

# Amaryllis



Autumn, 2022

*Amaryllis, a newsletter for the Chelsea community, was conceived, and has been researched and written by Jane Hogg since 1996.*



## ALONG THE JOURNEY

What did Walter Naegle want to be when he grew up? When very young, he assumed he'd be a teacher like his father and grandfather. "Math and science?" I asked.

"No, more likely English or the Arts."

After completing his freshman year at the University of Bridgeport, he dropped out to join VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America). The turbulence of the 1967/68 school year—two assassinations of major leaders and urban unrest—pushed him onto a different path.

Posted in Chicago at a senior center, Walter was part of the Hull House network, the legendary settlement house founded by Jane Addams. It was a modern, interracial complex (now landmarked) where he became familiar with the unique problems seniors face. The residents were from his grandparents' generation—people who had lived through two World Wars, the depression, struggles for labor rights, and racial segregation.

Some had not received a basic education, so Walter taught elementary reading and math. Sometimes he escorted people on public transportation to medical appointments and helped them complete intake forms. Comfortable at the piano, he accompanied a small choir and played familiar standards during group gatherings. Movie nights and bingo games provided casual, social gatherings where he was able to hear their life stories. A food co-op brought neighbors together and provided quality staples to residents who could not travel to

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distant supermarkets. These lessons led him to believe that he had learned more from seniors than he could ever teach.

Following his year in VISTA, he hitchhiked cross-country to visit family in California, where he considered his next steps. His interest in nonviolence, sparked by his Catholic upbringing and witnessing the African American civil rights struggle, was deepened by reading the works of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thoreau, and Tolstoy.

In 1970, he moved to Manhattan to pursue his interests in mental health and photography. His first job at the NY State Psychiatric Institute educated him about bipolar disorder, as he worked with patients on a unit conducting double-blind studies with lithium, a promising treatment for mood stabilization. Much of the day involved observation and recording behavior, but other times a simple board game or quiet listening brought more human interaction to the work. At night, he took classes at the Germain School of Photography.

Several secretarial jobs followed, one at a nursing school, another at a cancer research lab. They paid the rent on a tenement flat in Hell's Kitchen and covered expenses for film and darkroom time. He did not pursue photography as a career, but has exhibited in numerous group shows and had a one-person show at the Southern Vermont Arts Center.

In 1977, after he decided to relocate to San Francisco, a chance encounter altered his plans.

"Tell me about it," I said.

"On a sunny afternoon in April, I met Bayard Rustin, a leader in the African American civil rights struggle. I recognized the name, but just the name—couldn't recall from where.

"I'd done lots of reading about nonviolence. Rustin was a leading proponent of social change through nonviolent direct action.

"His mentorship with Martin Luther King, Jr., and his pivotal role in organizing the 1963 March in Washington for Jobs and Freedom, thrust him

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into a leadership role—one that had been denied him in the past because of his radical politics and open homosexuality.

“We became romantic partners, a relationship that lasted a decade until 1987 when he died. We traveled together to Grenada, El Salvador, Haiti, and South Africa to meet with activists seeking to bring about democratic change.”

In the decades since Rustin’s death, Walter’s public profile has grown, as have the groups that champion his values and causes. They include *The Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice* in Princeton, New Jersey, and *The Rustin Fund for Global Equality*. Political clubs, community groups, and public schools also bear Rustin’s name. Bringing his name into history classrooms, Walter co-authored a young person’s biography, *Troublemaker for Justice*.

An award-winning documentary, *Brother Outsider, The Life of Bayard Rustin*, introduced him to millions internationally.

