Cooking and Baking With Carmelo
11-Year-Old Finds His Passion During the Pandemic

By LisaRuth Elliott

C

ocolate Cream Pie with Oreo Cookie Crust.
Upside-Down Peach Cake with Blood-Orange Sorbet.
Macadamia Nut Tart with Caramel Filling, Topped with Chocolate Ganache.
Strawberry and Mango Fruit Tart (Gluten-Free).

Is your mouth watering yet? Want to know which Noe Valley bakery offers these gourmet desserts? 
Unfortunately, none of the delights listed above are available for purchase. They are the pandemic baking adventures of 11-year-old Noe Valley resident Carmelo Foy-Martí, an engaging and articulate sixth-grader at San Francisco Community School in the Excelsior. Despite the trend over the past few years where people are having their groceries delivered or ordering prepared food through apps, this is a child who is regularly in the kitchen cooking and baking. Not many of his friends like to cook, he says. He’s the one in his group of friends who likes to cook the most. Carmelo was drawn to helping his parents in the kitchen even as a young boy by hearing the sounds and feeling the textures—the tactile elements of being a cook.

He says he knows a lot of people began baking sourdough bread during the pandemic, but even a year ago, when he was just 10, he was already baking something. Despite the growth in confidence, enabling the young chef to take on very complex recipes.

Recipe for Success. Carmelo Foy-Martí not only knows a lot about food preparation, he’s becoming skilled at presentation. Anyone for a fruit tart? Photo courtesy Fernando Martí

Recipes he wants to make when he has the right ingredients live on open tabs on his computer. And he also loves just “going for it”—gathering the ingredients and trying a recipe. If it doesn’t work, he isn’t reluctant to go back and research recipes again to see what could have gone wrong.

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School for New Immigrants Full Of Pelosi ‘Heroes’
Principal, Staff and Students All Striving to Learn From Home

By Tom Ruiz

For the roughly 100 students at Mission Education Center (MEC), most of them new immigrants from Central America and Mexico, the 2020-21 school year has been a rough row to hoe.

The pandemic concerns, the lack of a physical classroom, and the need to switch to distance learning have made catching up to their fellow SFUSD students a bigger stretch than ever before. Still, students are working hard, and MEC and its staff are striving to provide a safe harbor for the children and their families.

Noe Valleyans may have heard about MEC in the news on Sept. 2, 2020. That was the day the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, held an outdoor news conference on the campus at 1670 Noe St., to highlight the impact of the pandemic on schools and the children they served. Pelosi stressed the need for federal support and Senate action to pass the so-called Heroes Act, which offered provisions for student, teacher, and family safety. (The House passed an updated Heroes Act on Oct. 1, earmarking $182 billion for K-12 schools. But the Senate failed to advance the measure. As the Voice went to press, Congress was passing a $900 billion Covid relief bill, which contained $82 billion for schools and colleges.)

At the September press event, Pelosi also announced MEC Principal Carla Llewelyn-Vasquez, remarking, “Madame Principal, thank you for your hospitality here in this great school. The Mission Education Center elementary school, it’s a strategy that many in the entire country adopted. —Jack Tipple

Noe Valley 2020
Many of Us Survived a Year of Covid Stress in a Noe Valley That Nevertheless Remains Hopeful

The first time I brought my friend Nina to visit Noe Valley (in December of last year), she was impressed. “What a cute neighborhood,” she said.

It was a mild and sunny day. The street was lively. We sat down at an outdoor table at NOVY, where she would later exclaim, “That was the best lamb I’ve ever tasted!”

Hunger satisfied, we put our masks back on and walked east on 24th Street past the colorfully bright shop of Basil Racuk with his handcrafted leather goods. And past the cleanly designed and spacious SkinSpirit, the medical spa that now graces what for many years was a barren section of Noe Valley’s main shopping district.

Our destination was Nomad Rugs. Nina would be moving soon and had chosen a couple of beautiful rugs online to check out in person. After viewing them and dozens of others, she completed her purchase.

We knew then, as we do now, that we were among the fortunate. Healthy, able to afford beautiful things, with no immediate fear of poverty, or of police.

But even in resilient Noe Valley, the signs of struggle were evident. Many storefronts were empty and had been so for months. Most people were masked and some even walked into street traffic to avoid close passage with their neighbors. The sidewalk “booths” at NOVY would close within days of our visit, as another pandemic lockdown was ordered by the city.

