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Magazine



Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

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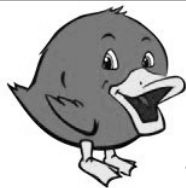
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Commentary Beyond the water crisis

By Paul Rozycki

Before last November's election there were many who wondered if Dr. Karen Weaver, running for her first elective office, was ready for prime time. It seems that we have our answer. In just a little over three months, has any mayor of a similar sized city had as much national, state and local air-time? Indeed, has any Flint mayor ever gotten so much media coverage? But, after all the interviews, Rachel Maddow appearances, CNN news interviews, newspaper quotes and celebrity photo ops, has it served her well and has it served the city of Flint well?

Certainly, the city has benefited (at least in the short run) and has garnered much national sympathy and support (both financial and otherwise) from around the nation. For better or worse, we are the poster child of the urban water crisis and the nation is paying attention to Flint's problems. And the response has been generous.

But has the mayor's celebrity status taken her away from the more mundane aspects of city hall?

Conflict with the Council

It was about time for the powers of the mayor to be restored, and the state finally did, giving her the power to hire and fire her own team. Yet, the firing of Police Chief James Tolbert, Fire Chief David Cox and City Administrator Natasha Henderson raised more than a few eyebrows. There is no doubt that Mayor Weaver has the power to pick her own team, as all mayors do, but many wondered about the wisdom of such a dramatic upheaval just as we are starting to get a grip on the water crisis. Police Chief Tolbert, seemed especially well regarded in the community. Though the council did approve former police officer Tim Johnson as replacement for Tolbert and Raymond Barton as the new fire chief, Weaver's dismissal of Henderson was voted down by the city council. Several on the city council felt they were left out of the loop and not informed of the mayor's plans.

All of the new appointments still need to be approved by the Flint Receivership Transition Advisory Board (RTAB). Once the TV cameras are gone the mayor will need to establish a working relationship with the council (and the RTAB).

When to Replace the Pipes?

However the friction with the council works out, there is one conflict that might be easily resolved. Recently the mayor and Governor Snyder seemed at odds over the timetable for removing and replacing the lead pipes in Flint. The mayor wants them fixed NOW, while the governor wants to wait for a full scientific survey of the city to locate the lead pipes.

There is perhaps no better time to apply Yogi Berra's maxim "When you see a fork

in the road, take it."

On one hand there is no reason why the mayor can't show immediate results. We already know of some houses that have lead pipes that need replacing. Why not take care of a few of those houses ASAP? Have a photo op with the mayor, local residents and water activists surrounding the earthmoving equipment breaking ground for the first replacement pipes. Over the last six months or so there has been a lot of talk, many studies, panels and presentations on the water issue. That's all good, but now people are looking for action. The anger and frustration over the Flint situation was apparent in a recent forum with presidential candidate Bernie Sanders at Woodside Church. Immediate action could be an initial response to that anger and it might be a first step in restoring trust.

On the other hand, there is still a lot we don't know about who has lead pipes and who doesn't (though the UM-Flint and Rowe Professional Services seem to be making real progress with the issue). Let's do this right and use solid science to decide where we need to dig. It may take a little more time, but the last thing we need to do is run around digging up the city like a demented squirrel on speed looking for lead pipes willy-nilly. The odds are that by the time we've finished with the lead pipes we know about, we'll know about the rest. (One suggestion to emerge from the Woodside Church forum was that some of the funds coming to Flint for the water problem should be set aside for computer software to track future problems with lead service lines.)

Beyond the Crisis

In the end, we will solve the water issue. However, there are both challenges and opportunities beyond the current crisis.

One long-term worry is the decline in property values caused by the water issue. One recent projection suggested a decline of as much as 25 percent in Flint. Those declining property values not only hurt individuals and businesses, they reduce revenue to a city that is starving for funds and has already lost huge amounts of its tax base. Even if future property values bounce back up, state law limits a comparable rise in tax revenue.

A similar concern is that the symbol of Flint as "the city that poisons its kids" may

(Continued on Page 7.)

