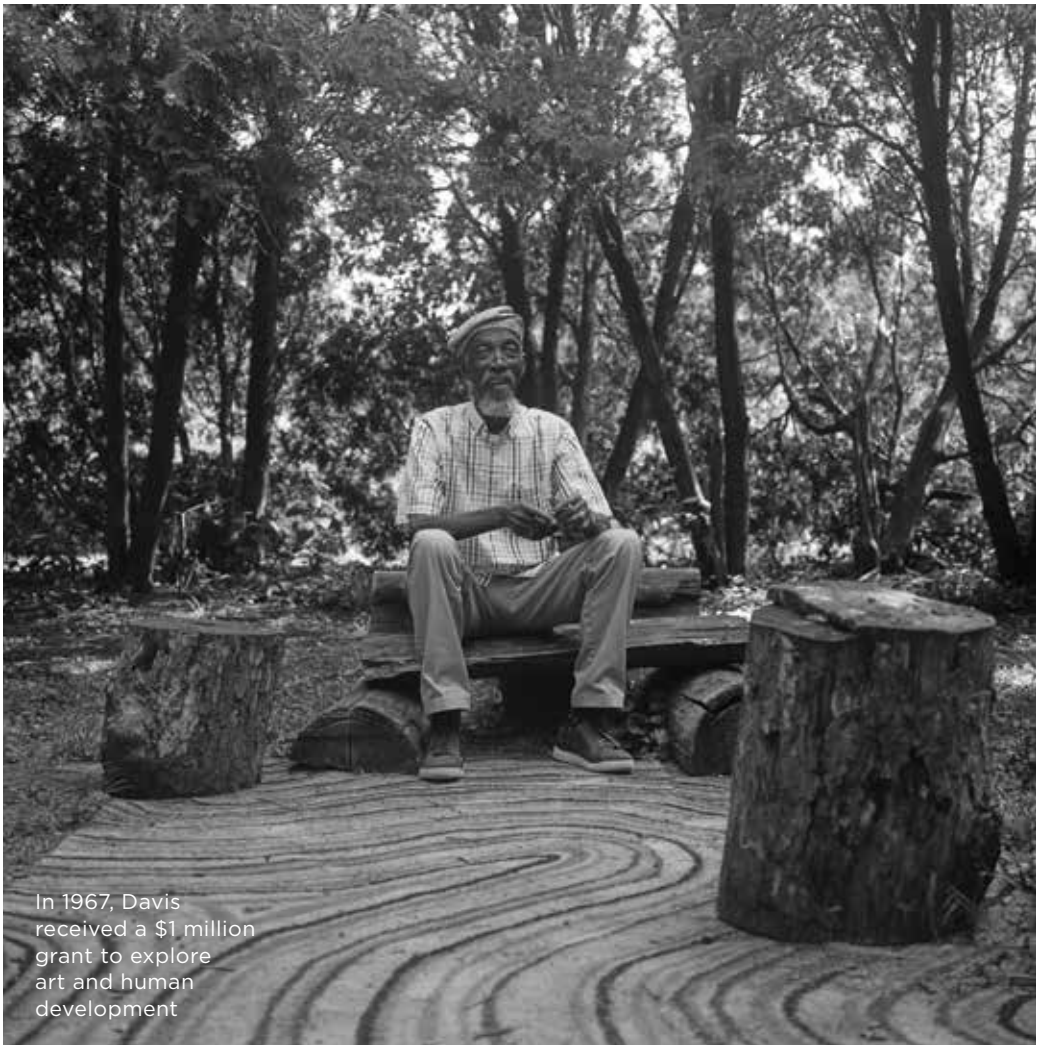

Ceramics







Davis's studio basement is filled with tools and artwork by him and others — much of it inspired by the fullness of the African diaspora



In 1967, Davis received a $1 million grant to explore art and human development

And so, the band never got back together, and a new path was charted. (Davis also insists that the record they released — the songs can still be found on YouTube — didn't have much traction anyway.) Davis immediately took to teaching, to expanding his own art practice by engaging with younger, more curious minds. He taught at Colonel White High School and coached the basketball team. In 1967, he got a million-dollar grant to explore art and human development, and he purchased a warehouse in East Dayton, renovated it and built what was eventually called the Living Arts Center, a space that taught art, music, dance and creative writing, with the goal of taking in young people in Dayton and using the arts to further their development.

"It was from there that I was pulled back to DePauw," Davis says. "They told me I could come back and get my master's on a teaching track. I would be the first-ever black faculty there. When I went, there were five black students, total. When I went back, there were 40. By the time I

got tenure a few years later, there were 47 black students, but still only one black faculty. And so I was traveling the country, meeting other black academics, and I'd say, 'Hey, give me your resume. What you got going on?' And I'd try to get folks to come onto campus and teach anything. Science, history, whatever they could. The faculty was so resistant to it. It was a unique experience for me space-wise, geography-wise and salary-wise. But getting them to make the change to enhance the experience by broadening their faculty and students, I found resistance, and so I resigned. And it was strange, because at that time, I had just gotten divorced, resigned, no job, and I had a 5-year-old kid I had to raise by myself. But I had to do it. I couldn't have slept if I didn't."

His reputation was growing, though, so he wasn't without work for long. He was first at Miami of Ohio, working in their art department, while simultaneously redesigning the art department at Central State. And then, in 1978, Central State called him, insisting that, since he built the art program there, he might as well come and run it. And so he did, for 20 years, from 1978 to 1998. When he retired, he purchased the building we're in, and slowly started building out his gallery, which now feels like both a place for well-honed exhibits and also kind of like the living room of your most brilliant and beloved elder, both in terms of comfort and in terms of the sprawl of all which has collected and been collected.

