

Avila News and Views

A publication of the Resident Council at Avila Retirement Community

Albany, NY

July 2020

A CHILD'S FLAG

By Alice Begley

*Earliest memories of the flag
From a little child's eye
Are three bold colors stretched aloft
And flying in the wind,
As soldiers marched abreast
to the Battle Hymn.*

*Or in a theater dark and grand,
Old Glory on the stage
Sent shivers up a tiny spine
At yet, this tender age.*

*Small hand held over heart
With love, respect, and awe
As shining eyes to full of pride
Watched the flag unfurl.*

*Today, the flag is still as bright,
Colors not marred by time
But fervor's dimmed
I know not why,
Why does the world not see
That the lovely flag of long ago
Is still the same to me.*

*With eyes not dry
My heart still pounds
When old Glory comes on show
And my patriotic fervor swells
As it did so long ago.*



GRAYCE SUSAN BURIAN

Interviewed by Rod Correll



Photograph by Karl Gohlke

Grayce Susan Burian is our new neighbor, now residing in Apt 146 at the Lodge. She and her late husband, Jarka, moved to Albany in 1955 and have lived here ever since. While this span of years entitles them to call themselves Albanians, both were "from away," Grayce born and growing up in the Boston area and Jarka, raised by Czech parents, in Clifton, NJ. The couple met on stage, in New York City, in 1951.

Active in theater productions during her high school and college years, Grayce developed a love for acting. This led to jobs in little theater groups, radio shows and a tour of the Borscht Belt in a show that catapulted her to the lead in

an off-Broadway play. It is there that she met Jarka Burian, a PhD student at Columbia.

As luck would have it, he also had a role in this production and, one year later, the two were married. What followed was more work on stage and off during a happy, 54-year marriage.

After completing their education, each taught theater at the university level. Jarka was a professor at SUNYA, starting in what was then the English Department. Later, under his leadership, it became the Theatre Department, providing some interesting opportunities for him. Those early years at SUNYA were indeed exciting ones for both Burians. With his Czech heritage and knowledge of the language, Jarka became an ideal candidate for a study the US State Department was launching of subsidized theater in communist countries in Eastern Europe. After winning Fulbright and IREX grants, Jarka set out for his homeland. Grayce accompanied him and spent seven academic years abroad, principally in Czechoslovakia, where Jarka had a chance to study the method in which a communist state subsidized first-rate theater.

It was an eye-opening experience, producing a wealth of knowledge, research that is now housed in the libraries and archives of Ohio State University. With a BA and later MA in theater arts from SUNYA under her belt, Grayce was able to assist her husband in his research.

Meanwhile Grayce was also active here in the United States. Between runs to Europe with Jarka she began to teach; a year at the College of Saint Rose in Albany was followed by 2-½ years at Hudson Valley Community College. Later, after Jarka's work in Prague was done, the couple returned to Albany, where he resumed his position as full-time professor and department head at SUNYA and Grayce instituted a theater arts program at Schenectady County Community College. That chapter of her life lasted 20 years, followed by a year of teaching at SUNYA after she retired. She did not rest on her well-earned laurels, however. She remained active, working with RSVP, teaching theater to children, and working with various theater groups in the Albany area.

Sad to say, Jarka died in 2005 but her attachment to him remained, through lectures about their lives in theater and chronicled in a book she wrote entitled, "From Jerry to Jarka, a Breezy Memoir of a Long, Peripatetic Marriage." That breeze, aided by former students, still blows, and has brought her to Avila where, I suspect, she will be a welcome addition in the years to come.

JACK CURRAN

Interviewed by Wilbur Shapiro

Jack and his wife Kay came to Avila in November 2019, on election day. They came from Loudonville, where they had lived for 44 years. Kay suffered from Alzheimer's and she unfortunately passed away on January 25, 2019. They were married for 62 years.

Jack was a mechanical engineer and he received his education from the GE apprentice program. He then went to work for the State of New York.

Perhaps Jack and Kay's crowning achievement was the production of seven children. They are: Jack, Mark, Mary Kay, Michael, Anne Marie, Paul, and Sue Ellen.