Cover:

Not spring yet



Photo of the Month

Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

Local poets, singers make art from water crisis at “Powers of Witness”

By Stacie Scherman

Kimberly Brown, of Flint, steps up to the mic at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Flint (UUCF) in the warm glow of spotlights illuminating the stage, and launches into a poem.

“We are so vulnerable to what happens to the waters that nourish us,” she reads. “It was always the other creatures that needed saving, never us. We thought. Now we rethink; the water is life.”

Afterward Brown said her reaction to the water situation is very personal and that her poem is part of her grieving process.

Along with 11 other performers and an audience of 60 that late February night, Brown had been given an opportunity to confront the city’s water crisis through the spoken word.

Flint artist David Aaron sings about his experience with Flint’s water crisis.

The event was the second of three in a series called Spotlight Poetry of Witness, or POW, co-sponsored by the UU Congregation of Flint and Artistic Visions Enterprise (AVE). The two organizations have partnered to “cross cultural, ethnic, religious and racial barriers,” according to UUCF member Rayna Bick.

The series’ three events, all featuring local poets and artists, are being held at UUCF, located at 2474 S. Ballenger Hwy. The first POW event focused on racism, the second on the Flint water crisis, and the final one, set for March 18, will explore the school-to-prison pipeline.

UUCF’s collaboration with AVE began in November 2015 when UUCF minister,

Reverend Claudene F. “Deane” Oliva, met DeWaun E. Robinson, CEO of AVE. According to Robinson, 29, AVE, a Flint-based organization, primarily focuses on providing a “positive outlet and platform for youth creativity and innovation” in Flint.

Bick said that after meeting Robinson and learning about his organization, Oliva told the UUCF board that she wanted to do something with Robinson and the youth he works with. According to Bick, UUCF’s vision with POW is to “do something in the community to bring different people together and build relationships, especially with younger people.”

Robinson said that his mission for POW is to bring the community together and to provide an outlet for community members to share their perceptions about social issues. “What better way to express yourself than through poetry, art, and creative writing?” he asked.

Flint resident Lawrence Washington uses spoken word poetry to introduce himself: “They call me the poet minister.”

Robinson added that one of his goals with the POW series is to help Flint community members have fun in the midst of the water crisis. He said, “We’re still going to enjoy ourselves. We’re going to stay active, we’re going to stay positive, we’re going to be optimistic and we’re going to make sure the long-term solution is done. We’re going to be fighting on it during the day and having fun by evening.”

POW performers, including poets and visual artists, each receive a free meal provided by

UUCF and a \$10 gift card. Bick said that UUCF has held poetry slam competitions in the past, but this time they wanted to support all of the artists equally. Non-performers pay \$5 for admission and \$5 for dinner during intermission. Additional proceeds also go to AVE, the videographer and the photographer. Bick said, “Our goal was not to make money,” but rather “to co-sponsor in a way that we would cover our costs.”

Robinson said the POW series is part of AVE’s “tour around Flint” that began in December 2015 at the Greater Flint Arts Council.

The first POW event, held in January, focused on racism, and had about seven performers, according to Olivia Johnson, 23, who helps with marketing for AVE. She said planners found POW performers through word-of-mouth, flyers and social media. Johnson added some people who attended the first POW event as spectators were inspired to sign up as performers in the second POW event.

The 12 performers at the second event, including Brown, addressed personal, political, environmental and global perspectives through poetry, spoken word, song and visual art.

John Straw, 70, a former science teacher, read a poem connecting Flint’s water crisis to global pollution. “If you think the lead crisis in Flint is bad,” he said in his introduction, “the future based on hydraulic fracking will pollute the water for everyone.”

Flint water-themed visual art was also
(Continued on Page 7.)

Spencer's Art House leadership changes in Carriage Town

By Lori Nelson Savage

The February meeting of the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association (CTHNA) focused on a review of the community improvement projects affecting the area. Projects discussed included Chevy Commons, Hamilton Dam, Spencer's Art House, the Statue Garden and a Carriage Town Flea Market.

Chevy Commons project progresses

CTHNA president Michael Freeman said the Genesee County Land Bank and the city of Flint are working together to turn the former Chevy in the Hole site into a natural park along the Flint River. The park will include wetlands, woodlands and other green areas to form a vegetative cap.