"Back then, in 2001, this whole street was empty," he says, stretching a long arm towards the window. "I was one of the first people to come in here, and we worked with a black contractor, and I worked with some of my active art students that I had just finished up with at Central State, and that's how we kept the cost down."

The studio is split into two divided rooms, one of the rooms mostly a space housing the large-scale works of Davis himself: massive textile art, masks and landscapes filled with recurring triangle shapes. Davis has been to West Africa 12 times in his life. It's the place where his artistic practices were shaped and honed, where he learned to practice art that honors the fullness of the African diaspora.

Davis keeps the mode of operations at the shop pretty tight knit. In the office upstairs is Mrs. Green, who he met at church, singing in the choir. She's been up there for 15 years, handling all of the office responsibilities, paying all the bills and the taxes. Davis' wife, Audrey, was also an educator, teaching first grade. When the studio first opened, her schedule allowed for him to have some time in the studio, which is walking distance from their home, building it up, getting it together, and — perhaps most importantly — removing the large-scale art pieces that filled his house and putting them in this space.

Davis smiles wide when I ask him about his relationship with Audrey, who came along shortly after he'd divorced his first wife, in the moment of time where he was somewhat floundering after walking away from DePauw and figuring out what to do next. They met at DePauw, when Audrey was taking evening classes to get her master's degree in elementary education.

"A friend of mine told me there was a nice lady in his evening class, and that I'd love to meet her," Davis says through a half-

laugh. “And so I rigged a situation to bump into her. I would be outside wandering and bump into her when she was on the way to class, and we would talk on the way there. And I’d go up to Indianapolis to visit her while she was teaching. And man, we been together for 48 years.”

The studio itself is somewhat of a family affair. The gallery’s name, EbonNia, is a combination of his two children’s names: his son, Derek Ebon, and his daughter, Nia. When combined, the names form a meaning: Black Purpose (Ebon, from “Ebony,” and Nia, which translates to “Purpose” in Swahili). His son has dabbled in art off and on, and his daughter danced for a time, but they have mostly left the serious pursuits of artmaking to their father, and so their contributions exist in name, which, in terms of legacy, is just as good.

When taking in the studio on the whole, its division between its two central rooms feels intentional. The first room is for Bing, his own works in progress, his own past ephemera, odes to his family, photos of his daughter and childhood work from his son. The other half of the studio is where the work is shown, where gallery-specific shows unfold. Though this, too, is not without connections that feel at least somewhat familial.

The thing about lineage is that it does not necessarily require approval. For an artist to situate themselves in a lineage, it doesn’t require consent or approval by the person they believe themselves to be in lineage with. This, in a way, is one of the things I find most beautiful about artmaking. So much of what people are taught about the labor of art is that it is a lonely process, something undertaken solo, during silent

Reach High & Reach Back

Bing Davis is an award-winning and internationally celebrated artist, educator and community activist known for multi-media artwork that explores race, identity, history and the power of community. The documentary *Willis “Bing” Davis: Reach High & Reach Back*, which was funded in part by Ohio Humanities, shares the story of this Ohio legend. Produced by Emmy Award winners Ann Rotolante and Rodney Veal, the documentary is airing on PBS nationwide. You can view it at this website or by using this QR code:

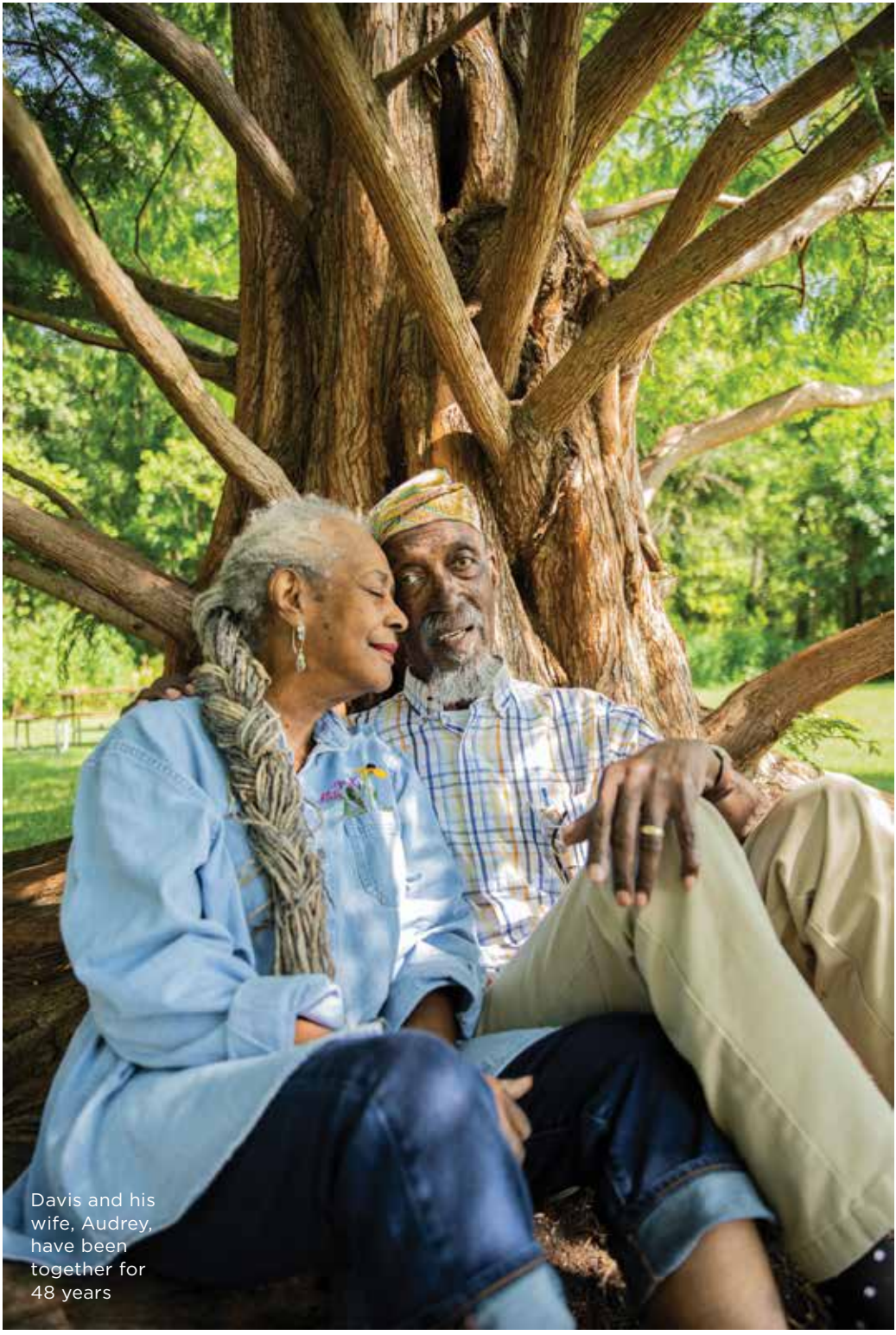
thinktv.org/bing-davis-reach-high-reach-back