They reside locally and all had a college education, so they are doing well. Their parents were active in the PTA during the earlier school years. Today Jack has 15 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren

On their 50th wedding anniversary, Jack and Kay went to Rome for two weeks and had a private audience with Pope Benedict. Other travel destinations included Hawaii, San Francisco, and Seattle. After retirement in 1995, Jack and Kay often went to Florida and embarked on several cruises.

Jack was an avid golfer and would like to continue today, but he would need a caddie to bend down for him. His hobbies included being a soccer official for college and high school for 25 years and he belonged to the Capital District Umpires association for umpiring college down to Little League baseball.

Jack is a very pleasant fellow and fits nicely into the Avila community.



Photograph by Max Tiller

MARY HOGAN

By Erin Teichman



Photograph by Max Tiller

Mary is a native Albanian who moved into Avila during the Covid-19 pandemic. She is the second oldest of five; a preemie at birth, her father nicknamed her "Chickadee," because she was so small. Family and friends now use the shortened version, "Chick."

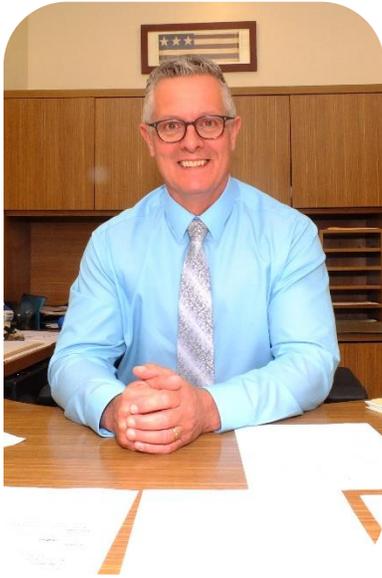
She earned her BN in nursing from the College of Saint Rose and a master's in nursing from NYU. Mary has worked as a critical care nurse, office nurse and taught nursing at Russell Sage College.

In her free time, Mary enjoyed drawing, watercolor painting, ski vacations, and, in season, visits to the Saratoga racetrack. She enjoys reading mysteries. Summers were spent on Cape Cod in her home in West Harwich, MA.

Having weathered her 14-day quarantine, Mary now looks forward to joining her sister-in-law, Gail Hogan, in meeting her new neighbors and taking part in all Avila has to offer.

SHAWN HALL

Interviewed by Murray Block



Photograph by Max Tiller

Shawn Hall may be a newcomer to the role of CEO at Avila, but he is a respected, and beloved old friend of all of us. Since he first came to Avila seven years ago to assume the newly created role of chief administrative officer, Shawn has been the linchpin of support for previous CEOs, and a great friend and advisor to many grateful residents.

Although Shawn is well known to many at Avila, it is appropriate that we all learn more about his earlier years, his family, and what he likes to do in his leisure time—if, and when, Avila allows that!

Shawn grew up in Cobleskill, not too far from Albany, and is a graduate of Cobleskill High School. He then went to Maria College, where he majored in physical therapy. After working as an assistant physical therapist, he returned to college at SUNY Utica/Rome (now part of SUNY Polytechnic Institute) to take a degree in health administration. He trained at Teresian House and received his licensure as a health care administrator. When Avila's new CEO at the time announced he was creating the new position of CAO, Shawn was recommended for and got that position.

Shawn lives with his family on a 10-acre spread in Knox, in the scenic Helderbergs. It is not all that far away but is a world apart from more urban Albany. His wife, Michelle, is an optometrist. She was from the Utica area, and Shawn needed an eye exam during his college stay there. Since he was new to the area, Michelle offered to take him around. They now have four children!

They have three daughters, ages 34, 21, and 18—and a son, aged 16. The oldest daughter is a pharmacist and earned her Doctor of Pharmacy degree at the Albany College of Pharmacy. She is married. His second daughter is finishing a degree in mathematics at Siena.

Shawn is a devoted family man and has been very involved in their activities over the years. He has instilled in them an appreciation of the importance of good health and physical fitness. Among his leisure-time activities, spending quality time with his family ranks highest. And when there is need for unwinding, there is his Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

I asked him how the CEO position differs from his former job as CAO. Working directly with the board is one major adjustment he needed to make. The time spent on contracts is another. And the responsibility for budgets is a third. He said that this is not an easy transition, but Avila is his second family, and the support he gets from our wonderful staff and friendly residents is superb. I asked what his major present goals are. He said his main goal is to keep all of us at Avila safe, especially during these troubling times. Another goal is to improve the occupancy rate, which is very much affected by the pandemic.