We had voted in November, and our national choice was certified. But the election had revealed fear and hatred dwelling large in the land of the free. In Noe Valley, not so much. Still, only hard work and hope—and neighbors helping neighbors—will sustain our sanctuary beyond this time of trouble. —Jack Tipple
The View West on Valley Street from Castro Street. The photo was taken in 1923 by Horace Chaffee for the San Francisco Department of Public Works and is now in the hands of a private collector.

Photo and information courtesy OpenSFHistory.org / Western Neighborhoods Project / David Gallagher

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Farewell, Steven and Melania

Editor’s Note: The longtime owners of Chloe’s Cafe on Church Street asked the Noe Valley Voice to publish this farewell letter, sent on their last day, Dec. 1, 2020. This letter also noted in a second email that the restaurant’s new owners plan to remodel and reopen as soon as circumstances permit.

See the new owners’ letter at right.

Dear Friends of Chloe’s:

In early 1987, my wife, Melania Kang, and I opened a cafe in the Clarendon Building in San Francisco. After checking out various prospects, we found a tiny place for sale and fell in love with a café concept for what we were looking for: a great neighborhood, a small space in a building with character, lots of light, and reasonable rent. The business was located at 1399 Church St., and had formerly been a deli. It seemed perfect. We walked up and down Church Street, meeting locals and business owners, asking if they’d like to have a cafe in the area. They all said “YES!” so we bought it and signed a lease with the property owner for $475 per month. Although we’d never owned a business before, we did have experience catering movies and working to- gether as a team. Our first big catering project was for the film Dirty Dancing.

The night before we were to go down to the Health Department for their inspection, we still hadn’t decided on a name for the cafe. We heard a neighbor calling their dog, which happened to be named Chloe. We both liked that name and decided to use it.

When we first opened Chloe’s, it was just the two of us that did everything: cooking, food prep, cleaning, washing dishes, shopping each day after work, bill paying, etc. We didn’t have a stove, so our first hot meal we served was eggs- sandwiches, soups, salads, and baked goods. After several months, we added one hot breakfast item to the menu: two scrambled eggs with toast and a cup of fruit for $3.95. We used one hot plate in the back of the prep room, set on top of the ice maker, to cook the eggs in a sandwich maker. Primitive, yes, but it worked, and people started ordering more of this breakfast, so we got a permit from the city to install a stove. (Yes, it’s still the same stove we’ve used for 33 years!) As the business grew, we put a few tables outside and started gradually adding more staff. And the business kept growing...

As the years went by, I experienced something wonderful and unexpected: customers began turning into friends. It was truly enjoyable to go to work every day and see those smiling faces as they walked in the door. The memories of all those people and their life stories—particularly on topics relating to Noe Valley and all of its residents will all be turned into my way of voting “for none of the above.”

The failures and misdeeds of President Donald Trump’s administration are well known and often spoken of in our slice of America. What is seemingly forgotten is the way the failures of the Washington establishment for the last 30 years that made his election possible.

And from Wall Street deregulation to mass incarceration to endless military conflict to the destruction of our manufacturing sector, few politicians in Washington have been such a central part of those misdeeds as Joe Biden.

To all our neighbors who found joy and solace in Joe Biden’s election as our next president—congratulate them. But I hope they stay vigilant and scrutinize his policies as much as many have of Presi- dent Trump’s. Otherwise it was just par- tisanship masquerading as principle.

And the next demagogue to capitalize on our sleepwalking through democracy might be even more dangerous than the petty narcissus we had to endure the last four years.

Bennie Corace
25th Street

Bye Don, Hey Joe

Editor

Got any plans for Wednesday, Jan. 20? How about a “Bye-Don” celebration in Noe Valley Town Square? With his electoral college victory certified on Dec. 14, and with the Supreme Court staying out of President-Elect Joe Biden’s way (over the now President Re- jected), how about we meet in the square on Inauguration Day to say Bye-Don (de- pending on current city health orders and conditions).

So many of us have worked so hard to- gether for four long years for this mo- ment. Let’s celebrate together. Bring your mask, keep your distance, and bring your own electronic device, your own chair if you like, and be there at least 30 minutes before President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris take the oath of office at 9 a.m. Wednes- day, Jan. 20. Anyone got access to a Jum- box or equivalent? Bring it along! Anyone have time before Jan. 8 to call Georgia voters? If so, contact. Charlie Spiegel
Member, ActionSF.com
415-644-4555

Hello Again, Chloe’s

Editor:

My family, consisting of my mother Anne, brother/chef Bobby, and I, are the new owners of Chloe’s Cafe on Church Street at 26th Street.