Davis has visited West Africa 12 times, and he credits it with helping shape and hone his artistic practices and artwork

hours, the only available company being a blade of light tumbling in from a window or the faint sounds of songs hanging in the air. But the better, more reliable truth — and I believe this to be an even greater truth for Black artists — is that none of us are operating alone. There are ancestors who carry us to the work. There is a teacher who once believed in us, who saw something that would have been otherwise overlooked in the things we were excited about. There are present artists we are linked to, or reaching towards. This is all lineage is, which is another way of saying that to know that you are positioned in a lineage is to know you have a responsibility to someone other than yourself. A responsibility that supersedes decoration, or notoriety, or The Next Product.

Bing Davis is someone who, at this stage of his life in career, whether he believes it or not, gets to delight in being firmly in a lineage of several artists, many of them Black, many of them Midwestern. But, even beyond that, and perhaps more importantly, Bing himself is the central point of lineage for several younger Black artists. He grins wide and nods vigorously when we bond over the Black Columbus arts scene that I got to witness as a kid, when I mention Aminah Robinson and Smokey Brown. These were his peers, his influences, the people who he learned from, so that he could teach others. And so, he's also the massive trunk from which the branches of their tree of influence spring. This is the joy and miracle of lineage — a bit of gold touches everyone, eventually. As Bing walks me through the exhibit currently



Davis and his wife, Audrey, have been together for 48 years

on display at EbonNia — multiple artistic reinterpretations of Dr. King's "I Have A Dream" speech — he has stories about every piece, every artist who created the pieces. He points to work by the artist Dwayne Daniel and tells me, while beaming with a palpable pride, "This might be the best young artist working today."

When I ask how it makes him feel to not only uphold Black art, but to see his own work reflected back to him through generations, Bing scratches his beard, lightly.

"Well, I just want to see artists who are not afraid to approach social situations in their own way," he says. "You have to look at the world, and you have to make something of it. The world is always going to demand that you make something of it. So, we just gotta keep doing it."

There is a wall in Bing's studio that stands out, right when you walk in. It's covered in business cards, what looks like over 100 of them, stuck to the wall with tacks, somewhat haphazardly, many of them spilling on top of others. After about an hour of us talking and me glancing at the wall, I finally ask the question.

"Bing, what's the deal with that wall?"

And Bing, as though he forgot it was there at all, laughs.

"Oh, I just started collecting all those things," he tells me. "I would go to all these conferences and meet all of these artists and all of these people, for years. And now, whenever younger artists come in, if there's a connection or contact I can help them with, I try to help them out."

I find this endearing, but also revelatory, kind of a thesis statement of Bing's entire life. To live a life in service of others while still creating a legacy of artmaking for yourself is challenging, sometimes thankless, sometimes comes at great sacrifice. I think of Bing walking away from a record deal all of those years ago in this context. He brushes it off, treats it as no big deal, and maybe in hindsight it isn't. But he didn't only (or even primarily) walk away from the record deal to make art for himself, he walked away to teach others. To build a place young artists could come to and find themselves. To come to a place he was, and take something they needed away from it, like the cards on the wall now.

Genius, as it is named and handed down to Black artists from wherever the designation comes from, inherently suggests a model of scarcity. Black genius is rare, and is most often named by an institution, or a person on the periphery of a community, but not in it. A primary way that Black artists are required to operate against this is to see genius everywhere, and not potential genius. Active, vibrant genius, in our people, in our children, in the barber who weaves a multi-layered story while lining up a fade. These are the griots, the painters, the poets, the music of their making in the air wherever we are, and some of them are just waiting for someone with access to a door to hold that door open for them, and I believe for whatever else the legacy of Bing Davis will be, he will be someone who always held a door.

"I had tremendous input, from various artists," Bing says. "We have to help each other. It ain't all about us. People aren't going to pick up everything from the art itself, we gotta leave them more than just that."

There aren't enough hours in the day, Bing insists with a sigh, as he leads me through the somewhat cavernous and labyrinthian back-end of the studio space.

He takes me downstairs, to show me multiple works in progress, in various mediums. Work made out of re-purposed found materials, clay and metal masks, all of them in different stages of completion. It's fascinating to look upon, and from a naked-eye perspective, it seems amazing that anything could get done down here, the tables filled with metal scraps and dismembered doll parts and pieces of toys. But as he explains the various things he's working on, Bing's hands shuffle around the table rapidly, piecing all of the disparate things together, and his visions become your own.

"I love it when I can get the young folks down here," he tells me, whimsically, while running a hand along the outside of a clay mask. "We get workshops going down here, and I love to just let the young folks mess around and make things."