Freeman explained the public park will have looped walking paths surrounded by low-maintenance plants. According to Freeman, the plant life will help filter and clean the contaminated soil left after the removal of the Chevrolet Flint Manufacturing complex.

Hamilton Dam study reviewed

Janet Van De Winkle, director of the Flint River Corridor Alliance, presented the results of an engineering study displaying a safe and controlled method of removing the Hamilton dam and Fabridam.

The study includes a plan to replace the

dams with a series of rock rapids, each with a one-foot drop, that will create small rapids available for recreation. The design also takes access into account – creating areas to put in kayaks and canoes.

According to Van De Winkle, if the funding was all in place, the project could be complete in eight months. Project directors are still seeking state and federal funding.

Zacks steps down

Freeman announced news affecting Spencer's Art House, formerly Spencer's Mortuary. He said Stephen Zacks has stepped down as executive director of the Flint Public Art Project, and Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood member Joe Schipani was named interim director.

Spencer's Art House is an alternative art space and design incubator situated on the edge of downtown Flint. Carriage Town (CTHNA) owns the building and has partnered with the Flint Art Project.

"After working so hard to keep this project alive," Freeman said, "we are very optimistic that something will happen here." Freeman continued, "We are conceptually looking at something that's bigger than one house – a bigger plan that might include residence and sales space. We need something

great to happen over there."

Statue Garden improvements eyed

Statue Garden is located at the river entrance to the Carriage Town neighborhood. David White, a Carriage Town resident, asked if a flagpole could be put in the middle of the garden. He also asked if neighbors would contribute flowers to put around it. Freeman said it was beautiful until the weeds took over. This year, the group will put down a weed barrier before planting flowers to help reduce maintenance of the garden. Freeman said, "now that they have fixed and opened the bridge it will be a beautiful gateway into the neighborhood."

Carriage Town Flea Market

The neighborhood association is planning to open a flea market in Carriage Town held on the first Saturday of each month. Freeman said he would like to see musicians, food trucks and a variety of artists selling their products. He suggested the group hold one or two flea market events this year to see how it goes. Yasmin Ladha, board member, offered to chair this project. Further information will be available on the CTHNA Facebook page.

Staff writer Lori Nelson Savage can be reached at lorinelsonsavage@gmail.com

Street light upgrades, zoning changes highlight CPNA meeting

By Nic Custer

The Central Park Neighborhood Association (CPNA) discussed grant applications, mobile meetings, Riverside Tabernacle playscape improvements, Kearsley Street zoning and water distribution updates at their February meeting.

Norma Sain, executive director of the Court Street Village Non Profit Housing Corporation, outlined plans for grant applications and asked residents for other suggestions of improvements to apply for. She will be applying to the Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF) for a \$5,000 Next Level grant to fund installation of additional streetlights on the bridges over Interstate 475 on Second and Third streets.

She said Second Street currently only has one light and she wants to make college students and nearby residents feel safer as they cross the bridges. An additional \$1,000 CFGF grant proposal seeks to fund food for neighborhood clean-ups and possibly T-shirts.

She said she is also looking for \$10,000 in grant funding to install 10 additional LED streetlights in the neighborhood. She reported she met with city of Flint officials to discuss options.

Sain told members she would be applying to the Genesee County Land Bank for the Central Park and Fairfield Village neighborhoods to become a Clean and Green site again this year. Last year the program funded regular mowing of 14 vacant lots in Central Park and 36 in

Fairfield Village by a neighborhood resident.

She also said the group may seek funds to take down five crumbling garages in the neighborhood and for property improvements on handrails and porches.

Amber McDonald, neighborhood program assistant for Court Street Village, reported that last summer the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association held two of its regular meetings outdoors in vacant lots to get neighbors interested and involved in the group. The mobile meetings were short and participants brought snacks and their own chairs. She said the Fairfield Neighborhood Village Council will be trying out a couple of mobile meetings this summer and suggested CPNA also try it. The group decided to move its regularly scheduled June meeting to the vacant lots at 606 Crapo St.