We are well aware of Chloe’s long- standing significance to the community and are excited to carry on the legacy the original owners Steven Baker and Mela- nia Kang began (see letter at left). In a time of industry-wide shutdowns and un- certainty ahead, we are hoping to provide some relief that we plan to reopen Chloe’s, keeping much of the menu fa- vorites the same. We also hope a majority of the original staff will want to come back to work, once we can safely reopen. We are making the best of this second restaurant shutdown by taking the time to make needed health department and cos- metic updates to the space. This work should be completed in time to open for take-out in mid to late January, and shortly after for outdoor dining in Febru- ary if it is allowed.

Thank you for your dedication to re- porting all these years!

Sandy, Bobby, and Anne Siu

The Noe Valley Voice welcomes your letters. Email editor@noevalleyvoice.com. Please include your name and contact information. (Anonymous letters will not be considered for publication.) Be sure that letters may be edited for brevity or clarity.

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Chef Carmelo Could Have a Career in Cuisine

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

One of these baking trials was the French cookie—the macaron—which, according to him, might just be one of the hardest desserts to make. He’s still working on that one.

From Store to Table

Carmelo goes to the store with his parents to buy everything he needs on his list, but sometimes he lets the seasonal fruit he sees at the store speak to him and direct him toward a recipe, like a nice basket of strawberries to pair with mangles for a gluten-free fruit tart to make for his mother for her birthday.

Already he is up to speed on and can explain what makes a loaf of bread fluffy and what techniques are needed to hold a gluten-free pie crust together. And he is ready to share tips, like: avoid overworking the batter, which can make cake tough. Adding gluten-free flour will also help with this problem.

His favorite part of baking is seeing how his baked goods develop into the final product. He is captivated by watching how they change in the oven. He loves how they turn out at the end when everything comes together.

He also really likes playing food, so it looks beautiful. The combination of ingredients, toppings, and garnishes when presenting them is important to him, and he will often mix and match recipes if one version has a more creative way to display the dessert or entrée.

Since early in the shelter-in-place, Carmelo’s father, Fernando Martí, has been posting photos on his Facebook feed, showing a smiling Carmelo holding one after another delicious-looking dessert. I’m sure I was not alone in hoping I could move past the screen and smell the wafting scents of his creations.

A Run on Pumpkin Pie

For Thanksgiving, through his dad’s social media presence, Carmelo announced he would be taking orders for pumpkin pie. The enthusiasm was almost palpable, and within only a few hours he had 40 orders! He decided to cap the orders at 20 pies. He said it made his kitchen in order to accommodate the two batches of fillings and crusts that were necessary, using a total of 63 eggs and 315 ounces of pumpkin.

After the Thanksgiving pie sales, Carmelo wanted to donate some of the proceeds to a good cause, which he found in Seed the Vote’s crucial Georgia runoff election work. With a political savvy beyond his years, he says he made this donation because not only does he think the Senate’s continuing to lean Republican will affect his future, but he understands it will make things harder for the incoming president.

Not too long ago, he and his parents brought over a delivery of chocolate eclairs, so I could try them. At first he said the technique of filling the pastries was “a secret,” but very quickly Carmelo was animatedly telling me the tricks of the trade of transferring the custard inside the puffed-up hollow insides of the eclair. Later I was glad he had been so generous with the pastry cream, as I licked up the gooeyness dripping out of the light and flaky dessert.

Carmelo has his own internet presence for his baking and cooking demonstrations. His TikTok account, @cooking.withcarmelo21, takes the viewer through making several quick recipes that could turn out to be, in his words, “the best you’ve ever tasted!”

Carmelo’s instructions are clear and simple and make even the novice cook want to take on the challenge of roasting a whole chicken or covering eclairs in a chocolate ganache.

In these winter months, if you are walking down Noe Valley streets and smell the wafting scents of a bosc pear galette or a tray of macarons, or get a whiff of the savory notes of chicken parmesan, you might just be near Carmelo’s kitchen.