Avila residents and staff are most fortunate to have a leader as warm, dedicated, and devoted as he is to our well-being, especially during this most difficult period in our country.

Thank you, Shawn Hall!

MACKENZIE WATROBA

By Maxine Koblenz

We at Avila send out a most enthusiastic welcome to our new Chief Administrative Officer, Mackenzie Watroba. She, in turn, wants us to know how excited she is to be a part of the Avila community; and how much she appreciates the warm welcome she has received from residents.

Mackenzie graduated from Siena College in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in English and minor in communications. She began her career in the registrar's office at the College of Saint Rose. The past seven years she has worked at Make-A-Wish Northeast NY as the manager of operations. Now at Avila she is excited to be a part of the team involved in development, communications, and finance with evolving responsibilities as Shawn's CAO.

She is a life-long Capital Region resident who grew up in the Rotterdam area with her parents and two brothers. She now resides in the Latham area with her boyfriend. Mackenzie is the proud aunt of twin nieces and loves spending time with her family and friends. She is an avid sports fan, loves traveling both near and far, and giving back to the community.

In 2015 Mackenzie and her family started a non-profit, "Play It Forward 518" in an effort to help others by paying it forward, just as the community rallied around her brother, Joe, and her late father during their battles with cancer. To date the organization has raised over \$100,000 to sponsor wishes for local children through Make-A-Wish and diversion activities for patients at the Melodies Center at Albany Medical Center.

Mackenzie looks forward to meeting more residents. She wants us to know her door is always open; values our ability to make our voices heard; and wants to be someone the residents look forward to seeing each day, even if it is just to say, "hi!"



Photograph by Max Tiller

LODGE WRITING CLUB

By Lynn Altonin

This issue of *News and Views* contains several articles submitted by residents of the Lodge. Earlier this year, the Lodge began holding meetings of its writing club. The idea for this club came from Wilbur Shapiro and its purpose is to "stimulate and assist our writers to write and publish their work."

Many of those who attended were interested in writing their memoirs, or to put down in writing their thoughts and ideas for the benefit of their children and grandchildren. They brought their stories to the meetings, to share with the other members.

Anyone who is interested in writing is invited to join the club at the Lodge. Or perhaps a separate writing club could be set up at the main building. For more information, please contact either Wilbur Shapiro or me.

A FOUR-LEAF CLOVER WISH

By Sally Tiller



*Now that the grass is green, and winter is finally over
I think I will walk outside and look for a four-leaf clover
I will make a wish to get back to our usual places
So that I can see my friends' happy faces
And do my usual daily tasks
Not having to wear any masks
Then life will no longer be doom and gloom
And meals can again be eaten in the dining room
And games and activities can again start
And people no longer have to be six feet apart
So, take a walk, look for a four-leaf clover and make a wish
That this pandemic will soon finish*

THE NEVER-TOO-LATE SCHOOL REUNION

By Larry Johnston

I'm not really a reunion guy. The high school variety were never experienced. I did attend a 10th college reunion, but the chemistry of the years 18 to 21 somehow failed to reignite. The exception to this behavior is the fact that I do stay in touch with a few college classmates and greatly value the ongoing honesty and support exchanged in these special friendships.

However, here's a real reunion story.

I decided to call a friend that I knew in grammar school over 70 years ago. We graduated together from the sixth grade in 1947. Now, that's a real gamble, based on the hope that a special bonding takes place at that age. We were "buddies" in the old-fashioned sense, running around footloose, playing in sports, raising a little hell. You know. It was a great age.

Why did I decide to call Charlie? I had been talking with some friends about the game of golf and I remembered that a number of years ago, I read somewhere that he had won some golf tournaments in his part of the world. At that time, my life was busy and complex, and it never occurred to me to give him a call.

I found a number via white pages and dialed, not knowing what to expect. A woman answered. I said "Hi," gave her my full name and stated that I went to grammar school with Charlie. "We graduated together in 1947." Good for Charlie's wife. She didn't hang up. Instead, I heard her calling out to him, "There's some guy on the phone who claims he went to school with you over 70 years ago".