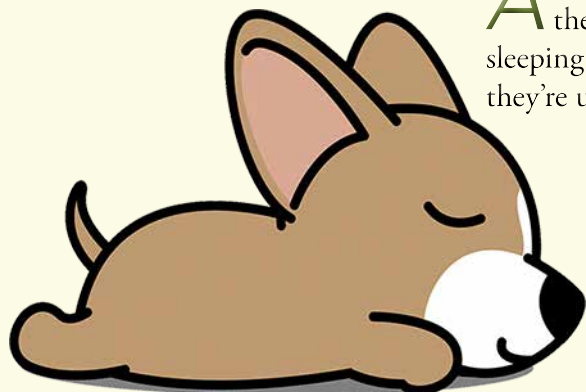
In 2013, Walter was one of the first LGBTQ partners to accept the posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom. In the now-right-now world, Obama’s production company is completing a docudrama, *Rustin*, due to be released next year.

Still hard at work, this Chelsea-ite is currently working on a comprehensive exhibit that will showcase the progression of Rustin’s work and link it to the global struggle for human rights and equality. The plan is for a premiere at the National Civil Rights Museum (a Smithsonian affiliate) in 2024, with a portion of the show curated as a traveling exhibition. The museum is located at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, the site of Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination. 🌀



## CERTAIN SLEEP-OUTSIDERS

All those sleep-outside dogs under the shedded area east of 6th Avenue on the north side of 23rd are basically sharers. Non-furred buddies receive sleeping bag privileges come dark. Seems they relocate Sundays; the one day they’re unseen. 🌀









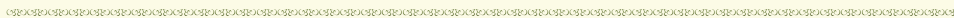
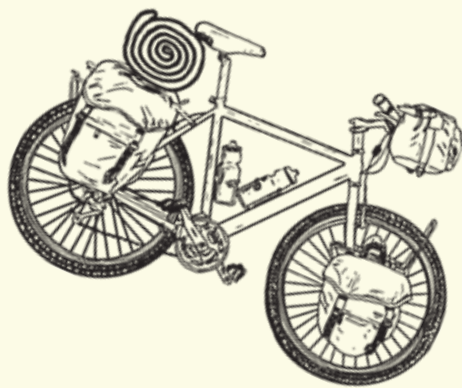
## GHOST BIKES

Streets seem more dangerous than ever. As the walkways widen more and more, people are out walking. Increased lighting from street lamps, illuminated shop windows, and curbside restaurants make it a 24-hour event.

Citi-Bikes installed in massive numbers are seen everywhere in Chelsea. Riders seem unaware of rules. They're seen racing down sidewalks or going against traffic on bike lanes. Walking west on 26th Street, heading towards 8th, you'll see something called a Ghost Bike mounted on a steel pole. Numerous coats of peeling white paint surround the bronze plate.

*In loving memory of Dan Hanegby  
A father, husband, son, brother & friend  
1980-2017*

Dan was a beloved pet owner killed by a bicycle. Occasionally a bouquet of flowers is delivered to the nearby animal hospital and the receptionist is asked to have them placed above the plaque outside. ☺



## BLOOMIE NAILS

SPAs... I usually avoid them because I assume whatever they're providing will be quite costly. Remembering a time when 23rd Street had dozens of nail salons, all upstairs, because big businesses rented street-level shops. The one salon that remained charged \$40.

Walking down 8th, Bloomie Nails at 21st Street caught my eye. In their window was a big news article describing how, for somewhat less than \$10, they did amazing things. Based on that, I went in, spoke to a staff person, and explained what I wanted (which seemed quite simple).

How much would it cost? She didn't know. That was up to the manager. Seconds later, he came over, looked at my nails, and said, "We're not interested."

Odd. It was not a language problem. In fact, I had the feeling everyone there only spoke English, and most of the manicurists were unoccupied. I mentioned that the large article posted in their window had attracted me. The manager said, "We had nothing to do with the article. Someone had taped it to the front window quite some time ago, so we just left it there."



That said, he moved towards the front door and suggested, "Perhaps you should leave."