There are massive, black-and-white photos down here. In one is a young Black man in a white T-shirt, standing in front of a clay wheel. It's Bing, back from when he was in high school. When I point at the photo and ask him how his artistic vision, his practice, his living, has evolved since he was the person in that photo, he insists that he's always wanted to make bigger things, more things, both large in scope and ideas.

"I also always think about my first trip to Africa, in 1973," he says. "It taught me to trust the work from within, and not be afraid to set something down, try something new, and then come back to that first thing with what I've learned."



Generations of community members in Dayton have taken classes with Davis, who continues relishing teaching

He's 87 years old now and planning multiple shows at once. He's, seemingly, both aware



of time but not in a place where he is actively working against it.

If he can find 30 minutes, he'll make art in those 30 minutes. He adapts as he ages. A doctor tells him that he can't lift the same amount of weight that he once could, and so sometimes he works on smaller-scale things, or makes large-scale things a piece or two at a time. He's working with more materials that are gentler on the body, in terms of process. Like glass, for example. He's survived three bouts of cancer: lung in 2005, and prostate twice in 2015 and



"The world is going to demand that you make something of it," Davis says

2017, but he insists he feels good now, and our time together suggests that is the case. He's as lively as ever, particularly when talking about his works in progress, darting from one room to the next, touching everything, holding it up to me like we are in some kind of speed-run show and tell. It's endearing, and uplifting, I think. A reminder that the process, the actual Hard Work of Making, doesn't have to lose its pleasure, that the behind-the-scenes labor can be just as joyful as the art opening, or the person coming to talk to you about a full life and legacy.

He's still dreaming big. Before I arrived, he says, he was on the phone trying to rekindle the National Conference of Black Artists, which is the largest gathering of Black artists in America and where, he tells me, he amassed the vast majority of the business cards that line the wall in his studio. Upstairs, he has a massive, sprawling library of art books that young artists can come in and take from and return whenever they feel like they're done with them. ("Library" may be generous; it is more like "a large room with books everywhere.") He's able to juggle it all and able to keep as focused as he has been by keeping his artistic philosophy fairly simple, he tells me.

"It reinforces what we saw when we started this conversation — that to use my art as a means of experiencing the world and expressing my thoughts about it is valid, that no one can tell me that my making of art isn't valid, because no one can tell me my life isn't valid."

He pauses to laugh for a moment before continuing.

"It's like you hear all of those people talking about, 'Hey, do you believe in Black art?' I always just say, 'Yeah, well, I'm Black, and I make art.' So that's the whole conversation. It's simple as that. I have to make contact. I have to make things that represent an experience of learning, and growing, that never stops. And I have to bring it all back. I have to touch these African traditions that have been passed down to me and that I can hopefully pass down to others."

As our time winds down, Davis takes me to the roof of his studio, which is an extended patio of sorts. It overlooks a vast, green field. This is the place, he tells me, where the Wright Brothers assembled the parts of the plane, the place where the idea of flight was first approached, where the dream of pushing into the sky and beyond was first pursued.

We stand there for a while, taking it in. He sees this every day, and so, perhaps, it has lost some of its miraculous nature, or lost some of the feeling of coincidence. But I find myself momentarily overwhelmed by the contrast, the understanding that someone dreamed the impossible here once, and then the impossible became touchable, and then it became materially real.

And now, decades beyond, the building resting just next to that place is still where so many people come, with hopes of momentarily touching the sky.

Behind the Story



Writer Hanif Abdurraqib is an award-winning poet, essayist and cultural critic from Columbus. His poetry, essays and music criticism have been published in The New York Times, The New Yorker *and beyond. His collection of essays,* They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us, *was named a book of the year by* Buzzfeed, Esquire, NPR *and* Oprah Magazine, *among others. And his book* A Little Devil in America *won the 2022 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction and the Gordon Burn Prize.*



Photographer and artist Da'Shaunae Marisa is a Cleveland native who is an accomplished photographer and teaching artist. Now living in Los Angeles, she uses her work to spread stories of power and upliftment to communities of color. Her work has been featured in publications worldwide, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Vanity Fair, Rolling Stone *and* National Geographic, *among others.*

Good Memory

Six Ohioans reflect on what it means to remember



EVERGREEN

By Beth Weinstock

Beth Weinstock is a poet and physician whose son Eli died at age 20 after unintentionally ingesting fentanyl. She and her daughter Olivia founded BirdieLight, an organization dedicated to ending the senseless loss of young people due to unintentional fentanyl ingestion. Weinstock lives in Columbus, has served on several Humanities in Medicine committees and graduated in 2019 from the Bennington Writing Seminars with an Master of Fine Arts in poetry.

I've lost someone I can't live without, yet I am living.

On a gray February morning in 2001, my son Eli was born; he died in March of 2021, on a cold day devoid of color.

A minister and two policemen arrived on my driveway, and the backyard, which will forever anchor those three men in my vision, held no leaves, no early spring grass — only sky drained of blue. Their words splashed red, like blood, all over the blacktop, and in the hours that ensued and in the remainder of my time connected to my previous self — however tenuous that connection — I was powerless over memory; the creation of it continued despite a complete absence of color in my mind.

The creeping minutes, then hours, and long days to come, were profoundly anemic, locked in black and white.

Yet the world wouldn't wait, and within a month, the green exploded across my yard and across fields at the Jewish cemetery that had just weeks ago swallowed him up. Green was everywhere all at once: crabapple and hyacinth and the grass in tufts. Friends delivering spring flowers and house plants in green vases onto our back porch steps. My eyes welcomed these colors like steppingstones to survival; a budding leaf and a blade of growth demanded my attention — LOOK AT ME, I will show the way forward.

What a remarkable thing, to notice color again.