Suspense. He came to phone and not only knew who I was, but immediately began to give me a hard time, saying, "Where did you disappear to?" This was wonderful. Only friends with a solid base talk this way to each other. He went on to say that, back then, I was his best friend. That's a statement that most people don't hear in a lifetime. I certainly hadn't.

He then said, "Why did you suddenly move away without consulting me?" I had no excuse. I couldn't even remember much, if anything, about the years immediately after sixth grade. Well, in our 80's, reaching that far back in memories is like wandering around in a smoky room.

We did laugh about some of the different incidents that we each recalled, proving that individuals store things independently. We covered a few topics, including our mutual lifetime interest in the game of golf. I mentioned that I had written a little piece about the game and he asked me to forward a copy. I agreed. This was a small step in keeping our contact alive.

We then exchanged some emails and raised the possibility of getting together. Pretty wild. Two old guys living many miles apart, talking about directions via highways that didn't even exist 70 years ago, wondering if a meeting place we recalled was even still in existence. Simple logistics? Not really. We picked a place that, hopefully, was still there. With cautious spousal endorsement, we planned our reunion.

We met in the coffee shop of a suburban hotel. The first hurdle was recognizing one another. Surprisingly, we knew right away who the other guy was. There must be some mysterious bonds that cut through the issue of physical appearance. Interestingly, we are both about the same height and weight. Same deal as age 12.

The reunion was amazing. We didn't know where to start, but this was understandable given the time span. We talked about ensuing school years, families, business experiences and other highlights. For me, the most interesting discovery was the fact that we both emphasized incidents that were "turning points" in our lives. These were primarily adverse happenings that instilled either new awareness or determination. Heartfelt revelations. Good stuff.

We both had to adjourn. How to handle the next step, if any? We left with a hug, and an intention to somehow meet again. Maybe even getting to play a round of golf together. How great would that be? We'll see.

I believe that we were both delighted to have met again. I also believe that friendships of this magnitude are to be treasured.

It's never too late.

TWO INTERESTING AVILA RESIDENTS

By Marion Burns

When Paul Ward and I first heard the loud screeches, we thought it was a bird in distress hiding in the bushes at the side of the patio. The next day when the screeches sounded closer, we traced them to the underside of our umbrella table. We were startled and puzzled! We jumped from our chairs to discover a small brown toad, about two inches long, resting under the slats of the table. By the next day he had climbed partway up the umbrella pole and seemed pleased to watch us as we chatted. Paul named him, "Bob." As friends stopped by the table, we introduced them to Bob. Each day when we raised the umbrella, Bob was perched on the pole, patiently waiting for us. After several daily visits, Bob met us as usual, but had a cute little friend with him. Paul named her, "Melissa." She is green and no more than two-thirds Bob's size.

We continue to enjoy sitting at the same table each sunny day as do our unique Avila residents, Bob and Melissa. If you see us on the patio, please stop by. Bob and Melissa would love to meet you!



Photograph by Marion Burns

YOU GOTTA' GO WEETH THE FLOW BABEE

By Aris DeNigris

Many years ago, I boarded a plane twice a year to visit my mother in sunny California. She lived in a sleepy desert town 30 miles from Palm Springs. I would go there to check on her, see her doctors, reorganize her apartment if I thought it was needed, and schmooze her many friends so that they could tell her what a wonderful daughter she had. And "how did she do it?" They were happy years for the most part and I especially loved the shopping trips to Palm Springs. I also loved her Spanish friend, Louise, who was so fond of saying, "you gotta' go weeth the flow babee." It didn't matter what the occasion was, good or bad, happy or sad, it was the same thing. It got so I was saying it all the time and sometimes still do.

My mother had a 1963 Nash Rambler that she loved, and every time I visited her, I noticed her responses when driving were slowing down. But she was very popular with the other residents who either did not drive or never had. There were trips for lunch, shopping, and grocery items, and guess who was driving? My mother! I tried to tell her not to be so generous with so many people, that she could have an accident (there were no traffic lights where she lived), and if she was maimed or, God forbid, killed, there might be legal complications from some of her travelers. So, while I was a visitor I insisted on driving. It was like telling her that she had a terminal disease and I began to feel sorry for her. All the while, her friend Louise was saying, "you gotta' go weeth the flow babee."

