

South End News

January 10, 2019 [Vol. 40, No. 1]

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Sarge



Obituary

Sarge Cat, suddenly of unknown cause

SUBMITTED BY RHYS GARDINER

Sunday morning, December 30, 2018, the South End lost one of its longtime citizens, a beloved "community cat". Sarge, a big orange and white neutered male, was a handsome, amiable gent. He was loyal and devoted to his bonded consort Tia Calico (lost in the big blizzard of 2015), fought only in self-defense, and was a friend to any cat in distress, bringing lost friendlies and hungry

strays to our kitchen window for food and rescue.

Too wild to tolerate close human contact, he lived his whole life as a community cat on the streets around the Villa Victoria and Blackstone Square. At 12, he was healthy, active, and had outlived the average feral's lifespan at least three times over. By MA state law, any cat who lives, or spends time, outdoors must be provided a shelter by their feeder, and he survived the bitter

New England winters snug in a home-made insulated shelter, which he generously shared with any other cats who needed warmth in inclement weather, friend or foe.

Sarge was a familiar sight around the South End and many of us enjoyed watching him walking casually along fence tops, lounging on a roof in the sun, or trotting around the park at night, patrolling

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Rich and Expressive

Small Mouth Sounds,
SpeakEasy Stage Company, Roberts Studio Theatre, Boston
Center for the Arts, through February 3. 617-933-8600 or
bostontheatrescebe.com

BY JULES BECKER

Is the world 'too much with us'? William Wordsworth warned exactly that in an early 1800's sonnet to that effect. Bess Wohl surely agrees in her witty, insightful and often amusing

2015 play "Small Mouth Sounds."

Here urban pressures are escaped and technological trappings are verboten during a week-long stay at a meditation retreat in the woods designed with disarming simplicity by Cristina Todesco. In fact, this

clever playwright—who actually experienced a retreat herself—has written a largely silent but always involving 100-minute work in which words largely take a back seat to feelings, body language and reading the essence of others.

Now SpeakEasy Stage Company—in a taut area premiere from guest director M. Bevin O'Gara—is

Continued on page 4

Local news
for and about Boston's
best neighborhood

Guest Opinion

ABCD calls for end to government shutdown

SUBMITTED BY ACTION FOR BOSTON
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As the government shutdown enters its third week, millions of Americans face life-threatening hunger and hardship, with funding running out for food stamps, tax refunds/credits, WIC, school lunches, and Section 8 and other subsidized housing programs.

Many are already losing the benefit that allows them to purchase food. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP or food stamps, will run out of funds by February. More than 19 million American households—or 39 million people—depend on food stamps to survive.

But right now many grocery stores across the nation are reporting that "EBT" cards issued to SNAP

recipients are not being accepted in their online systems – it seems the government has already shut them down.

The shutdown also means that no tax refunds will be made. Hard-working low-income taxpayers who benefit from the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Care Tax Credit and who depend on early filing to receive their refunds and credits have nowhere to turn.

"We join with our representatives in Congress – in the Senate and the House – who call for total restoration of government funding while differences are discussed separately," said Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) President/CEO John J. Drew. "If

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Advice on Pets, Life, Love

BY MONICA COLLINS

Dear Dog Lady,

I have a Facebook "friend," a woman with whom I used to work and we have a shared love of dogs.

In fact, she has the same kind of dog as I do and I've always enjoyed her pictures and postings about her pet Shelby. Over the years, we've swapped stories, home remedies and funny quirks about our dogs. Recently I was gobsmacked when she posted that Shelby had gone in for delicate surgery to have his gallbladder removed. She asked her Facebook crowd for their best wishes and hopes for his recovery. I was near tears as I wrote a "get well" line. Two days later, I was overjoyed when I saw her update – Shelby was recovering. He had rolled over to have his belly rubbed and had taken

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Notice of Public Meeting

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Sarge

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the neighborhood.

I had the honor of being his caretaker for over a decade. In the early 2000's, unsterilized cats abounded in this neighborhood, bearing multiple litters of kittens annually. Trap-neuter-release (TNR) is the humane approach to reducing the street cat population. In Boston, this is a volunteer effort assisted by the Animal Rescue League and Charles River Alleycats. When I called to report all the stray cats running through our yard, I got recruited as a volunteer.