Bev Bergler from Riverside Tabernacle told members that a new playscape the church ordered has been delivered and will be installed when the weather warms up.

Vice President Ed Custer reported that the two homes at the corner of Kearsley and Crapo streets, east of the alley, will be zoned MR1 along with most of the rest of the neighborhood. Kearsley Street, west of the alley, will have denser zoning as MR2 and MR3, including the stone-covered home at the corner of Thomson Street, facing Kearsley Street.

In other news, McDonald reported there were 250 cases of bottled water and 200 test kits delivered to the CSVNP Neighborhood

House for neighbors to pick up during regular business hours, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., on weekdays.


The group meets next at 7 p.m., March 10 at Court Street Village Non Profit Neighborhood House, 727 East St.

Nic Custer, East Village Magazine managing editor, can be reached at NicEastvillage@gmail.com.




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Syracuse, NY galvanizes city-wide response to Flint water needs

By Stacie Scherman

Four hundred miles from Flint, Daren Jaime, pastor of the People's AME Zion Church of Syracuse, New York, recently "had a vision in the middle of the night" about helping Flint residents cope with the water crisis.

The next morning he reached out not just to his congregation but to the superintendent of the Syracuse City School District, who agreed to make every school in the district a drop-off site for water donations.

The campaign caught on in a big way in the city of 144,000. Soon the Syracuse mayor and county executive made all city buildings available for drop offs.

Jaime also invited help from another New York city and others of his acquaintance. He invited Buffalo City Council President and True Bethel Baptist Church pastor, Darius G. Pridgen, to join the water campaign. Pridgen responded by launching "Operation H2O," a city-wide water donation drive led by True Bethel.

One donor included the Buffalo company ROAR Logistics, who volunteered to arrange the water delivery to Flint and to cover all of the transportation costs.

The result was an initial delivery of 4,500 cases of water, with plans for ongoing deliveries and storage in a Flint warehouse and established collaborations with several Flint-area churches.

People's AME and True Bethel originally planned to work with the Red Cross to distribute the water. However, Jaime explained that as his church began to promote the initiative, he heard from sister churches in Flint, including Joy Tabernacle and Blackwell AME Zion, that many Flint residents were "running into challenges" with the Red Cross water distribution.

Jaime said he heard similar reports from former Flint residents in his congregation who were in contact with family members still living in Flint. "We had boots on the ground to find out what some of the challenges were," Jaime said.

According to Jaime, reported challenges included alleged ID requirements to receive water as well as rationed water distribution, leaving many residents looking elsewhere to fill their water needs. Jaime was also told that certain areas of Flint had only been visited by the state and federal distribution agencies once.

Residents in those areas who are unable to travel to water pickup sites, like the elderly and those without a vehicle, have been relying on outside help to receive bottled water.

Questions about the Red Cross response in Flint are being directed to a Michigan.gov website. According to a Michigan.gov press release from Jan. 22, identification is not required at any of the

five official state water distribution locations to receive free bottled water, filters, water replacement cartridges and water testing kits. Members of the National Guard are instructed to ask residents for their home addresses but according to the press release do not deny water resources if residents do not provide their addresses.

Because of reports and concerns about the Red Cross, however, Jaime and his partners in Syracuse and Buffalo decided to work with their sister churches in Flint to distribute their water donations directly to the community. Jaime explains that they wanted to "fill the gaps left by the Red Cross" and to deliver water "to people who may be underserved and have tremendous need. We felt it best to get the water to the people."

Twenty-four volunteers from Syracuse and Buffalo made their first trip to Flint at the end of January with 1,500 cases of water. Jaime explained that when they returned to Syracuse, he went to the local news and radio stations "to show the devastation people were going through on a personal basis," which motivated more people to donate water.

Over the following three weeks, People's AME and True Bethel collected enough water to make a second trip with 3,000 cases, twice as many as the first trip. The two churches, along with 35 volunteers, traveled back to Flint at the end of February.

Water distribution began on a Thursday afternoon. Volunteers from New York were led by the pastor and some church members of Joy Tabernacle to homes that Jaime said did not have access to other means of water distribution.