Raspberry Soufflé

By Carmelo Fay-Martí

People are usually intimidated by soufflés, but they’re not actually that hard. I made these for my mom because they’re gluten free. The recipe was adapted from the Food Network.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter plus more for greasing
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar plus more for dusting mold
- 1 pint raspberries
- 4 eggs, separated
- 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
- Powdered sugar for dusting

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Prepare 4 small ramekins by greasing them with softened butter and coating with granulated sugar.

Pour out any excess. The butter and sugar keep the soufflés from sticking to the sides and allow them to rise evenly. The sugar gives the soufflé a crunchy crust, which is a really nice contrast to the fluffy interior.

Blend 1 pint of fresh raspberries, then put them into a saucepan with 1/4 cup of granulated sugar and 1 tablespoon of butter. Mix. Then cook for 10 minutes or till the sugar dissolves. Remove from heat, then strain to remove the seeds. Whisk in 4 egg yolks one at a time.

In a separate bowl, mix 4 egg whites and 1/4 teaspoon of cream of tartar until they’re foamy and reach soft peaks. Then fold in 1/3 of the beaten egg whites into the raspberry mixture to lighten it. Then gently fold in the rest. Put the mixture into the prepared ramekins and place them on a cookie sheet. Then bake for 20 minutes.

The soufflés are done when they have puffed up and their outsides are golden. Dust them with powdered sugar and garnish with raspberries and maybe a mint leaf or two.

“crazy,” scaling up to bake that many at once. Through this experience, he got a sense of the frenzy of restaurants. Over the course of three days, he had to find the biggest bowls and stock pots in his kitchen in order to accommodate the two batches of fillings and crusts that were necessary, using a total of 63 eggs and 315 ounces of pumpkin.
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School Finding a Way to Be at Home With Distance Learning

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

just about doing the Lord’s work. When you’re talking about children, the Latino community, many of them [with] English as a second language, immigrant families, the faces of the future of our country, [you’re] giving as you said the confidence to reach their fulfillment. It’s an honor to be here. Thank you for your leadership.”

Staff Working Online

In the weeks and months since, Princi- pal Llewelyn-Vasquez and her nine class- room teachers have continued to meet the dual challenges of using the Google Classroom and Sccaw apps to teach their students in their native language while also preparing them to learn in English. Llewelyn-Vasquez can rely on her ex- tensive background in bilingual educa- tion, having served as a bilingual class- room teacher, content specialist, and a program administrator in the school dis- trict’s Office of Access and Equity before taking the helm of Mission Education seven years ago. She is building on the successful foundation laid by predeces- sor, friend, and walking partner retired Principal Deborah Molof. Most of the current staff members are veteran SFUSD professionals, including fifth-grade teacher Ricardo Cortez, who attended MEC as a student and was featured in a December/January 2009 Voice story on MEC and retired Principal Molof. MEC is a transitional school where students typically attend one to two years before they move on to regular SFUSD elementary and middle schools. Many of the graduating fifth-grade students choose to enroll in James Lick or Everett Middle schools. Llewelyn-Vasquez shared that most families choose to keep their students in a Spanish bilingu- or immersion program offering both Span- ish and English instruction, as they progress to higher grades.

Phases and Minuses

Pre-Covid-19, MEC had not invested heavily in technological learning. Llewel- lyn-Vasquez said in an interview with the Noe Valley Voice the week before Thanks- giving: “So it threw us for a loop, with tech not used to teaching and support students. It caused a huge pivot in how they teach.”

She explained that students at MEC all received Chromebooks for their at-home learning and to enable their parents to participate in digital parent-education classes when the students were not using the devices.

Since distance learning began in March, students and their parents have been committed to a daily online check- in with their teachers. Some students, for example first-graders who are making videos, have demonstrated an increase in academic performance. Meanwhile, par- ents are sharpening their technology skills. Students practice oral reading in Spanish and English to the teachers and classmates on their screens.

“It threw us for a loop, with teachers not used to using tech to teach and support students. It caused a huge pivot in how they teach.” —Carla Llewelyn-Vasquez

Faculty meetings, where teachers share ideas and strategies on how to plan and teach using the new technology, occur virtually as well. The twice- monthly meetings are augmented with what Llewelyn-Vasquez calls “Share and Learn opportunities,” where teachers share their latest findings on how to use new applications and websites in their in- struction.

Still, there are downsides to distance learning. Llewelyn-Vasquez points out. Teachers are concerned that the two years’ growth their students normally ex- perience per year may have been reduced to one year or less.