In 2007, I trapped Sarge for sterilization and vetting, and cared for him daily ever since with the help of my kids and roommates. His photo shows the left ear tip he proudly bore—the universal symbol of a cared-for feral who has been TNR'd. Through TNR of perhaps three dozen feral cats, rescue of a dozen friendly strays for rehoming, and as many kittens for taming, over the years the feral colony near Blackstone Square gradually reduced from 16 regulars at its peak, to just Sarge. His demise ends a chapter of the South End story.

Sarge became part of our family, visiting often and sitting at the window for company and was much loved, although he couldn't tolerate being indoors nor being close to humans. He will be missed.

On Sunday morning, December 30, at least four separate neighbors saw a cat lying in West Newton Street or Newland St., checked for signs of life, and sadly called 311 to report it dead. Animal Control fields calls regarding live

animals, however the removal of dead animals falls to the Dept of Public Works.

By the time I heard from a concerned neighbor that a cat had been found dead nearby, it was too late. Efforts to find out what happened were complicated by it being Sunday, the imminent New Year's holiday, lack of recorded details, and no way to reach the DPW staff who handled the removal. Initially, there was some concern that one or more cats might have been poisoned—horrible but plausible given the heightened rat activity related to all the recent utility work. However, it now seems probable that he was struck by a car. Although several people had called in to 311, there was only one "case" on record, for removal of a dead animal, closed with little detail and no additional notes from subsequent callers.

After multiple calls with neighbors, to 311 and DPW, a staffer eventually located a photograph, which brought some closure by positively confirming the cat's identity—sadly, it was our Sarge. Surprisingly, there's no established protocol for identifying dead cats and dogs picked up by the City. Is it long or short haired; neutered; coat color and pattern, legs, tail, face markings, and size? For cats, is it ear-tipped? Many pet owners rely on microchips to provide contact information in case of emergency.

However, it only works if the animal is scanned for a chip, which isn't current practice. DPW doesn't have a scanner. Thanks to DPW staff for engaging in discussion and hopefully following up on suggestions such as photographing, labelling by location found,

taking a written description, and scanning for a microchip, for any pet-type animals in future. Sarge lent beauty to our neighborhood with his genial though elusive presence. Thanks to a caring neighbor, a visual of candles, flowers and photos marks his site. In his memory, or in honor of community cats, contributions of any amount are invited to ARL Boston-Community Cat Services, 10 Chandler St., Boston MA 02116

This poem was written for Sarge by a new South End resident, Patience Andrew, a poet from Nigeria working at Teen Empowerment this year as an Atlas Corps Fellow:

I saw him
through the
windowpane
glaring
calmly
penetratively
peacefully
I only could wish
for such presence
with a comely fur
I wish I had touched.

I felt naked
to his peering eyes
as one knowing
my weakness
yet not judging
reminding me
life is here and now



Sarge

But is this just a cat?
Or is it the conscious
connection he brings.

I do not know
how to stop
seeing his face
and how much
he taught us
to give all we hold
in our sweaty palms
was he just a cat?
Certainly, no
He was more...

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Letter to the Editor

A Boston Boom, but not for everyone

As someone who was born and raised in the South End/Lower Roxbury neighborhood along Harrison Avenue back in the days before gentrification came in and changed housing patterns, and not so much for the good. I did notice that public meeting notice by the Boston Planning & Development Agency concerning the Alexandra Hotel. I remember this building quite well back in the days of my youth. I had friends who lived in what was then a very large apartment building. It didn't have historic value and was only an old building to me.

Thinking about that building, I also remembered the old opera house abandoned for my then lifetime at the corner of Washington Street and Worcester Square. They both seemed like ghosts of the past. Today, the opera house site is now upscale condos and I see that the Alexandra Hotel seems to be headed in the same direction.

The public notice in the South End News talked about a 150 room, 12 floor boutique

hotel with most likely expensive restaurant and café space on the ground floor and a rooftop eatery.

Growing up in my old boyhood neighborhood, things were always tough for working class families like mine. As the building boom in Boston continues, it has become a bust for low-income and working families.

Doesn't anyone care about working class folk anymore? Our Boston Boom is not booming for many of us but only for those who can afford the high life. Boutique hotels, expensive restaurants, what about the rest of us?

We are becoming a city of housing extremes. The very rich and the very poor. The rest of us just keep getting squeezed out of our future in Boston.

God forbid, developers think about ordinary folk and that goes for our elected officials too.