Memories changed and, in fact, became sharper, as if I'd reached a deeper level of consciousness that no one else could understand. The green Peter Pan costume sat folded in our basement, but I didn't recall it being that electric green. An Easter egg hunt took on an iridescence — swirled mint and pink and aqua, tucked beneath a curled garden hose. And the memory of a grass-stained boy in green Crocs, rolling down a hill, is so vivid in my mind that it is right now difficult for me to tell if that's memory or happening in real time. The color I latched onto amplified the greenness of Eli's loss, the unknowing of him now.

A friend and I recently sat near a beaver dam in Yellow Springs, where the forest landscape has been so altered by the beavers' efforts that it's difficult to remain oriented. Where does the water end? Is that ground cover or algae on water? The sun flashes over and into the richness; the canopy above and the velvet carpet of duck weed below float parallel, like a hallucination of forest floor. The beavers swim beneath it all, so purposefully determined to build their lives. To survive.

My grief moving forward creates a memory of grief, stacked upon the memory of Eli, stacked upon my memory of self. Color for me, in the aftermath of his death, became multisensory; here in the forest, in this richness of growth and timeless patterns, I can taste the color in the back of my throat. This experience for me is a gift — when I hike now, I try to see the canopy through a little boy's eyes, imagining the cones of his awe-filled retinas storing the experience — the memories — of green.

His name drips into conversation now, like water from the backyard faucet that is greened with copper decay — not yet archaic or a relic, but on my hardest days, I feel his name may become just that.

Every March, I crave spring with such intensity that I alarm myself; it arrives and so does sorrow.

I had six evergreens etched into his gravestone.



WHAT WE CHOOSE TO REMEMBER

By Jason Thomas

Marine veteran Jason Thomas was living in New York on 9/11 and became a hero who was portrayed in Oliver Stone's 2006 movie *World Trade Center*. The father of five now lives in Columbus, where he recently retired from the Ohio Supreme Court and enjoys speaking about the importance of unity at public and private events.

I snapped pictures of the perilous scene around me, then turned the camera towards myself and clicked the button in what I thought might be my last photo.

I perched the disposable camera — which I had happened to have in my car — on the highest point of rubble, hoping that it might make its way to my children so they could have a glimpse of what their dad was doing on his final day.

It was Sept. 11, 2001. A few hours earlier, I had just dropped off my infant daughter at my mom's so I could attend a criminal justice course when the first plane hit the World Trade Center.

People were unrecognizable as they fled the World Trade Center towers — their faces completely covered in dust, some crying and screaming, and others in shock. One man's lifeless body lay in the middle of the road, his head having been hit by flying debris. Did he even see it coming?

My family was in the middle of a move, so my car was packed with personal items. I created a makeshift mask with an extra T-shirt and grabbed the only tools I had at my disposal — my Marine Corps uniform, a Ka-Bar knife and a disposable camera — and made my way towards the site of the attacks.

In the chaos, I managed to locate a small group of people assembling to help in search and rescue efforts. After brief introductions, we began making our way through the carnage.

Smoke and dust permeated the air, and countless small fires provided the only color in an otherwise black-and-white scene. The once-paved ground was cluttered with the remnants of the tallest buildings in New York City, including everything inside: desks, printers, chairs, files, personal belongings and, worst of all, human remains. As we made our way deeper into the wreckage, the sounds of sirens and shouting gave way to deafening silence. The only voices were our own.

"United States Marines," we shouted, over and over. "Can anyone hear us?"

We traversed the uneven, sizzling mess for hours. My ungloved hands were burnt and cut. The soles of my military boots melted.

We continued shouting and moving in the patterns we learned from our military training in hopes that we would find someone. And then, around the thirteenth hour of searching, we heard what we thought was a voice. It was so faint. We paused and shouted again.

We made our way to a deep crevasse of rubble, where we found two trapped survivors — Will Jimeno and John McLoughlin. As I traversed down towards them, my lungs immediately filled with smoke. I had to retreat temporarily. I promised to return. I am one of 16 children, and I was taught that you are your brother's keeper. I am also a Marine, and we leave no man behind.

But it was clear we needed evacuation equipment. All I could offer was distracting conversation and words of encouragement; it was one of the more helpless moments of my life. There were tears of relief, tears of desperation, a lot of candid conversations and many prayers shared.

Thankfully, Will and John were able to return home to their families. But nearly 3,000 people were not as fortunate.

For weeks, I went back to Ground Zero daily in search of others. Each night, I returned home and hosed off in my backyard so as not to disturb my family. Maybe it was a way to switch my mind from Marine to civilian. Maybe it was a way to attempt to wash away the memories.

Many documentaries and movies have been produced to keep this part of history alive, including Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center*. In that film, this very story is depicted portraying me as a hero — something I've never identified with. I have not seen the movie, and I don't plan to. When you experience an event like 9/11, you carry those memories with you every day.

I eventually returned to retrieve my camera, because it signified the way God chose to use me on that day. But it was nowhere to be found. I assumed it had been swept away with the rubble until many years later, when a firefighter who had found it and had the photos developed found me. The pictures took me right back to that moment: the smells, the sights, a reminder of where the scars on my hands came from.

I enjoy receiving regular family updates from Will, and I find that sharing my story at corporate and private events is cathartic. It is how I honor the fallen.

There are nightmares, yes. But I choose to remember, too, how we came together as a nation.

I will never forget. Because I can never forget.



BECOMING WHO WE ARE

By Faye Sholiton

Faye Sholiton has been telling the stories of Ohio for more than 40 years as a journalist, playwright and screenwriter. The founder of Cleveland's Interplay Jewish Theatre, she has produced more than 50 theatrical projects, at no charge, to promote thoughtful discussion and build stronger relationships in the greater Cleveland community. She holds degrees from George Washington University and The Ohio State University and lives in Beachwood with her husband.

"Could I be excused from my first class?" asked a grad student who had just joined our teaching staff.