Also, they miss the closeness they once had. “It is emotionally hard for the teach- ers to deal with their students solely over a laptop without the in-person support and caring they are used to giving, and it is really hard for their students, who really want to come to school to be with their teachers and friends. I don’t know how the teachers do it. They are truly amaz- ing.” Llewelyn-Vasquez said.

How Noe Valley Can Help

Over the past two years, MEC has be- come a community school, a designation that allows for neighborhood groups to help in providing physical and financial resources, academic tutoring, and emo- tional support to the school. A community school staff coordinator is reaching out to connect with Upper Noe Recreation Cen- ter and other community organizations to support MEC’s students, staff, and fami- lies.

An innovative feature of MEC is its Community PTA, which takes the idea of a school-based PTA into the local com- munity. Led by MEC’s Madrinas, includ- ing Olga Talamente, Tracy Brown, Maria Pinedo, Paula Fleischer, Lucy Bernholz, Olga Milan-Howells, and Rosalia Valen- cia-Tow, the group has organized a Go- FundMe page, which raises money for events, holiday gifts, and clothing and other items.

Another ongoing project is the school’s garden, which is visible to anyone walk- ing along 30th Street on their way to or from Billy Goat Hill. MEC also hopes to establish a food pantry for the community when the school reopens, using volun- teers and donations from local residents and businesses.

Reopening Date Still Elusive

Speaking of reopening, Llewelyn- Vasquez was awaiting word from SFUSD on when MEC could reopen its doors, but had received no specific date as the Voice went to press.

According to a Dec. 9 letter of interest submitted to the city’s health department, the reopenings were expected to occur in phases, as the district determined which schools and grades best met health and safety standards. Still, the district an- nounced nine days later that an antic- ipated January start for the first phase had been delayed.

Neighborhood residents wishing to volunteer when MEC reopens can go through the San Francisco Education Fund, at sfedfund.org.

To Principal Carla Llewelyn-Vasquez, MEC remains “a hidden Noe Valley gem which makes me very happy to come to work every day.”

Charles Spiegel

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Bacco Ristorante Now Molto Bello

Restaurant Moves to 24th Street
And Adds Pizza to Italian Classics

By Pat Rose

In early November, the popular 27-year-old restaurant Bacco Ristorante Italiano opened in its new home at 3913 24th St., formerly the site of Savor Open Kitchen, which closed last year.

Owner Shari Dominici said she was thrilled to find the space after she was forced to stop indoor dining during Covid at her original Diamond Street location.

“The Diamond Street restaurant had no patio, so I could only put two tables outside for outdoor dining,” said Dominici during a conversation in her new restaurant. She decided not to renew her lease and to look around the neighborhood for a larger space with outdoor seating.

“A customer told me about the 24th Street site, which has a large outdoor patio,” she said. “I also always wanted to offer pizza, but there was no space in the kitchen at Diamond Street for a pizza oven. This kitchen is much bigger, so we bought a pizza oven, had the cooks do an intensive training with a pizza chef for two weeks, and now we’re offering gourmet pizzas.”

A Michelin Star

Dominici started the restaurant with her husband, Paolo, and Chef Vincenzo Cucco. Paolo Dominici, originally from Rome, worked with his older brother Luigi, who owned a restaurant in Russian Hill. Cucco was the chef at the Fairmont Hotel.

“My husband had always wanted his own restaurant,” said Dominici. “He met Chef Vincenzo through mutual friends. The two became partners, found the place at 737 Diamond St., and opened Bacco in 1993.”

The restaurant became an instant success with its authentic Italian cuisine, house-made pasta, daily risotto, and old-country wines. It drew high praise, including a coveted Michelin star, and rave reviews from the San Francisco Chronicle, USA Today, Zagat, and other outlets.

The two partners later opened a second Italian restaurant in Belmont, called Divino and Vino. Eventually, they decided to divide up management duties, with Cucco running Divino and Dominici staying in Noe Valley to manage Bacco.

Tragically, a spearfishing accident in Hawaii in 2009 claimed the life of Paolo Dominici. Soon after, Chef Vincenzo came back to Bacco to manage the kitchen and help Shari Dominici run the restaurant. He continues to split his time between Bacco and Divino.

