THE MOTTLEY CREW REVIEW

The Mottley Law Firm

AN ABANDONED VIRGINIA

THROUGH JOHN PLASHAL'S LENS

When my neighbor, John Plashal, turned 40, he decided he needed a hobby he could grow old with. Photography had always piqued his interest, so he gave it a try, investing in some basic Nikon gear. When driving the back roads of Virginia to find unique landscapes to shoot, he kept stumbling upon something more interesting: places that were falling apart. Nine years later, John now has a robust print business, has authored the coffee table book, "A Beautifully Broken Virginia," and is selling out theaters and microbreweries across the state as a professional storyteller with a program called "Stories of an Abandoned Virginia."

Conversations with John about his adventures are interesting and enlightening. His pictures of abandoned houses, churches, schools, and insane asylums are haunting, often eliciting this response from people who see them: "What happened there? Who lived there? Why did they leave?" John answers their questions by researching the history and delivering powerful, emotional stories from the podium.

John enjoys shooting the exteriors of these forlorn places, especially under cloudy or stormy skies. The images offer unique texture, dark moods, and elements of intrigue. The intrigue grows exponentially when you see some of his interior shots. Many of the homes are still fully furnished, just as they were decades prior. "When you enter a home that has been abandoned for 50 years and still see all the furnishings and personal belongings intact but covered in dust, it is a surreal experience," Plashal says.

"These places are frozen in time. You are literally entering a time capsule."

His images not only include elaborate dining rooms full of decaying antiques but also living rooms with family photos, old newspapers, and vintage pianos. He says, "I find so many pianos. Everybody seemed to have one. I thought a piano was a token of affluence until I was recently corrected by one of my elders. They informed me that it wasn't a token of affluence [but] rather a sole form of family entertainment."

While he does photograph them often, decaying houses aren't John's only subject. "Churches are the best," he says. He has found over 100 abandoned churches throughout Virginia and claims to have only covered about 5 percent of the state. They range in size from small and rural to grand and ornate. Often, these houses of worship still have hymnals in the pews, the Bible on the pulpit, and cobwebs in the holy water dispenser. It's incomprehensible to many how this can happen, but John says the answer is simple, "The congregation either outgrows the building, or the money dries up."

Despite the cool places and fascinating stories, John maintains that the best part of this journey is meeting people. His methods of discovery include loitering at rural gas stations, talking to patrons in diners, and simply knocking on doors in an effort to gain local knowledge. He says, "They invite me into their houses, feed me meals, and educate me about their surroundings. It was enlightening to find out just how friendly

and accommodating Virginians in rural communities can be. Once you express a genuine interest in something important to them, all they want to do is share."

John originally thought his images would appeal to a select few because rural decay seems like a niche interest, but the interest in his images and stories of abandoned Virginia is more widespread than he expected. "We all have a subconscious obsession with a sense of place," he explains. "As odd as it may sound, dilapidated places are very meaningful to many in a multitude of ways."

For those of you interested in John's work or in attending one his "Stories of an Abandoned Virginia" talks, find more information on his website, JohnPlashalPhoto.com. You can also see his pictures on his Instagram account, @JohnPlashalPhoto, or on Facebook at John Plashal Photo.

–Kevin W. Mottley

CLUBS: NOT JUST FOR HIGH SCHOOL

THE BEST WAY TO STAY ACTIVE IN RETIREMENT

While it's great not having your nose to the grindstone nine-to-five, leaving work also means leaving behind a lot of daily activities and social interaction. Eventually, having nothing but free time goes from relaxing to isolating, and that can be dangerous to your physical and mental health. When planning for retirement, it's important to plan ways to stay active and engaged. Joining a new organization or club can be a huge benefit. Here are a few suggestions to help you stay active in retirement.

ENJOY YOUR HOBBIES

Did you spend years dreaming about hitting the golf course every day? While it can be nice to spend some time alone on the green, consider joining a golfers club if you want to mix things up. Enjoy scrapbooking? Check for get-togethers at the craft shop. If you've always wanted to try pottery, look for a class at the rec center. It's easy to find groups dedicated to just about any activity.

GET INVOLVED

Think of the causes you're passionate about and get involved! Animal shelters and soup kitchens are always looking for volunteer help. Book lovers of all ages can join their local Friends of Libraries chapter. To make a difference through politics, help with fundraisers or join an active campaign. If you want to stay closer to home, check out your local homeowners association. There are plenty of ways to engage with like-minded people while making a difference.

TRY SOMETHING NEW

Don't know where to start when looking for a group to join? Start online! Try searching "groups for retirees" and see what comes up. You might discover a travel group and start planning your trip to Asia. Or maybe you'll have more fun mentoring young people in your professional field. Don't be afraid to spend your retirement doing something new!

There's nothing wrong with enjoying your alone time, but don't let your alone time turn into a lonely retirement. Joining a group can help you broaden your social circle, stay active, and maybe even learn something new about yourself.

MOTTLEY FAMILY SPRING BREAK SUMMARY

For this year's spring break, we headed to Key West, Florida. The experience was a little different because it was our first family vacation without Andrew. His college spring break didn't coincide with the girls' spring break, so for the first time, we were a man short.

If you head to Key West on a family vacation, I highly recommend the Sunset Key Cottages located on a tiny island nearby (SunsetKeyCottages.com). To get there, you take a 7-minute boat ride to the resort, which is made up of 1–4-bedroom cottages. We chose a two-bedroom with a view of the water. The framed cottages are charming, have Key West- or Bermuda-style décor, and come with a small kitchen and a porch with rocking chairs. Breakfast pastries and more are delivered to your door every morning, and the resort houses Latitudes, a fantastic restaurant with the best sunset views on the island.