Baffled, I left, mentally thanking him as the experience made for an interesting Amaryllis tidbit. ☺ 5



## VERIZON... NOT ON MY HORIZON

It all began one late Thursday night. I logged into the New York Public Library to search for a book when the announcement came up: “Not connected to WiFi.”

“That can’t be,” I thought. “My entire apartment has been WiFi-ed since weeks before the beginning of 2019.” However, since Verizon had been tearing up so many nearby streets, I assumed the glitch was merely temporary. Took a bath and went to bed.

First thing next morning, I went to check my email. Couldn’t, as the screen still said, “Not connected to WiFi.” Grabbed my physical phone book and called Verizon’s toll-free number, 800-328-9243.

“The number you have called is not in service.”

Raised an eyebrow and dialed another number, 800-698-3545.

“Welcome to Verizon.”

A bit more encouraging, except it was just a voice response system asking if I’d like to discuss my telephone service. Pushed 1 for “No,” and then 2 for “Something else.”

“Maybe they’re suspicious?” I wonder. To make sure I’m really me, I had to enter my four-digit PIN. Having done that each time the non-human voice asked what it can help me with, I speak, “Customer Service.”

Eventually, I’m transferred. My expected wait time is 11 minutes. Fifteen minutes later, the voice response system thanked me for being a Verizon customer—except the wait time was still 11 minutes.

Furious, I hung up to make a cup of coffee. Two cups later, I headed out the door to my dentist appointment, lunch, a Zoom class, and finally, back to Verizon. Enter the PIN again so they know it’s me. This time the voice asks if I’d be willing to answer survey

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questions after the call for training purposes. “If you answer yes, please remember to stay on the line after your call is completed.”

I did learn an important lesson—agree to take the survey! I was transferred to Customer Service with no wait time at all.

After saying yes, I’d take the survey, I was told the problem required technical support. With no available agent, I’m told to leave a callback number and one will contact me shortly. Phone rings in five minutes. I’m delighted.

Agent explains he’s checking my line directly but can’t figure out why my computer isn’t connecting. “A tech support agent will have to come to your apartment to examine your equipment,” he explains.

The answer to my question, “How much will that cost?” produced a sigh of relief.

After a number of click clicks, I reached appointment scheduling. Verizon doesn’t do house calls on weekends, so the scheduling agent asked me, “How about next week, maybe Tuesday?”

“Why not Monday?” I ask.

“Monday is completely booked,” she explained.

A technician would arrive next Tuesday, sometime between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., but he’ll call about an hour before he is to arrive.

Twiddling my thumbs while gulping hot coffee Tuesday morning... the phone rings at 8:20. “I’ll be there before 9:30 and will call when I’m less than 2 minutes away,” he explained.

After working for about 30 minutes, the technician couldn’t find any problem. Hmm... He suggested disconnecting a wire they seemed to have installed years ago and promised to return in 5 minutes. Never seen again.

What’s even odder? For years on autopay, I once requested direct billing so I could pay by check. I never heard about that request again. They email the amount due, ignoring my pleas for snail-mail bills.

Final score? I think Verizon tallies it up to a win-win situation for them—not so much for me. ☹️





## STAPLES IS A BUSINESS

In August, Staples announced that since summer was almost over, school would soon begin. Teachers know all about that, so they make a beeline to stock up, and they pay out of their own pocket because no funds are available. List in hand, an early-grade teacher was searching the racks for inexpensive items. She explained, “All my students came from families living below the poverty.”

Push pins, pencils that write in colors, scotch tape... “Do any come in colors?” she asked a somewhat disinterested clerk.


I’d been looking for a stapler. Mine had aged out, and I hated the idea of spending \$24.95 on a new one. I lucked out. Special sale—a 3-in-1 pack. It included a nice blue stapler, plus a staple remover and a small pack of staples for immediate use.

Just ahead of me in the check-out line, the harried teacher took out her credit card. The cashier even charged her for the paper bag in which her purchase was placed.