Dominici hired an Italian designer to help remodel the restaurant’s interior. “We worked around the vision of the beautiful nickel chandeliers that were already there,’” said Dominici. “The fireplace has been tiled in a gray and white pattern, and gray cushions and pillows line the banquettes. A dramatically large photo art installation of the Statue of the Three Angels in the Field of Miracles, Pisa, Tuscany, Italy, hangs in the front of the restaurant. Black and white photos of Italian street scenes hang throughout the restaurant. On the large back patio, Dominici has added garden boxes with basil, oregano, rosemary, and other herbs.

Takeout Saves the Day

In November, business was bustling, with neighborhood regulars and many new customers coming into the restaurant on 24th Street. “A lot of new customers who never knew we were on Diamond for 27 years starting coming in,” said Dominici. She added a build-out of outdoor booths in the front of the building, which were being completed just as the Dec. 6 shutdown hit.

Though business slowed, she managed to get by. “I have good-size takeout because of the new pizza, and I do small group catering, which has really helped.”

Bacco offers a range of antipasti, from grilled calamari to burrata with eggplant, celery, capers, and olives. House-made pastas include vermicelli with homemade tomato sauce, soba pasta with oyster mushrooms; and the Bacco Pizza, with mozzarella, arugula, arugula, and pesto piadina, and Parmesan cheese.

Lunch May Arrive Soon

Dominici plans to offer lunch in January. Thursday through Sunday, with a menu of paninis, pizza, pasta, soup, and salad, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Later she hopes to add a brunch.

Takeout hours during the Covid shutdown are 4:30 to 8 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday, and 4:30 to 8:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday. For updates or other information, call 415-282-4969, or visit the website BaccoSF.com.

Photos by Art Bodner

Shari Dominici stands outside Bacco’s spacious new home at 3913 24th St. Once health orders are relaxed, she hopes to offer both indoor and patio dining.
This Valentine’s Day, give the gift of Sizzling Sex for Life

Author Michael Castleman, a 40-year Noe Valley resident, is the world’s most popular sex expert—his PsychologyToday.com blog, “All About Sex,” and his Q&A site, GreatSexGuidance.com, have attracted more than 50 million views.

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That was fun, but if you really want to be my superhero...
Finding Peace in The Waves

By Stella Mullin

Back in February, waking up at 6:30 a.m. was a given. That was when I needed to be awake if I wanted to have enough time in the morning to get ready for school. And because I’m a teenager, I absolutely hated it. No one, at least no one I know, voluntarily drags themselves out of bed while half asleep and is happy about it. But now, in these far from “normal” times, waking up that early is a blessing for me.

At the start of the quarantine, I spent my days sleeping in, sitting around the house in sweatpants, and just doing nothing and not being productive in the slightest. After a few weeks, I was bored out of my mind. I’ve known how to surf since I was around 8 or 9, but I never actually did it on a daily basis—a few days in the summer at the most. So this past year, I made it my goal to surf as much as possible, and I quickly realized that goal would be extremely easy to fulfill.

I faced the rough and freezing waters of northern California and turned the windy and cold beaches that I used to hate years ago into beaches I can’t wait to surf. Some of my friends became interested, and the majority of my sophomore year was spent in the water, laughing and catching waves with my friends, right up until mid-March. During the pandemic months, surfing has brought peace to my life, and also some structure to my daily routine. I am now waking up as if I was going to school. Even just surfing for an hour makes me feel like I’ve accomplished something in my day.

Sure, surfing is way more fun with friends, but it brings a whole different meaning to the word peace when you’re out there alone. Surfing is a very individual sport, and you’re usually sitting 5 to 10 feet away from the next guy in the lineup, so really it’s just you and your thoughts. Going early in the morning is my preference, where not many people are out, compared to the insanely crowded beach and millions of surfers paddling out around noon.

In the morning, the water is calm, and it’s quiet. Not the type of quiet where you can hear a pin drop, but quiet in that the only noises surrounding you are the seagulls passing by, the waves crashing on the beach, and the swirling of the water from your legs moving around. And this quiet lets me just think. Sometimes just sitting out in the water, thinking, is the best way to clear your mind of all the noise in the world. Especially right now.

Since last spring, Stella Mullin, 16, has been attending high school from her home in Noe Valley. Besides sharing her reflections on surfing, she has written opinion pieces for her school newspaper on the importance of wearing masks and the awkwardness of Zoom breakout rooms.

