



A Few Nostalgic Thoughts on Reaching an Important Milestone

It is difficult to write a celebratory retrospective like this without sounding terribly self-serving, and that is not our intention at all. What we feel about reaching our 25th volume of publishing is extraordinarily grateful—to our readers, who constantly amaze us with their affectionate regard, to our advertisers, whose loyalty and support over all these years has been downright mind-boggling, to all the people who have been associated with the magazine over all this time and have each made major contributions to its evolution.

We also feel a bit nostalgic, of course. Not long ago, a group of us was looking over old issues of *County Lines* and thinking about how many things have changed in the quarter-century since our first issue in September 1977.

The inhabitants of the Brandywine Valley are more cosmopolitan today,

more au courant and style aware, yet the region retains its love of tradition, open spaces, fine items well-wrought, antiques, art and festivals of all sorts. The new sophistication blends well with the tradition.

Our food tastes have changed dramatically. When we first came upon the scene, Wally and June Callahan at the Coventry Forge Inn were in the midst of redefining regional fine dining by introducing the first traditional French menu to be found in Chester County. These days, the dining landscape throughout the Brandywine Valley is replete with every ethnic presence imaginable, plus fusion cuisine that borrows from one tradition, blends with another and emerges with something entirely different—and quite wonderful. Regional American cooking has become creative and venturesome, all of this replacing a dining scene twenty-five years ago that

was, at best, rather bland and terribly predictable.

The landscape has certainly changed. The Exton By-pass slices through Chester County, spreading shopping centers and development as it goes. All the drive-in movies are gone. The Guernsey Cow no longer stands by Route 30 in Exton, but the Kennett town clock has been restored and the sign on the "Blow Horn" barn on Route 82 remains. They're all things we remember fondly.

Many farms have disappeared, as have great swaths of hunt country. More and more these days, new housing is the crop of choice in cornfield and orchard. And if there are fewer open acres, there are lots of new arrivals and many new friends to compensate for that loss, along with myriad new municipal parks, conservation areas and even a new 90-acre lake at Hibernia. As always, win some, lose some.

There are more people, more houses, more cars, more businesses and, surprisingly, more Amish residents. There are fewer farm supply stores, feed stores, cows and unpaved roads. There is a thriving new wine industry and a faltering old steel industry. High tech abounds and businesses barely heard of 25 years ago are burgeoning—television shopping, biotechnology, dot-coms and software development.

There used to be more time, somehow. We did things in a more leisurely fashion. People stopped by our offices just to chat, and we were delighted to listen. For years, I brought my Samoyed dog, Bear, to work every day, and she was so popular in the neighborhood that people made regular stops to come play with her. One was a very large motorcyclist who scared us half to death the first time he walked in, wearing a cut-off denim vest that revealed his wall-to-wall tattoos and chains, until he smiled warmly and said to me, "I brought a yummy for



Bear." On the days when, for some reason, Bear stayed home, we had to put a sign on the door that read, "Bear is Out Today," to avoid disappointing visitors.

Among our earliest visitors was Berenice M. Ball. Our General Manager, Kathy Meade described her best: "For our first issue of *County Lines*, we thought we'd like to do a feature on Chester County Day, so we contacted Berenice Ball for information. She was Chairman of the Chester County Day committee, and an incredible, dynamic person, with a real love of the county and its history—a committed preservationist. Her enthusiasm for life, this area and its people was absolutely contagious. You couldn't walk away from a conversation with Bernie without feeling invigorated right down to your toes.

"Since we were going to feature a project close to her heart, she gave us a huge amount of support and access to many people.

"I remember a telephone call from a realtor who asked to buy a half-page ad. 'We're taking out this ad because Mrs. Ball said we should,' he said.

'She told us that 'the house is on the tour and if it's on the tour, it needs to be advertised in *County Lines*.' "

"It wasn't unusual for her to stop into the office to chat for a bit. It was always a highlight of our day. We were, of course, a lot younger then, and she'd say, 'I like being around all you young people. I can feel the energy.' But it was we who were energized after her visit.

"We would see her around town when our offices were in West Chester. She was exceptionally warm and friendly, always impeccably groomed, with white curled hair and, when she needed to be, a bit imperi-

ous. She'd hold up her hand and stop three lanes of traffic while she crossed the street. I guess she felt that she really didn't have the time to wait for the light to change."

When we moved to our offices in Westtown, we saw a little less of Bernie, but the move brought us the great pleasure of Marshall Jones's company. He owned all the land on the other side of Route 926 and his nephew, Russell, owned everything on this side, including, at that time, our office building.

Marshall was a working farmer, with a passion for the history and arcana of Chester County and he was a mine of all sorts of unexpected information, which he loved to share. He was probably somewhere in his seventies at the time he first came in to introduce himself.

He was the most wonderful storyteller. He would pop in early in the morning, preceded up the stairs by his dog Bluey, with a twinkle always in his eye, and he could keep us spellbound for hours.

His father originally farmed in the 69th Street area of Upper Darby. When that grew too populous, the family purchased a great deal of cheap farmland in Westtown. They literally moved everything by horse and wagon—farm equipment, personal possessions and people. Marshall was a great collector of things, including vintage cars. (He also kept an old beat-up airplane in his barn for years, which he occasionally flew with dubious credentials and hair-raising results, according to his neighbors, but that is another story for another time.)