One evening my mother and her friends were downstairs playing bingo. Since I have never been a bingo aficionado, I stayed upstairs in her apartment watching television. All of a sudden, the chandelier began shaking and moving back and forth, the sofa I was sitting on was shaking violently, and the dishes in my mother's cabinet began to flop over, piling together, and breaking. It seemed like an eternity while I was praying for it to stop. I rushed down the stairs after the first "quake" thinking I would see my mother and her friends huddled in a bunch, like any normal old ladies would be doing in emergencies; maybe crying or frightened to death. I rushed in, expecting the worst scenario, and there they were, all seated at their respective tables while one of them was calling out to the others, "O-75", and Louise looked at me, the picture of fright, and said, to my trembling form, "you gotta' go weeth the flow babee!"



And the very next day, even with warnings about aftershock, my mother was out driving with a carload of her friends, waving her hand to me, and calling out, "it's an emergency." I thought to myself, maybe you're right Louise, I "gotta' go weeth the flow." I learned later that the buildings in that area were right on the San Andreas fault line. So, when my mother could no longer take care of herself, I brought her home to live with us. I had finally learned that Louise was right, she had solved the quandary of life: how to relax and be happy, and sad, at the same time. I think to myself, Louise, wherever you are, I love the memory you left with me. And don't forget "babee, you gotta' go weeth the flow."

THANK YOU, AVILA TEAM!!

Life at Avila is stable and secure. This status is largely due to the fact that Avila adopted an expanded security program when medical experts announced that senior citizens were especially vulnerable to Covid-19. This program has proven to be both sound in principle and realistic in action. Residents have embraced this aggressive approach and appreciate the fact that close teamwork with the staff is a major component for its success.

As everyone knows, we can be a feisty group. We live here for a reason. We have chosen Avila because we love the feeling of independence and determination that permeates this special place. We pledge our continuing determination to address this situation. You know us so well.

Together, we make a formidable team. No virus is going to have its way with us. It is important for you to know how much we appreciate your concerns and support. We could recite hundreds of stories where you have gone "above and beyond" expectations. We also understand that you must be dealing with upheavals in your personal lives that occur with such challenging scenarios, all the while being concerned about personal exposure. We continually marvel at your ability to flawlessly handle major revisions such as meal services, deliveries, and safety requirements. Always accomplished in an upbeat and professional manner. Your caring means everything to us.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NUMBERS

By John Wagner

We are fortunate to have what is arguably the best number system ever developed. With it, young children can add, subtract, multiply, and divide; operations that no medieval scholar could perform. It took a long time to get here and the trail begins thousands of years ago.

When humans were hunter-gatherers, a hunter might report to his clan that he had seen "one," "two" or "many" animals that they used for food and clothing. Such a simple number system was adequate for their needs. But these needs changed when humans became farmers and had livestock. A shepherd needed a way to count his sheep when returning from pasture. Using pebbles to "count" his sheep, he would drop a pebble into a pouch for each sheep that entered the sheepfold. If the last sheep to enter used the last pebble, then he knew he had brought them all home.

But the need for number systems grew as civilizations arose along the four major river systems: the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, the Ganges, and the Yellow River in China. Now when a farmer took some chickens to market, the customer needed a way to say how many birds he wanted.



When writing was invented, symbols were devised to represent the numbers. The Egyptians seem to have been the first to do this. They had a symbol for "one" and another for "ten." They also had symbols for "one hundred" and "one thousand." The symbols could be written in any order which was convenient, but the writing could be very time-consuming. For example, to write the number "1999," it would require 28 symbols (nine for each of the 9s and one for the 1000).

The Greeks, Hebrews, and Romans used letters from their alphabets as symbols for numbers. The Romans introduced two changes to the Egyptian system. They added symbols for the numbers "5," "50," and "500." They also ordered the symbols, writing them in decreasing value, the symbols for the largest value was written first. Furthermore, to reduce the number of symbols needed to represent a number, they decided that if a symbol for a lower value preceded one of a higher value, the numbers were to be subtracted. Thus, while "VI" represented six, "IV" represented four.