It was a bold question at the beginning of a school year, but Day One at Ohio State University that September coincided with Rosh Hashanah, when Jews worldwide observe the beginning of a New Year on the Hebrew calendar.

"Which brings up a point," replied our department chair. "Why can't you people change your calendar?"

Almost instantly, another voice responded.

"Dr. M.," it said, "we were here before you were!"

Imagine my shock to realize the voice was mine.

Never in my then-23 years had I even acknowledged an anti-Semitic remark. Growing up in (mostly) progressive Shaker Heights and attending college on the East Coast had kept me in a bubble of relative acceptance. But something awakened in me that day — something too basic to ignore.

I look back on my moment of post-grad chutzpah as life-defining: Going forward, I would listen more critically to human discourse and consider how we might acknowledge our differences with more civility. And I would remember how it felt to be treated as less-than.

Storytelling emerged as the vehicle to give context to my memories, in large part because of a talk I attended years later. Dr. Ruth Gruber, a distinguished photojournalist, held the audience in thrall describing some of her life experiences. At the time, she was writing her book *Haven*, detailing the lives of the thousand European refugees she had escorted to the U.S. in a top-secret 1944 mission. That assignment, she declared, was the moment she began to truly embrace her own Jewish identity.

"Sometimes," she said, "we have to become what we already are."

Inspired by her words, I began working on Holocaust exhibitions and traveling to Israel. And I began writing for the *Cleveland Jewish News*, processing stories that people generously shared.

Ten years in as a reporter, however, I became more consumed with what people uttered in unguarded moments, thoughts they couldn't share publicly. I'd note these honest revelations with a big "X" in the margin, to indicate "off-limits."

Those "X's" are what prompted my next phase of storytelling: writing plays, often about the Jewish experience. Poetic license allowed me to explore how we behave when we think no one is looking. Armed with a better understanding of what motivates human behavior, I could revisit my long-ago outburst at a staff meeting.

Evidently, I was becoming what I already was.

In 2023, I saw the documentary *Monument*, by American filmmaker Michael Turner. He recorded his life-changing journey to his grandmother's pre-war town in Hungary. By late 1944, the Nazis had deported its Jewish residents, erasing the memory of a once-vibrant community. Interviewing occupants of the house where his family had lived for generations, he recognized that his sacred place had, in only three generations, become another family's ancestral home.

Walking away, he shared what seemed an unusual reaction: surprise — to discover he felt no anger toward the strangers who now claimed his land, forgetting all who had come before.

And then he wondered, aloud, about the provenance of his own home: Who had loved and cultivated that land before him?

Stories will do that, as we take others' memories to our heart. And become who we are — or who we'd like to be.



MEMORY AS SELF

By Cynthia Kubu

Cynthia Kubu, Ph.D., is a neuropsychologist at the Cleveland Clinic who specializes in brain-behavior relationships and cognitive assessment. She is also a professor of neurology in the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Among other noteworthy work, she led a video project that challenges the stigma associated with a dementia diagnosis, which Ohio Humanities helped fund.

Anne reminds me of my friend Marilyn, without the funky glasses: neat, trim physique, topped with tousled gray curls above smiling eyes.

"Hello," I say. "I'm Dr. Kubu."

"Oh no! You are already testing my memory," she says with a laugh. "I will never be able to remember your name. You are going to think I have Alzheimer's!"

She shares that she is seeing me because she is a bit forgetful. It's been that way since she was a child, she explains. It's just a "titch" worse now. But her family describes ongoing declines. I learn three times over the course of the interview that her relationship with her oldest son is closer than her husband's as she smooths, smooths, smooths nonexistent wrinkles from her pants.

It is never easy helping people like Anne and her family with the moment that comes next.

Anne meets diagnostic criteria for early-stage dementia, most likely Alzheimer's disease, per the memory testing and the interview.

"It can't be Alzheimer's," Anne says.

I ask what she knows about the disease.

"It is awful," she responds. "And it means you don't know your family and you are no longer you."

Are we, as humans, merely our memories?

Let's first define what memory is, because neuropsychologists have identified five different types:

1. Using a passcode for online banking? That's short-term memory — our ability to temporarily recall information for brief intervals.

2. Figuring out a tip? That's working memory — a cousin of short-term memory that refers to our ability to temporarily retain information that is manipulated.

3. Tying your shoe or riding a bike? That's procedural memory.

4. Know that Paris is in France or that a male chicken is a rooster? That's semantic memory — or facts you know about the world.

5. Recall waking up on Christmas morning at age 6, jumping on your parents' bed to wake them and then unwrapping the Cabbage Patch Kid you so desperately wanted beneath the tree? That's episodic memory — our ability to remember personal events in time and space.

Episodic memories are particularly interesting, because they do something magical: They allow us to travel in time. They let us re-experience past events. They also help us understand our subjective experiences across the continuum of time, from past to present to an anticipated future. They connect us to people, to places, to feelings.

This is the type of memory we most fear losing. Because if we don't understand who we were yesterday — what we experienced, when we fell in love, how we lived — how do we know who we are today? Does it even matter? Are our memories all that we are?

I've dedicated my career to studying and working with people who have neurological disorders, including dementia. Many patients who enter my office are afraid, like Anne. They are afraid that a diagnosis of dementia inevitably means that they cease to exist as they have always been.

Here's what we also know, though: Over time, our unique life experiences, or episodic memories, become part of our knowledge, or our semantic memory. They inform who we are and what our values are. They comprise part of our narrative identity — the stories we tell that illustrate who we are.

What we've learned is that patients who have significant damage limited to their episodic memory system can still describe who they are — even if they can't remember specific events vividly. They can, for example, share that faith is a strong value, recall frequently told family stories or remember that they love pepperoni pizza. They still experience emotions, including love — and, in Anne's case, humor, too.

Episodic memory is undoubtedly important. But it is also apparent that we are much more than our ability to remember specific events in time.