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Outdoor Adventures and Mood Boosters

A new year, bright future, fresh start? Well, not exactly. Much to our disappointment, Covid-19 did not magically vanish at midnight on Dec. 31. And it’s going to be well into 2021 before we can gather with friends. But we can follow our New Year’s resolutions, right? And one of mine is to do more exploring of Noe Valley and other beautiful neighborhoods in the city. Walking around in the fresh air—whether alone or with someone else (no closer than 6 feet, of course)—is a fun way to de-stress. Turns out, I’m not the only one who thinks so. I asked friends and acquaintances, and many Noe Valley teens are using the outdoors as a way to relax during the pandemic. Here are some of our ideas on how to enjoy the neighborhood as a mood booster, and get in some exercise at the same time. Before you head out the door, remember to grab a mask!

Happy Trails

Billy Goat Hill 2442 Castro St. 3801 24th St.
Noe Cafe 1239 Sanchez St.
Martha & Bros. Coffee 1515 Church St.
Noe Valley Pet Company 1451 Church St.
Church Produce 1798 Church St.
Destination Bakery 586 Chenery St.
Cheese Boutique 680 Chenery St.
Glen Canyon Park Elk and Chenery
Harry Street Steps Starts near Noa and LeDaily.
Lehr’s German Specialties 1581 Church St.
Noe Valley Bakery 4073 24th St.
Happy Donuts 3801 24th St.
Holy Bagel 3872 24th St.
Noe Valley Town Square 3861 24th St.
Bi-Rite Creamery 3892 18th St.

A great way to take a break from your screen—and work up a sweat—is to hike up Billy Goat Hill. At the top, you can have a mini, Instagram-worthy photo shoot in front of the gorgeous view of Noe Valley and Bernal Heights.

The yellow brick roads of Noe Valley may lead to trees, novels, or coffee laced with cream.

Keep an eye out for the tiny free libraries scattered throughout Noe Valley. You can find a new book to cozy up with or even clear space in your house by dropping off old books.

Support a local business! Thirteen-year-old Sashia Utting (full disclosure, my sister) and Imogen Eastwood like to walk their dogs, Ronnie and Rip, to Noe Valley Pet Company for a new toy or treat. They also love the recently re-opened and family-run Church Produce store, which carries great produce, but we like to support local businesses more importantly. Taco Chocolate!

High school sophomore Taevin Sullivan recommends bringing food from Destination Bakery and the Cheese Boutique to Glen Canyon Park (not technically Noe Valley, but very close) for a picnic. She says Destination Bakery’s cranberry scone is “amazing” and she loves the tuna melt from the Cheese Boutique. Take your novel or a sketchbook.

High school senior Fionnuala Eastwood feels being limited to walking in Noe Valley has helped her appreciate its hidden secrets, like the Harry Street stairs. “I find the little parks and pathways so exciting,” said Fionnuala. “It’s like a treasure hunt!” She also enjoys doing homework outdoors, going on long walks, and even biking!

Slow streets like Sanchez are a perfect way to get in a calm, scenic stroll. There’s a little free pantry near Duncan, where you can donate food or household items. If you walk a block down to Church Street, you can pop by Lehr’s German Specialties for chocolate, gummies, and unique packaged sweets. They have the best German chocolate sprinkles, which you can melt on a piece of toast (or eat out of the box!).

Twenty-fourth Street is also a great place for teens from all neighborhoods to hang out. Starbucks is always a favorite, but we like to support local businesses too, such as Noe Valley Bakery (cake by the slice alert!), Happy Donuts (donuts, need I say more?), or Holy Bagel for the perfect “everything” bagel.

Head up a few blocks to Noe Courts, a great space to socially distance, enjoy a snack, or even have a study session. The Noe Valley Town Square is also a quiet place to eat your food or watch the world go by.

While walking up and down the hills, look for purple or white chalk writing on the pavement near certain trees. Thanks to San Francisco tree experts Mike Sullivan, Jason Dewees, and Richard Turner, I’ve learned the names of some special trees growing on our sidewalks. You can find North and South Noe Valley tree tours on their website, sftrees.com.

With travel out of the picture this year, take a walking trip to another neighborhood and play tourist for a few hours. Try a visit to Glen Park or an exciting (and convenient) exploration of the Dolores Heights/Mission area. After you’ve picked your favorite Victorians or murals, make a beeline to Bi-Rite for ice cream.