These systems were not helpful to a shopkeeper trying to determine how much to charge a customer who wanted to purchase several items. The solution was to use the shepherd's technique. The shopkeeper would use a counting table which had on it a number of stones or "counters." Selecting the number of counters representing the price of each item, the amassed collection of stones would represent the total sales price. Today's vocabulary has words that recall this counting method. The table was called a "counter," a term used today for display cases used in department stores. A summary of transactions is called an "account" and the people who manage accounts are called "accountants."

Oriental developed a much better tool, the abacus. This is a frame with wires holding movable beads. A skilled practitioner can do addition as quickly as a Westerner using an adding machine. Such competitions were actually held in Japan in the 1950s.

The next advance came with the introduction of place-based numbers. In such systems, the value of a symbol depends on the place it occupies in the array of symbols. The value of each place is determined by a "base" number. The first of such systems occurred in Babylon where they chose 60 as their base number. Echoes of this today include 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, and 360 degrees in a circle. The Mayans in Central America developed another place-based system with a base of 20. Both systems were especially useful in astronomy. Babylonian records of star positions enabled a Greek astronomer in 450 BC to determine that the Earth's axis did not always point to the same star but rather described a circle in the heavens. The Mayan astronomers identified many cycles in their study of the heavens. A projection of these cycles showed that each of them would come to completion in 2012. Some doomsday advocates expected the world to end, others just expected each of the cycles to begin again.

The last major development occurred in India about 600 AD. Some Hindu mathematicians devised a place-base system which used the number 10 as its base. The usefulness of this system was significantly improved by the addition of the symbol "0" (zero), which was introduced as a place keeper. Arabian mathematicians recognized the value of this system and promulgated it throughout the Muslim world. We call this the Hindu-Arabic number system.

Italian merchants encountered this system in their dealing with their Muslim counterparts. They recognized that the system provided them with a way to record how they arrived at a sale price. So they brought this system home (about 1200 AD) and it soon spread across Europe. It led to a tremendous growth in Western mathematics. This is the number system we use today.

Another system has recently seen tremendous growth, the binary system. The binary number system is a place-based system with a base of two. Digital computers have used such binary number systems where the two symbols are "1" and "0." These two symbols are easy to implement electronically. (The base of two means that each place has a value of a power of 2. Thus, the third place has a value of 4.). Operations such as addition are quite simple and can be carried out very quickly.

While there may be more instances today of binary numbers, the Hindu-Arabic number system is still the most useful system for humans.



Photograph by Max Tiller

WHO'S THAT BABY?

Some of our Avila residents have contributed photos of themselves when they were much younger. Stop by the display case and enter the contest. The person who can pair up the most photos with current residents will win.

VOTING IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

By Jodi Mitchell-Rosa

The coronavirus has put large parts of our lives on hold, but there's one event it won't delay. On November 3, about 230 million Americans will be eligible to vote in what has been predicted to be the highest-turnout election in decades. Avila will have shuttle transportation service for residents who would like to vote in person. Anyone wishing an absentee ballot application form can pick one up in my office. Please be mindful that absentee ballots must be postmarked no later than the day prior to the election. If there are any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at x436.

VISIT BY A WINDOW

By Fred Seltzer

*It is really obscene
To have to see your wife
Through a screen*

*First to the nursing home
In my car alone
Then a walk to her window
To talk by cell phone*

*In the window's light
Elaine's illuminated in her wheelchair
Like a painting by Vermeer
Without a pearl in her ear*

*There's no line as that for the Mona Lisa
To see Elaine, I don't need a visa
In the window she sits like Whistler's mother
All we really want is to be with each other*

*Yes, we want so much to be with each other
It's a long time since we've been together
Forbidden to touch, to hold hands
We might as well be in foreign lands*

*So I feel that I'm in exile
And every day I miss her smile
She's framed by the window with her Mother's Day bouquet
Like Van Gogh's sunflowers, as I prepare to go away*

*Emotions run high
It's hard to say good-bye
I leave with a sigh
But we've reconnected our tie*

*It is really obscene
To have to see your wife
Through a screen*