

P NORTHWEST PASSAGES

THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

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Moms share their 'baby love' throughout the city

By IAN QUILLEN
Current Correspondent

Motherhood, says Annie Lou Berman, evokes an instinctual compassion that goes beyond the limbs of a family tree or the walls of a family home.

"You automatically have this innate sense of being protective and caring for others and feeling for other mothers," said Berman, who lives in Georgetown and by day is an editor at the lifestyle Web 'zine Daily Candy. "And you see all the stuff fortunate people have and you know they want to help."

That sentiment, she says, drove the creation of Baby Love DC, a Georgetown-based charity devoted toward directing essential baby gear, clothing and products to needy mothers elsewhere in the District.

"Once we've kind of cycled through it, there's no way to immediately get it to families in need in D.C.," said Sarah Cannova, who lives in Spring Valley, co-founded local shoe company Sassanova and serves alongside Berman on the group's board of directors. All six members of the board are mothers of young children.

"You can go through various organizations," Cannova added, "that take everything and hope at some point it gets to the right place. But we all knew we live in a city that has an extremely high poverty level, and as women, we knew that there were other women that needed stuff."

Founded by Ali Wentworth, an actress and comedian who lives in Georgetown, and modeled after similar programs in New York and Los Angeles, Baby Love has grown from an idea into a thriving philanthropy in less time than it takes most infants to learn to walk.

Wentworth brainstormed with friend Jessica Seinfeld, who runs the similar Baby Buggy charity in New York, and developed a relatively simple battle plan: Publicize monthly drives by word of mouth, collect any and all baby goods that are in good condition, and transport and donate them to a number of organizations that route them to needy mothers.

After conceiving the idea last March, Wentworth "cast a wide net" to a few-dozen friends, Cannova recalls. The group eventually narrowed to the six permanent board members, who in June sponsored and ran their first drive in Georgetown.



Bill Petros/The Current

Georgetown-based charity Baby Love DC, which was founded by actress Ali Wentworth, gathers essential baby gear, clothing and products and distributes them to needy mothers in D.C. From left to right, organizers include Elizabeth Thorp, Annie Lou Berman, Sissy Yates, Ana Caskin and Sarah Cannova.

Using a truck donated by "Junk in the Trunk" removal services, the board members left astonished by the breadth of donations, while the truck pulled away completely full.

"It was amazing," Berman said. "And the care that people take to give these things — they don't just come and say, 'Hey, here's a huge trash bag of this stuff.' They really take the same care in giving

the things as they do in getting those things for their own children."

Baby Love DC held similar events in September, October, November and December. The spirit, board members say, has been contagious.

"We're making it easy for people by saying, 'All you have to do is drop off your stuff,'" Berman said. "And then we're trying to

make it really fun by a lot of times giving away cupcakes and cookies ... It's sort of a way for people to kind of hang out."

December's event, on the first weekend of the month, was nearly ruined by wintry weather. Baby Love DC's Web site, babylovedc.org, officially said the event was cancelled, and only two board members even made it to

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New collection puts D.C. in verse

By LINDA LOMBARDI
Current Correspondent

When you think of poetry, you might conjure imagery of the glory of nature. Does it count if it's a full moon on K Street?

The new anthology edited by poet and playwright Kim Roberts answers that question with an emphatic yes. "Full Moon on K Street" is a collection of 101 poems that portray our city in many different ways, celebrating the built environment and how we live in it.

If you love D.C., even if you haven't read a poem since high school, you'll find that the book is full of intriguing perspectives on familiar places and events.

One poem is about the painting of Marilyn Monroe on the side of a building at Calvert Street and Connecticut Avenue; another is set at a liquor store at the intersection of New York Avenue and North Capitol Street and asks, "Can you spare a quarter for a lucid moment?"

Everyday moments in the poems include



Bill Petros/The Current

Kim Roberts edited "Full Moon on K Street," a book of poems about D.C.

recognizable details like getting on the Metro at the Van Ness station, and, in more than one, the sound of summer in sweltering D.C.: the humming and roaring of air conditioners small and large.

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American Indian Museum celebrates winter storytelling tradition with fest

By LAURA L. THORNTON
Current Correspondent

Traditional American Indian stories, hands-on family activities and special gallery tours will be featured this weekend as part of the Winter Storytelling Festival at the National Museum of the American Indian.