Distribution continued that Saturday morning at the North Flint Plaza at the corner of Pierson Road and Martin Luther King Avenue. Several Penske trucks full of water, dozens of volunteers from New York and Flint, and hundreds of cases of water filled the parking lot. Volunteers with "free water" signs stood at the side of the road waving vehicles into the lot. The cases of water were stacked in a long row, and drivers were directed to line up on either side. Volunteers loaded, on average, two cases of water in each vehicle.

The water convoy then moved to Rosewood Manor, a low-income housing complex about a quarter of a mile north of Pierson Road off of Martin Luther King Avenue. Volunteers continued loading water into vehicles and also delivered water door-to-door. Jaime said residents of Rosewood included women and kids and families. One elderly resident with a cane was greeted by volunteers with water and hugs.

People's AME is also planning to rent enough space in a Flint warehouse to store up to forty-five pallets of water. Jaime explained that it is difficult for churches to receive and

store large donations of water because of space limitations. "Where do you put 20 pallets if someone wants to donate and bless you with 20 pallets of water?"

The stored water would then serve as a back-up supply if donations of water do not meet demand. "There will be a time at some point in the future that the water will stop trickling in," Jaime said. "At least they will have something to fall back on."

Jaime said that People's AME will replenish the supply as it is used. "People will move on to the next cause," Jaime said. "At least you have a place that you can go, and you haven't distributed all the water out."

The pastor at Blackwell AME said his church is covering the cost of the warehouse and will oversee the storage and distribution of water from Flint.

Full disclosure: Staff writer Stacie Scherman also works for Flint Distributing Company, the warehousing company in Flint where the water is being delivered and stored.

Staff writer Stacie Scherman can be reached at sscherma@umflint.edu.

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... Crisis

(Continued from Page 3.)

stick with us long after the pipes are replaced and the water is fine. (How many people still mention “Roger and Me” when they hear you are from Flint? And that movie was almost 30 years ago.) The long-term image will make selling Flint even tougher.

Finally, there are the lawsuits arising out of the water crisis. Already it’s a rare evening when there aren’t a half dozen TV ads to call this or that law firm to file a suit over the lead issue. Whatever the justification for the claims (and there certainly is much to sue for), is there any possibility the city will be able pay for those suits and remain financially viable? The shadow of litigation may hang over the city long after the pipes are fixed.

A Crisis is a Terrible Thing to Waste

Sooner or later we will solve the water problem. Pipes will get replaced. Water will again be safe to drink. But if that’s all we do, we’ll still be a declining, industrial, rustbelt city, with a bunch of new pipes. We need an “After the Crisis Team” to take a longer view. Flint needs to emerge from this, not only with a collection of new pipes and restored water, but with the wisdom to show other cities how it’s done and a vision of our own future.

We already have a pipe plant in the city. Could that become a growth industry? (Pipe City?) Could Flint’s colleges and universities become centers of expertise in mapping and engineering solutions? Could the local legal community develop remedies to fairly compensate those harmed, without bankrupting the city? Could the “water activists” stay active and require greater accountability and trust from future elected officials?

Could all the media attention, celebrity visits, campaign promises and financial assistance become a springboard to a new city that is much more than just new pipes and drinkable water?

Let’s hope so.

Paul Rozycki is a retired professor of political science from Mott Community College. He has lived in Flint since 1969 and has been involved with and observed Flint politics for many years. He is author of Politics and Government in Michigan (with Jim Hanley) and A Clearer Image: The History of Mott Community College. He can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

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... Witness

(Continued from Page 4.)



Photo by
Stacie Scherman

Flint artist David Aaron

presented, including a mural painted by youths in the local community art project, “Gallery on the Go.” Three children also presented water-related drawings they created during the POW event.

The third and final POW event will be held March 18 and will focus on the school-to-prison pipeline in Flint. Robinson explained that they chose this topic because “this is something we should be talking about. We’re talking about the water, but [we need to] talk about incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline because there is no public education that is impactful here in the city. We really want to put that subject at the top and in the forefront of everyone’s minds.”

Robinson added that “the youth feel like they have been forgotten, and we really want to have some young people express how they feel.”