If there's one thing that a lifetime of working with patients with brain disorders has taught me, it's the souls we've touched and the joy we fostered that are a whole lot more powerful.

Note: Anne is an amalgamation of several patients and does not represent any individual patient.



COMING HOME

By Adarsh Dahal

Adarsh Dahal was born in Dharan, Nepal, and now lives in Columbus. He is a program coordinator at the Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio, where he and students are producing a podcast that allows refugees to reflect on their memories of home — a project that Ohio Humanities helped fund. He hopes to continue his education and become a mental health professional who provides refugees with culturally sensitive mental health care that emphasizes connection, understanding and healing.

I was waiting in line for food at our refugee camp when someone came running, shouting for us to evacuate.

I swung the sack of rice I had just received onto my head, stepped outside and froze. The sky was ablaze with flames dancing in a terrifying frenzy. Ashes black as night fell around us like a dark rain. I watched as the fire swallowed hundreds of homes — makeshift, yes, but the only we had.

Days later, the smell of the ashes brought a herd of curious elephants trampling through several homes that had survived, snapping wooden beams, splintering bamboo poles, shattering dishes and forcing cries that I can still hear.

My life hadn't always been this way.

Nepal once was my heaven, with towering mountains that whispered stories of ancient times and a forest that offered a quiet refuge from the world. But that life was gone, and soon, this one would be, too.

My family resettled to the United States hoping for a fresh start. But our challenges continued.

Escaping poverty proved tough. From grades six to 12, I attended six different schools. I never seemed to find my place.

When I enrolled at Bowling Green State University to pursue a degree in neuroscience, I finally saw a path. But I couldn't shake the weight of my past. I began to focus my studies on the behavioral health of refugee populations and the long-term effects of that trauma. I realized that the pain we carried from the camps — the memories of disaster and loss — shaped the way we navigate the world.

In 2024, I began working with the Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio (BCCO) to help students cope with mental health challenges. I see how refugees live with the invisible scars of PTSD and depression. But I also see the power of empathy and connection.

By listening to their stories and offering support without judgment, I have realized that sometimes, being heard is the best medicine.

For so long, I believed that if I could just escape the pain of the past — if I could just outrun the fires and the elephants, the camps and the uncertainty — then I would find peace. But I've learned that healing doesn't come from forgetting; it comes from embracing your memories and using them to fuel your growth.

Home, I've also learned, is not a place. It's the people around you, the connections you make and the work you do.

I have finally stopped running, because I have found home here.



IN REFLECTION

By Lisa Lopez Snyder

Lisa Lopez Snyder is a writer and editor in Columbus, where she teaches adult writing workshops at Thurber House. She was a longtime health care policy journalist in Washington, D.C., and later taught writing at the University of South Carolina and Dartmouth College. Her essay "In Transit" won *The Chattahoochee Review's* 2011 Lamar York Prize for Nonfiction.

I was 14 years old when I started delivering the *Dayton Daily News*. I would zip along my Huber Heights paper route on a pink Schwinn Sting-Ray bike, complete with flowered seat and elevated handlebars, the swish of the newspaper's canvas bag flapping alongside my tires.

I remember feeling a sense of pride carrying the news of the day to people's front doors. It was the 1970s, during the Vietnam War. News was as important as ever, and newspapers were riding a post-Watergate high that would spawn an entire generation of journalists.

A classmate's father was missing in action after his plane was shot down during Vietnam. At the time, I often thought about what it would be like to know your dad was missing. How could you continue on with the everyday parts of

your life? Pack your lunch? Walk to school? The best we could do was pray and wear our MIA bracelets as a show of support.

This innate curiosity about not just what was happening in the world but also what was happening inside the hearts of others eventually led me to a career in journalism. I relished asking questions to find both facts and the feelings they spawned.

Why are these events happening? How do people feel about them? Who is working to make things better?

Now, I teach memoir writing. I relish helping people unearth and understand memories.

Ohio-based writer Lee Martin calls writing memoir "an act of resurrection." We revisit the past, he says, to make meaning of where we've been.

I like this idea, for finding memory's meaning seems to arise from the curated versions we all carry. Yet we often shy away from exploring our memories further, asking whose truth is it anyway?

My brother and I once recounted an incident when we were teenagers, throwing a small plastic ball to each other over our one-story ranch house. He was in the backyard, I was in the front. I clearly remember throwing the ball hard, but not high enough, breaking our kitchen window. He insists that he was the one in the front yard who broke the window. Not only do I clearly remember Dad rushing out to scold me, but I also recall seeing my brother through the broken window and out the back patio screen door, his mouth wide open — and then him running away. His recollection is entirely different. In recalling our distinctly dissimilar versions, we laughed, not really caring who was at fault.

Unearthing a memory and seeking the "truth" might be a bit unnerving. However, we can see memories as an opportunity to see others in a new light, and to try and understand each other better no matter how good or bad the circumstances.

It's what I did with my classmate, whose father was never found. As I look back, I realize that to me, she and her family were heroes for simply being able to wake up each day and go about the busy-ness of their day. We were also part of a proud community that came together, that showed love and care when times were hard.

For that paper girl on a bike, there is no better truth than that.



Project image by Simone Barros of boulder broom moss in Harrison County, Ohio

MOSS & MEMORY

By Kiley Kinnard

Simone Barros knew she wanted to be a filmmaker by age 15.

Born in Atlanta to a Cape Verdean-American and Black American family, her journey towards that storytelling dream took her to New York University for her undergraduate degree, to work for Spike Lee, Dave Chappelle and Judith Helfand and eventually — unexpectedly — to Cleveland.

She grew up visiting her grandmother in the city's Glenville neighborhood every summer and returned to help repair their family home in late 2007.