Sal Giaratani,
East Boston

Guest Opinion

Continued from page 1

this shutdown continues, hunger in America will be back big-time. You will have millions of people unable to buy the food they need to survive. They also won't have access to the hard-earned tax credits they count on to pay for rent, medicine, food and heat at this time of year. Landlords who can't collect rent subsidies may evict them for market-rate renters."

The average benefit for the 19 million households receiving SNAP is \$245 per month. More than 68 percent of SNAP funds go to families with children; 44 percent go to working families. The

SNAP program is used in 1.4 million households where veterans live. Without this benefit, children, seniors and the veterans who have selflessly protected our nation will go hungry.

With millions of people losing their consumer power without the benefits that enable them to buy food, the shutdown will have a major impact on groceries and small businesses that serve poor communities where shoppers rely on their SNAP benefits.

The Food Distribution Program on Indi-

an Reservations and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are not receiving any federal funds during the shutdown. Massachusetts has received funding through January for school lunches through the Child Nutrition Programs funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. After that there is no funding for school lunches.

The Department of Housing & Urban Development is basically unstaffed, with the vast majority of employees forced to stay home without pay. Dire situations involving low-income housing issues have been reported – with no help available. Low-income families make up 72 percent of HUD-assisted households – and more than half of those receiving vouchers are elderly or persons with disabilities. Funds for basic housing operations and housing vouchers are available through January – after that it is unclear what will happen. Low-income families and their landlords face loss of Section 8 housing subsidies, causing families to lose their housing and landlords to possibly evict them to get paying tenants to prevent falling into foreclosure.

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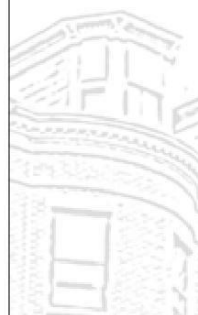
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Theater

Continued from page 1

voicing this search for personal clarity, serenity and mutual understanding as vividly as the sublime Off-Broadway original (also seen by this critic).

As in New York, SpeakEasy calls on audience members to take their seats around a modified thrust stage (theatergoers on three sides) of a cozily reconfigured Roberts Studio Theatre. Gradually six diverse participants—three women and three men—occupy the space on the fourth side—five in chairs and the sixth in a yoga pose on a mat. An unseen guru reviews the retreat rules—including speaking limited to specific Q and A, no food in dwelling areas and no phones—and guides the sextet via overhead speakers through such activities as writing down their intentions and sharing retreat 'rooms' two by two. Participants stare disapprovingly at a secretly eating or laptop-using scofflaw. By contrast, they sometimes follow each other's lead—for example removing shoes for meditation or letting go clothes-wise after Ron disrobes and runs naked into off-stage water.

Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot fans will particularly warm to the way in which Wohl has the audience develop individual profiles of the characters much as the retreaters do about each other. A simple photo takes on haunting pathos when it reappears, while a ring leads to a confrontation. In some cases, facial expressions as the guru makes serious observations about illness and mortality serve as revelations about the people reacting. Eventually the participants experience respective moments of truth during which some reach a transforming understanding while others look to find a calm reality.

No matter what the transformation or reality, a very strong cast—both individually and in ensemble—brings rich expression to the experience. Marianna Bassham captures The Teacher's European-like accent as well as her tenacity as a guru. She also brings a muted

voice to her vulnerability as a personal ordeal pushes her to use her own cell phone. Nael Nacer catches ski cap donning Ned's likeable quirkiness. He beautifully balances the humor and the angst of his ostensible question that actually explains why he covers his head at all times. Gigi Watson persuasively moves from a kind of technology-centered OCD and social distance to a greater openness to her fellow retreaters. Sam Simahk has yoga and meditation propelled Rodney's easy confidence about his impressive physique and his enigmatic demeanor with the people around him.

Kerry A. Dowling as Joan and Celeste Oliva as her loving partner Judy are arguably the most sympathetic of the retreaters. Dowling has a standout stretch of rage during Joan's deep concern for Judy. Oliva is very moving in Judy's plaintive moments with

Judy. Barlow Adamson demonstrates his considerable comic talents as Jan lets loose during a ritual dance as well as his touching torment in revealing the key to his own silence. Kudos goes to Annie Wiegand for the poetry of the ensemble ritual fire and the intimate nighttime lighting of the three retreat units. Elizabeth Cahill smartly evokes the diverse sounds of the retreat—most notably an unseen menacing bear.