AVE is also working with citizens returning from prison to provide them with a platform to share their experiences. “They just need an opportunity,” Robinson said. “If there were opportunities in place before, they would have had a different outcome in their life. We want to make sure we provide that opportunity; even though that is not at the top of the line of things to do right now, we need to make sure it’s there.”

Staff writer Stacie Scherman can be reached at sscherma@umflint.edu.

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... Guilt

(Continued from Page 8.)

every day. I think I have a problem – don’t know if it’s a Flint addiction or a Facebook addiction – or both.

Because what I usually do is read about Flint. Flint, Flint, Flint. How did this city burrow itself so intractably into my brain? I can look to my left and see the whole LA harbor – its lumbering container ships, gleaming white cruise ships, the lit-up parallel cranes and the “blue bra” of the Vincent Thomas Bridge – but all I think about is Flint.

On post after post, my Flint neighbors anguish about lead testing and compare prices for lead filtration systems. They repeatedly note acts of kindness – how somebody snowplowed their driveway, how they enjoyed a snow day with their kids.

They are fulminating now about a proposed pot dispensary in the old Family Video on Court, and I read with relish the give and take – some horrified, some angry, some telling stories about grandmothers and brothers helped by medical pot. They are teaching each other.

On another site, everybody’s talking about the so-called water “credit”: this week the State sent out a text message – from an website cloyingly labeled “helpforflint.com” announcing the 65 percent refund about to kick in. Even the way it went out ticks people off – half of my neighbors got it, half didn’t, and nobody knows or trusts the State’s methods.

“Why is it only 65 percent?” one neighbor asserts, “It should be 100 percent, because we couldn’t drink ANY of it!” He is readily joined by “likes,” including my own. Many comments follow, most people excoriating the State and over and over, sharing their disgust, weariness and suspicion.

My neighbors are both opinionated and considerate. I love their passion and I love them. And apparently I love my city. One night, when I see artist and water activist Desiree Duell dancing with Stevie Wonder at Whiting Auditorium on a Facebook share, my heart bursts a little bit – that’s it! A moment of happy Flint.

But waiting for the take-out chicken Ted and I ordered for supper tonight, in the privilege of my life as the lights come up on this LA hillside, the twinge returns: I should be in Flint.

I apologize for being somewhere else. If it is possible to be innocent and guilty at the same time, that’s me.

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Village Life

Flint's water story triggers writers' unease

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Scene One: I'm sitting under a yellow umbrella with Andrew Highsmith and my husband Ted in a sunny plaza at a California university. The yellow makes our faces look like we've smeared ourselves with dandelions. It's a chilly but sunny 63.

Highsmith has just gone back for seconds on his drink. "This diet black cherry soda is unbelievably good," he says. I'm finishing my avocado and quinoa salad and Ted is leaning back after a BLT made with artisanal wheat bread. Yeah, I know: it's Southern California.

Highsmith looks more relaxed than when I met him in Flint in October, when he gave three public talks based on his essential 2015 book *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan and the Fate of the American Metropolis*. Today he's in his Steve Earle concert t-shirt and has

scooted over from the UC-Irvine history department for lunch.

We're having a good day: a nice marine layer this morning, almost no traffic on the capricious 405 or the bustling 110. But there's an undercurrent and a subtext.

We almost whisper it: it's guilt.

We were there to talk about Flint, of course. Even 2,400 miles away, whenever I get together with other people from Flint, it's all we talk about.

Highsmith's book has sold out and gone into a second printing. No one is more astonished than he.

But there's a tinge of discomfort for him in the way the Flint crisis has benefitted his book's fortune and his professional cachet.

"I always understood that if crises were going to happen in Flint, the stage was set for them," he says, asserting in his book and in numerous interviews this year that Flint's woes are the result not just of the immediate water debacle but of decades of infrastructure neglect and policy and leadership failures.

"But the whole chain of misfires that led to this, who could have expected all that? And the timing of it so soon after the book came out is just remarkable."

Just beginning a new job as assistant professor, Highsmith at first resisted interviews, trying to put his faculty roles first. But university officials, barraged with requests for Highsmith's expertise, finally told him, "You really have to do this."