Years later, after earning her master's degree at Duke University, she found herself called back to Ohio yet again. This time, she went to Ashtabula, in the state's northeasternmost corner, to complete the documentary she'd started 10 years earlier about the connections between humans and the natural environment. It's told through one woman's experience walking a path from the Ohio River to Canada that was once The Underground Railroad.

"Living here," Barros said, "I came to see that a close examination of Ohio's history offers relevant insights for the nation as a whole."

Barros was awarded the Ohio Humanities Film Fellowship at the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University. Now in its third year, the partnership supports up to five filmmakers annually who are working on humanities-informed documentary films with a connection to Ohio.

Barros's film, *The Dead Will Show You the Way: A Fugue for Moss and Memory*, pairs conversations with Joan Southgate, who walked from Ripley to Ashtabula at age 73, with the point of view of a traveler along The Underground Railroad. As Joan, now 96, recalls her walk, the film compares her lifelong experiences with memory lapses to gaps in the historical record of the abolitionist movement — and a scientific examination of moss, which points the way north, to freedom.

What story will this film tell?

The story undergirding this experimental film revolves around moss, the non-vascular plant referenced in the coded phrase "the dead will show you the way." As this story about loss unfolds, so does the story of the people who created that phrase, which, decoded, indicates that they used moss as a navigational tool in the 18th and 19th centuries to travel out of the slave-holding United States to reach their sovereignty. The people formed a clandestine network called The Underground Railroad, and in the 21st century, Joan Southgate enters this story at 73 years old. Joan walked 519 miles from one authenticated stop on The Underground Railroad to another. She started in Ripley, Ohio. She trekked through Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York, and then ended her walk in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.

How are you telling the story?

The structure of the film is an experimental feature documentary. I'm telling the story by cinematically embodying Joan's walk. The film departs from narrative structure, crafting an engrossing fever dream. It's a fugue structure, which we're familiar with in music, and I'm excited to be applying that to a visual art. So I'm visualizing the landscapes of authenticated stops on The Underground Railroad — some of the stops that Joan visited — and I'm creating a moving image impression of walking, of approaching these spaces. I'm also interweaving microscopic and close photography of moss's presence in the Ohio landscape with more personal diaristic moments with Joan, so that the point of view shifts from Joan to a person walking on The Underground Railroad in the 19th century. As it shifts to present day, it shifts to the perspective of moss, which is something that is really exciting to do with film — to move into the sights and sounds that a non-vascular plant may have. In that regard, we also visit bryologists and how they study moss, which is a really interesting aspect when compared with The Underground Railroad, because bryology did not get its foothold until the middle of the 19th century, but people traveling The Underground Railroad were using knowledge of moss and its growth patterns as early as the 18th century.

Why is this story important?

I felt compelled to tell this story when I was living in Ohio. I didn't grow up here; I moved here, and it was a very difficult time in my life. There was a great deal of encouragement that I gained from a happenstance moment: I'm walking in Cleveland, and I pass a historic marker that denotes the house of a person who had left the South, gained their sovereignty, lived in Ohio as a freed person and then was a vital member of The Underground Railroad in Ohio. His name is John Malvin, and seeing that marker when I was going through extreme difficulty in my life gave me encouragement that you can survive difficulties, but you can also walk your way out of them. There is something incredibly simple about walking. Whether that movement is with aided tools, with a walker, with wheelchair, by crawling — however that movement occurred — there is a power in that. This brought me to Joan, who walked the distance of The Underground Railroad at 73 years old, when walking was difficult for her. She wanted to know: How did those people walk? How did they move at a time when their movement was restricted? It was something that she understood on an intellectual level, but she wanted to understand it on a physical level. When we include that,



"I hope that the film provokes a conversation about ways in which we learn, understand and interact with each other and nature."

— Simone Barros



Here: Project image by Simone Barros of the James and Sophia Clemens Farmhouse in Greenville, Ohio, where the couple, who gained freedom, served as Underground Railroad operators sheltering other self-emancipated people. **At left:** Portrait of Simone Barros by Zachary Betonte.

then we learn it on a deeper level. This was backed up by bryologists, whose research methods are physical. There are even notes by bryologists who tasted moss to get an understanding of that moss. This seemed to express to me a continuum of human experience and human survival and something that I stand in awe of when I look at us and the world.

What conversations do you hope the film provokes?

I hope that the film provokes a conversation about ways in which we learn, understand and interact with each other and nature. How can we move from looking at our environment as something for us to control, to instead looking at it as something that we participate within? One of the research sources that I've used with this film is Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Gathering Moss*, and she uses this phrase: "The river thanks the moss." She's talking about how the moss contributes to the river, how the moss enables the river to exist. The question arises: What would thank us? What is here because we enable it to be here? Children thank their parents; their existence has been cultivated and sculpted by the presence of their family. But as we widen that, how far does it go, and can't it go further? Can't we figure out how to be of service to others around us, to the broader world that we live in and to the environment?

What about this story inspires you?

The story is about people who were enslaved, moving out of that slavery. It's about Joan, who had physical ailments and was working with aging — a process that, if we are lucky, we will all experience, but it's a difficult process. It is about moss growing in difficult environments. It grows in nutrient-low environments lacking many resources, so moss is also something that not only moves through difficulty but then grows and thrives. Joan did that. The people of The Underground Railroad did that. Can we, as a country, do it? Can we move together? It's through the exchange of different knowledge, of different ways of knowing, that we may be able to.

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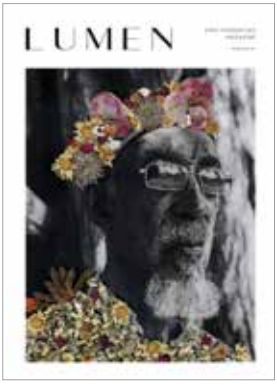
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"You have to look at the world and make something of it. The world is always going to demand that you make something of it."

—Bing Davis

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