At one point the guru tells the retreaters, "Perhaps you are the teacher and I am the student." Audiences can learn a lot from Wohl's serio-comic play. "Small Mouth Sounds," powerfully voiced by SpeakEasy Stage, is a must-see lesson about human connection and sharing.



Nael Nacer as Ned and Sam Simahk as Rodney in "Small Mouth Sounds" Photo: Nile Scott Studio, Courtesy of SpeakEasy Stage Company

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Calendar

Thursday, January 10

Notice of Public Meeting

A community meeting regarding the proposed cannabis establishment at 633 Tremont Street will be held on, 6:30PM, at the AC Hotel Marriott, Barclay Conference Room, 225 Albany Street, Boston.

Shop at Whole Foods Day for Community Servings

Whole Foods Market selected Community Servings as the recipient of its Winter 2019 5% Day. When you shop at a participating Whole Foods Market on Thursday, January 10th, 5% of proceeds will be donated to provide medically tailored meals to our critically ill clients and their families. 33 stores across Massachusetts and Rhode Island are participating. Visit your local Whole Foods Market on Thursday, January 10th and support Community Servings.

Saturday, January 12

SPIN for Scholar Athletes: Charity Ride at Turnstyle

2:30PM, Turnstyle, 310 Harrison Avenue

Tuesday, January 15

Joan Diver at the South End Library

Joan Diver will be at the South End library to talk about her debut memoir, *When Spirit Calls: A Healing Odyssey* at 6:30PM. It describes the voyage by Diver, a former South End resident, from nationally recognized foundation executive and social-justice advocate to spiritual healer through times of family crisis and confrontation with the challenges of urban life, while managing intense physical pain resulting from back injuries and, finally, her spiritual awakening after exploring healing traditions in East and West.

More information www.friendsofsouthendlibrary.org, South End Branch of the Boston Public Library, 685 Tremont Street, Boston

East Berkeley Neighborhood Association Meeting

The East Berkeley Neighborhood Association, formerly "Old Dover", will hold its monthly meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 15, 6:30 PM, at Project Place, 1145 Washington Street.

Boston Ward 4 Dems January Meeting:

Voting Rights & Reforms

6-8PM, South End Branch of the Boston Public Library, 685 Tremont Street.

Dog Lady

Continued from page 1

his first post-surgery poop.

I admit I was concerned about Shelby but also amazed at how my ex-colleague and her husband, who are retirees on a fixed income, probably spent much money for their dog's surgery. What are your thoughts on extreme and very expensive care for pets?

—Susan

Dear Susan,

Dog Lady's thoughts? Best not to think about—until you have to.

Dealing with an ill pet is one of the hardest things a pet owner has to endure. And if a trusted veterinarian advises surgery to correct a problem—and predicts a solid outcome with beneficial results and an owner has the funds to pay for it—the question is moot. However, it is all so personal. "Ask Dog Lady" could never presume to tell anybody what he or she should do in such a situation. For now, let's root for Shelby, obviously a beloved pet.

As the New Year begins, Ask Dog Lady brings back the following question and answer dealing with the same tender issue:

Dear Dog Lady,

A woman at the local dog park's shepherd-mix Tom was recently diagnosed with bone cancer. The veterinarian gave her the choice of either putting Tom to sleep or opting for an expensive and complicated operation to remove his front right leg. She decided in favor of the operation.

I am moved by this. At the same time, I wonder whether this will be worth the trouble and the expense. What do you think? When is enough enough?

—Kevin

Dear Kevin,

Never second-guess love. Stop trying to figure this one out. The woman at the dog park chose the option she believed was right for her and her pet. You should not question a dog keeper who believes in the boundless possibilities of a three-legged dog.

This situation of risky care for a domestic animal reminds Dog Lady to urge you, dear readers, to renew your pact with your pet as a New Year begins. Treat your animals with kindness, responsibility and respect. You may not have lots of money or patience but the animal in your care always deserves the best of you.

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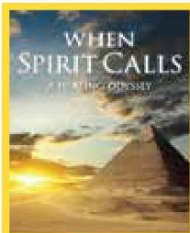
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Tuesday, January 15, 6:30 PM



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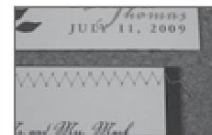
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