Storytelling is a traditional, wintertime activity in American Indian culture, according to the museum's Leonda Levchuk, who is Navajo. For generations, American Indians have gathered together after the first snowfall — when the animals are in hibernation — to tell stories about the animals, the earth and "how things happen the way they do," she said.

This weekend's storytelling festival — the museum's first — will feature several well-known and accomplished American Indian storytellers, including Gene Tagaban (of

Tlingit and Cherokee descent), a world traveler known for his interactive storytelling style, Levchuk says.

"Storytelling in Native American culture ... brings people together — communities, families ... individuals — to a place where they learn to listen," Tagaban said.

"The importance of storytelling is that it's a way to break down the walls and connect with the part of you that opens up the possibility of imagination and creativity," which "in turns opens up the door to create solutions," he added.

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Courtesy of Thirza Defoe

Thirza Defoe will perform in the National Museum of the American Indian's storytelling festival.

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POEMS

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The poems were all written between 1950 and the present, but the history of the city is a constant presence. Roberts, who's lived in D.C. for almost 25 years, has done research and given tours about the homes of famous local writers, and says the city's past permeates her thinking.

"Driving down the street I think, that's where Zora Neale Hurston lived, that's where Walt Whitman's boarding house was," she said.

Many of the poems evoke what Roberts calls this "layered sense of place." One, called "Ode to the Black Nationalist Pharaoh Head of Georgia Avenue," laments the loss of a decoration on a closed bookstore; it makes Roberts think of "the way locals give directions like, turn left where such-and-such used to be."

Another contribution that was written especially for the book tells of author Myra Sklarew's childhood home in a part of Southeast that was bulldozed for redevelopment. "There's no trace of it now except in communal memory," said Roberts. "I wanted to make sure I included poems that were about gentrification, what's torn down, what's built up."

Politics, of course, is also featured, both directly in subject matter and indirectly, such as in the day jobs of some of the poets, like

former congressman and five-time presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy. And for newcomers — or those who want to send the book to folks back home — the introduction to each poem explains the local references.

But more generally, the book shows that even poetic metaphors can be based entirely in the urban experience. One example is the way Sterling A. Brown, first poet laureate of D.C., expresses the beauty of a woman in one poem:

*"The last time I saw Annie on the avenue,
She held up traffic for an hour or two.
The green light refused, absolutely,
to go off at all;
And the red light and the amber
nearly popped the glass,
When Annie walked by, they came
on so fast,
Then stayed on together twenty
minutes after she went past;
And it took three days for to get
them duly timed again.
Even so, they palpitated every now
and then."*

"We have this sort of funny romantic ideal that poets are living these solitary lives out in the wilderness and writing about nature," said Roberts, who lives in the Park View neighborhood (two blocks from the Petworth Metro, but, she says, "every time I say I live in Petworth, Jim Graham yells at me"). "But statistically, most of

us are urban, most of us are part of literary communities."

And in fact, the book celebrates this literary community as well as the city itself. Roberts compiled the anthology to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the online poetry journal that she edits, Beltway Poetry Quarterly, which features only poets who live or work inside the Beltway. She says she wondered at first if it was odd for a journal to be so narrowly focused, "but it's worked really well — it's

helped people connect with one another. We have an incredibly rich diverse literary community to draw on."

There are poetry anthologies about other cities, but Roberts found that there had never been one about D.C., which she said has been slighted in other ways as well. For instance, she bemoans the name of the "Harlem Renaissance" — "People think that it happened in New York, but the movement started in D.C."

Roberts hopes this anthology will help to change this one-sided view of the city. "We have more of a reputation as a political center than a literary center," she says, "but we are a major literary center, so we need to claim it."

Plan B Press released "Full Moon on K Street: Poems About Washington, DC" on Monday. Readings will take place throughout 2010; see washingtonart.com/beltway/tenth.html for more information.

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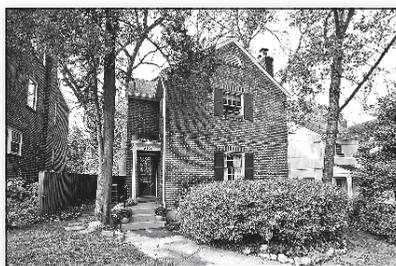
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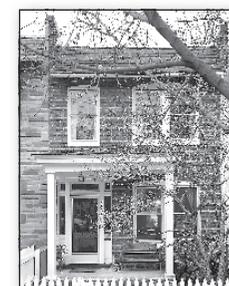
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