So he has been busy, fielding many requests, he says, and he is glad to do it.

But he wishes it was a story he didn't have to tell. When I describe how some parents in Flint these days are bathing their children in bottled water, he shakes his head sadly.

"I just can't imagine what they're going through," he says. "It must be so grueling."

Highsmith wrote his book over a period of years, beginning with three years living in Mott Park in the early 2000's – a project which grew from his dissertation for a UM doctorate.

He remembers the moment the project emerged. He was sitting on his porch on Paducah Street in Mott Park, a house he and his wife bought when she was doing a medical residency in Michigan. They had just uncovered the home's original deed, that prohibited its transfer to anyone but Caucasians.

The discovery set him off on a journey chronicling among other troublesome elements the city's long history of real estate and institutional discrimination.

After they moved out to be closer to her job, the house was broken into and the pipes stripped. Highsmith says they

eventually sold it for "what you'd pay for a car these days."

"Oh my god, that's awful," I say, watching the glossy, robust students amble by.

Scene Two: I'm sitting in a booth at Spaghettini, a fancy restaurant just off Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. I'm sipping my second gin gimlet – my favorite cocktail – and I had to borrow money from Ted for the second one: \$13 a pop.

We're at a fundraiser for Flint put on by L.A. publicist Howard Bragman and other Flint expatriates, and it's a wonderful afternoon. Bragman and his crew flew in Koegel's hotdogs, Angelo's coney sauce and Vernor's ginger ale. DeeDee Bridgewater is talking about the Flint River and singing Miles Davis blues as the afternoon light dims to dark.

Gordon Young, author of the 2013 classic *Teardown: Memoir of a Vanishing City*, is sitting next to me in the booth. He's holding court – a stream of fans are asking him to sign their books, and everybody wants to talk about Flint.

"I'm not from Flint but my wife is," one man says, "and we keep asking ourselves, how could this happen?"

In a pause between fans, Gordie leans over and says, "I have mixed feelings about all this." I know what he means. What's happened in Flint has given him and his book an unexpected boost. Like Highsmith, he has been doing many interviews, and in Gordie's case, as a journalist himself, he has penned several op-ed and analysis articles.

But he understands that for the story to be there, people are suffering. He's a good Catholic kid, a Powers High graduate. "It feels uncomfortable for me to benefit from what's happening," he says.

On stage, DeeDee Bridgewater remembers being told you if you caught a fish from the Flint River you had to throw it back. When she heard Flint was getting its drinking water from the river, she was shocked. "That has to be one of the most criminal acts that I know," she says. (A full description of the fundraiser is available at eastvillagemagazine.org)

And there's that slight unease. Ted and I say goodbye to Gordie and drive in the sparkling LA dark back down the 405, under huge jets gliding too close overhead toward LAX. We watch a full moon come up and we listen to old Nilsson-Schmilsson and Talking Heads and Joan Baez and try to feel okay.

Scene Three: I am sitting cross-legged in my favorite upright chair, avidly scanning Facebook. It's what I do

(Continued on Page 7.)

MOON MAN By Grace Scholt

Moonlight streams across my bed,
it should bring dreams,
instead my head hears moon rhymes
lune-rune-tune rhymes,
boona-croona-noona-rhymes,
luna--luna--lune--

And then I think of all the eyes
that minded that festoon of light
pleading that the rulers of the night

the Kingus, Kronas, Phoebes, Manos--
lover-hunter-huntress-gods
might bless--

And then one night
a moon man took
one step and
stuck his flag upright
into the light
and said
look what I've done,
its mine now, mine--
this poor dependent
of the lady sun...

and then he left ten footprints
where he'd roamed,
picked up some rocks
for souvenirs
to show his kids,

and came on home.

Grace Scholt is a retired English professor from Mott College who wrote art reviews for the Flint Journal. Her book of poetry, Bang! Go All the Porch Swings, is available online from Amazon. A personal narrative of the poet's life in Europe in the early 1950s, Vienna, Only You, is available at gscholt09@comcast.net. The author's new book of poems, Night Song, is available from Friesen Press (www.friesenpress.com) and Amazon.