The benefit of being on Sunset Key is that you're away from downtown Key West when you want some peace and quiet, and the resort offers a nice little beach, which is hard to find on Key West. When you want to have some fun, downtown Key West is only minutes away. We weren't the only ones from Richmond enjoying Sunset Key. At the resort, we met a group of Richmond ladies taking a long weekend vacation together and another Richmond family of six on spring break.

If you go to Key West, here are my top suggestions for restaurants:

Latitudes on Sunset Key See above. Latitudes has terrific seafood and the best, most romantic sunset views in Key West.

Antonia's Authentic Italian with a heavy focus on local seafood is Antonia's specialty. This is where you'll find the locals, and it was hands down the best meal we had in Key West. It is located in an old frame building at 615 Duval Street. Visit AntoniasKeyWest.com.

Louie's Backyard. Near the Southernmost Point at 700 Waddell Avenue, Louie's offers great cuisine to enjoy while sitting outside and overlooking the water. If you go to Key West, this is one of those "you've just got to go" places. Check them out at LouiesBackyard.com.

Blue Heaven. Another "got to go" place is Blue Heaven. It's the best brunch spot in Key West. Enter from 729 Thomas Street into a shaded courtyard with massive banyan trees hanging over you. Enjoy a Bloody Mary and some live music while you wait for your table. Visit BlueHeavenKW.com.

Caroline's Café. On Duval Street, Caroline's Café is another great brunch/lunch spot to duck into if you're shopping in the area. The jambalaya is top-shelf! Go to CarolinesCafe.com.

Did you know that in Virginia, you can be found liable (legally responsible) for causing a wreck by "signaling" another driver to enter an intersection by waving, flashing your lights, etc.?

Back in 1922, Justice Cardozo wrote, "One who assumes to act, even though gratuitously, may thereby become subject to the duty of acting carefully, if he acts at all." In other words, if you gratuitously assume responsibility for another person's safety (by waving for them to "go ahead"), you can be liable for not acting carefully if something goes wrong.

Since 1980, the Supreme Court of Virginia has used this principle to recognize that a driver may be held negligent for "signaling" another driver to do something that results in an accident, but the rule has a quirky wrinkle. If the person giving the signal is not in a position to see whether it is safe for the other driver to proceed, then it is not "reasonable" for the driver receiving the signal to interpret that it is

"safe to proceed." In that situation, the signaling driver will not be liable.

I appreciate it when people with the right of way at an intersection offer to let me go first by waving or flashing their lights, but I always decline the invitation. Sometimes, the person gets visibly irritated with me, and if you're one of those people, I'm sorry. It's nothing personal!

The rules at intersections are what they are for a reason, and they create certainty. If everyone follows them, everything (and everyone) will be just fine. Once people start doing something different, even if well-intentioned, certainty is compromised and the chance of something bad happening increases, as illustrated in the cases alluded to above.

Take a teenage driver, for example. When an inexperienced driver comes to a busy intersection, you're just praying they can get through the intersection safely. They've been taught several rules to make that happen.

Those rules are designed to keep them safe. And if they concentrate on following them, they'll be fine. But what if they must also worry about another driver flashing their lights to "go ahead"? Suddenly, they are distracted. They have an additional factor to consider, and that extra wrinkle could cause them to hesitate and make a mistake. I've taught my kids to ignore such gestures and just wait for the person to go.

SUDOKU

SOLUTION

SHRIMP SAUSAGE SKEWERS

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 pound raw shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1/2 pound cooked sausage, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 zucchini, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Wooden skewers, soaked in water for 30 minutes

Creole Seasoning Ingredients
- 2 tablespoons paprika
- 1/2 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1/2 tablespoon onion powder
- 1/2 tablespoon cayenne or chili powder
- 1/4 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1/4 tablespoon dried thyme

DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat your grill to medium-high.
2. In a bowl, combine all ingredients for creole seasoning.
3. In a large bowl, combine the shrimp, zucchini pieces, and sausage pieces, and cover them with the olive oil.
4. Add creole seasoning and mix well until all ingredients are covered.
5. Load up skewers with alternating pieces of shrimp, sausage, and zucchini until they're full.
6. Grill skewers until shrimp are well-cooked (6–8 minutes).

Inspired by PaleoLeap.com

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

GENEALOGY SITES AND THE WARMING OF COLD CASES

THE REVOLUTION IN FORENSIC SCIENCE CONTINUES TO CAPTIVATE THE MASSES

We've come a long way in the field of forensic science since 1986, when DNA was first used to convict someone in court. In 2019, criminals who would have gotten away with their crimes in the past are now put behind bars where they belong. The advent of genealogy testing has been thrust into the spotlight with high-profile cases that were solved by sequestering information from sites like 23andMe and Ancestry.com. With this revolution in DNA testing on the rise, there's really no end to the impossible-to-solve cold cases that can finally be put to rest.

Whatever the motivation was behind genealogy sites in the beginning, they're now some of the most sought-after databases in the world and are worth billions for their collection of the most personal consumer data in existence. Using these websites' data, investigators can make DNA matches with potential offenders. The most famous recent case is the successful apprehension of Joseph James DeAngelo, otherwise known as the Golden State Killer. After 13 murders and dozens of assaults, he was finally brought to justice after investigators matched his DNA to the evidence found at the crime scenes. They gained access to his DNA from the personal genomics site GEDmatch.

Although access to the data of popular sites like 23andMe and Ancestry. com is restricted to its customers, law enforcement agencies successfully subpoenaed the companies to hand over the requested data. With the ability to theoretically solve any crime with preserved DNA, law enforcement and websleuths alike are foaming at the mouth at the possibilities genealogy testing has to offer. If only we'd preserved some of Jack the Ripper's DNA!