I caught up with her as she pushed through the hard-to-open front doors. “Have a good year,” I said, reaching into my jacket pocket and handing her my newly purchased item.

That done, I raced back inside, and downstairs on aisle 9 were plenty of those Special Sale items. When the clerk asked if I needed a bag, I said, “Don’t bother.” I unpacked the item, handed her the rigid plastic case with cardboard wrappings, put my stapler in my pocket, and left the garbage for her to toss.

Seeing the manager mounting the stairs, inasmuch as I’m elderly, I asked him to push the heavy door for me. As he held it for me, I pointed out that Staples could do a good deed by giving school supplies to teachers, such as the one I’d been watching, for free.

“Staples,” he explained, “is a business. Profit pleases our stockholders.” 







## ONE HOME OFFICE

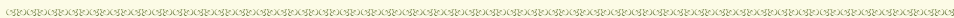
FedEx seeds seem to have been tossed everywhere in Chelsea. Wherever you look, a new one has sprouted with bigger, wider offerings—hiring, too.

But the tiny one on the west side of 8th, just below 23rd, has more than doubled its difference. No longer just the skinny street-level slot, the main action is distinctly different below. Well-designed and custom-crafted, the first area you'll see are several co-worker spaces. Nearby are small cubicles for those preferring privacy, and then a large printing area shared by everyone. The convenient prep kitchen and scattered toilets cover all bases.

All furnishings are movable, so a room with a large table surrounded by comfortable chairs may serve for conferences and later for dining. Finally, studios are available for rent by the hour, day, or even week. Murphy beds double as sofas by day, and double beds at night, with their own shower in the toilet area.

Look out beyond the windowed glass wall; come summer, will be a grass-covered area with a prep kitchen. Brew your own. Now that's blissful.

Formerly Mailboxes, One Home Office is open daily from 8:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. and on weekends from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. ☘



## LEAF BAR

The Leaf Bar is a skinny slot of a shop on the north side of 23rd Street. Looking through the bar window, it's clear they sell marijuana in all its forms. Curious, I decided to browse. Anyone who enters must immediately produce a photo ID—definitely no minors allowed.

Nothing haphazard about their interior with a handsome layout. Corked vials, screw-topped bottles, glass containers, gadgets necessary for product preparation—even edibles, cookies and candy.

The shop person explained that most customers are between their early thirties to late fifties.

"How do they pay?" I ask.



"Every way. Credit, cash, checks. You name it."

Bright and early on a weekday morning, I was probably the first person to enter. If you're curious, check it out yourself. ☘



## CALL A HEAD

We see it on so many portable toilets at construction sites. Wonder where the word came from?



In olden days, all ships had fabric sails. The captain's nest, at the back of the vessel, was close to the rudder with all the ropes to pull the sails. The captain's nest stood at that highest point so he could see the front, or the ship's bow. This position allowed him to see where the ship was headed.

Usually, a wooden figure or bust was fitted on the bow to show everyone who owned the ship. Since positioning the ship so the wind blows from the rear straight forward is the fastest way to sail, the obvious place for a sailor to relieve himself would be at the head, or bow, of the vessel.

Today, the vocabulary continues. Toilets, meaning heads, are now enclosed yet still called heads. Whoever came up with naming an outdoor toilet company CALLAHEAD was quick on his feet; it's trademarked, too.

Walking across 23rd Street, I realized working crews nearby need facilities. In big letters, you see the name or slogan of the company, United WE STAND! A new one by CALLAHEAD, The Water Closet, is dismally grey inside, chained, and padlocked—not for public use.

A neat sign near a restaurant's front door indicates toilets inside are for dining customers only. What if a covered, interior, heated toilet is on the sidewalk opposite the larger space? Where do diners go? A server escorts them.

One-way streets where everything is scrunched up have obvious construction toilets nearby; one resourceful eatery prettied it up by burying it in fake ivy.

Surely something everyone shares; going when you need to go! 🍷