It’s been a tough year, so we have to get creative and find even more ways to enjoy beautiful Noe Valley. Fellow walkers, let’s start 2021 off right and remember to stay safe!

Astrid Utting, 13, lives with her family near the corner of Duncan and Sanchez streets. As a regular contributor to the Noe Valley Voice, she hopes to report on what local teens are thinking and talking about. If you have ideas for her, write editor@noevalleyvoice.com.
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Happy New Year!
Valerie Miner Writes About Reunion, Repair And Forgiveness

By Olivia Boler

N oel Street resident Valerie Miner is celebrating the publication of her 15th book, Bread and Salt, a collection of short stories. Whitestone Press published the book in September, and it’s available through independent bookstores, including Folio Books on 24th Street.

Bread and Salt is Miner’s fourth book of short stories, and she’s been published in esteemed literary journals, including Ploughshares, Prairie Schooner, The Gettysburg Review, and Salmagundi. She’s also won awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Heinz Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Her works have been finalists for the Lambda Literary Award and the PEN USA Creative Nonfiction Award.

“The working title of [this] book was ‘Salvage,’” Miner says in explaining the collection’s theme. “I used the metaphor of ‘salvation’ to consider the reclamation of the natural environment, human relationships, material objects. The stories are about forgiveness, reunion, rescue, repair, return, and restoration, as characters explore how family and friendship are enriched by differences in national backgrounds get along in close proximity, in this case in a small Italian villa or pension. [The story] is about hospitality, and I thought it was an appropriate way to open the book.” The story was first published in Ploughshares, Winter 2017–18. To meet Miner on Zoom, attend the Dec. 7 Odd Mondays event on Monday, Dec. 7, from 7 to 8 p.m.

Il Piccolo Tesoro

“I’m stepping into an espresso bar, fragrant with strong coffee and sweet cornetti. When my attention is drawn uphill by a weathered pink and green sign offering a vacancy at Il Piccolo Tesoro. The small treasure. I’m not greedy. The adjective appeals as much as the noun promises.

I chose this Ligurian village in the sensible way by spreading a map of Italy across my kitchen table in Toronto, closing my eyes and sticking a pushpin into destiny. Scanzia in affitto: one of the phrases I know by heart.

At the door of the rambling house, I knock assertively. “Good morning.” A big man, all beardy and Scots, ushers me into the elegant marble vestibule. I peek around his shoulder at the parlor, push with Turkish rugs, brocade armchairs and hand-painted shades atop filigreed floor lamps. The large picture window offers a grand view of the Mediterranean.

I extend my hand. “Adrienne Moreau. I’ve come about the room.”

“Malcolm Gordon.” His grip is firm. “One moment, please.” He gestures to the parlor floor, walking through Malcolm’s argument with a Bulgarian tenor, who is leaving behind a trail of unpaid bills. The foyer is blocked by huge boxes and leather suitcases. For a penniless opera star—I don’t even pretend not to have leftover cornetti, mimosa, wisteria and the resin from the stately old pines. I’d gone through months of doubting my decision—leaving Canada, my job, my friends, abandoning everything—to move into Il Piccolo Tesoro even if I need to wash dishes to pay rent.

Each day during my first months at Il Piccolo Tesoro, the sunny Mediterranean weather reminds me that I am far from Toronto. Blissfully far. I’ve never been happier than in my pretty room at the villa with the sea view. A few miles over the French border, this would be a pension. Back home it would be a boarding house.

By Olivia Boler

Il Piccolo Tesoro

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A Taste of Bread and Salt

Following is an excerpt from one of the stories in Bread and Salt, “Il Piccolo Tesoro” (Whitestone Press, September 2020). Author Valerie Miner says, “I’ve always been interested in how people from vastly different backgrounds get along in close proximity, in this case in a small Italian villa or pension. [The story] is about hospitality, and I thought it was an appropriate way to open the book.” The story was first published in Ploughshares, Winter 2017–18. To meet Miner on Zoom, attend the Dec. 7 Odd Mondays event on Monday, Dec. 7, from 7 to 8 p.m.

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But the past decade has seen a steady decline in our revenue, mostly due to competition from internet advertising options. And now the effects of Covid19 have added to our burden. It’s becoming more difficult to produce the paper.

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Questions? Email editor@noevalleyvoice.com

Thank you! Jack Tipple and Sally Smith, Editors and Co-Publishers

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