We'd know spring had arrived when we'd hear an *oogah oogah* horn sound out in the parking lot, and there would be Marshall sitting in

an ancient open touring car with a rumble seat. There'd usually be straw all over the upholstery from its being stored in the barn all winter. He had come, he'd announce, to take "all the girls" out for a spring ride around Westtown.

Unfortunately, his dog Bluey always came along too. He was an Australian sheep dog, and we'd learned pretty fast not to pet him because he was covered with barn gunk. Bluey got to ride up front along with one other passenger, and three more of us would ride in the back. Boy, did we move fast to avoid being the one who had to ride up front with that dog!

One time, somewhere on the back roads, we came up to a large estate that Marshall wanted to show us, but he cautioned that the owner didn't like trespassers and we would have to "sneak up on it." But as he turned the wheel to the left to negotiate the steep circular driveway, the horn went off -- *oogah!* From that point on, everywhere we went, a left-hand turn set off the horn. He pounded on it trying to make it stop, but we *oogahed* and laughed our way all over Westtown.

What we really loved about being based in Chester County in those days was the kaleidoscope of people who lived here and made it such an interesting place to be, from the elite Old Guard, dedicated to life in the country and all things equestrian; to the county's many birthright Quakers whose heritage dates back to its earliest founding and whose country manors and stone farmhouses were filled with extraordinary fine art and antiques; to unpretentious and hard-working farmers; to fine artists and craftspeople who settled here because they liked the country and living here

was cheap; to actors, writers and directors, who always seemed able to find an available stone barn in which to stage their productions, and eventually coalesced into our own regional resident People's Light & Theatre Company; to African-American families, among them some now nationally-celebrated artists, with roots dating back to the days when our part of Chester County was a maze of conduits for the Underground Railroad; to the Hispanic families who originally came as migrants to work on the mushroom farms down in Kennett and Oxford.

It was an earthy, rich mixture, and the prevailing mood was, for the most part, laid back country with understated style and many dimensions.

It's instructive to take a look at the covers of *County Lines* magazines over the years. They have always reflected what has been attractive and interesting about our lifestyle during their particular time. They've evolved, as the magazine has, and as our circulation has grown, from soft country woodcuts in sepia tones to full color, glossy design that re-

flects more sophisticated tastes, and more urbane—but not urban—subject matter. Our roots are still where they always were, but our scope has expanded very considerably.

Our coverage has expanded from Chester County to Southeastern Pennsylvania and northern Delaware. Our interest in antiques, finely crafted furniture, home design, and fine dining has become more sophisticated, as our readership has become more cosmopolitan. Full-color editorial features and color ads on glossy paper have changed the look of the magazine. At the same time, we remain committed to evoking a sense of the



Berenice M. Ball



Marshall L. Jones, Jr.

Brandywine Valley's past, its traditions and special places that need to be cherished, because they are such an important part of what brought us all here in the first place.

It is really no small thing for a regional magazine to mark the start of its twenty-fifth year of continuous monthly publication. This is a tough business, and the publishing landscape is littered with the metaphorical corpses of many, many failed Brandywine Valley-based magazines. I think that what we always had going for us was a deep personal connection and commitment to our region, which showed through even in our first, painfully skinny issues that people used to call "that cute little book," and it still shows through in our evolution to a 21st century glossy, full color, broader-circulation lifestyle magazine.

We're still loaded with local information, because we have always been obsessed by the need to tell our readers about the wealth of great things to do and places to see right in our own backyard; we're still published in a unique format that makes us easy to use, easy to keep; and easy to take along with you as you explore our area's inviting nooks and crannies.

The truth is, we got into this business because we had an enormous affection for what we have come to call *County Lines* country—its physical beauty, its remarkable history and traditions, and the entrancing blend of its people with a huge range of interests and talents that, for us, somehow always connected up to quality. The general feeling in these parts was, if something was worth doing, it was worth doing well and honestly. That held as much for the farmer as it did for the maker of handcrafted furniture, for the artist as well as the equestrian, for the antiques dealer, the home restorer, the stone mason . . . everyone, including the publisher. We did the best we could with what we had, because that was our ethic, and it still is. We don't do gimmicks or short cuts.

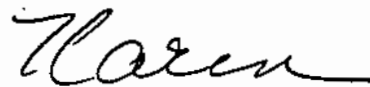
I get to have my name at the top of the masthead each month, but you should know that this magazine has always been a collaborative effort, the product of many minds and hearts, an astonishing range of talents, and a willingness by everyone associated with it to always go the extra mile.

Many people on our staff have been here an incredibly long time. That, too, is exceptional in the magazine publishing business. The result is not only an enviable continuity in a business sense, but also that we have all watched each others' families grow up, we have shared personal crises large and small, we have weathered rough times together, and shared the joys of great times, too.

And incidentally, we are all women. That was a really big deal twenty-five years ago, although it happened accidentally, not by design. (And it certainly made some potential bankers uncomfortable.) These days, though, the fact that a business is female owned and operated doesn't mean nearly as much, and that's fine with us too. In the end, it's the magazine that matters, and that's always been our view.

So here we are, a vibrant twenty-five-year-old (*We're talking about the magazine here, OK?*), with a great past and a great future, and truth to tell—it feels pretty darn good.

With profound gratitude, we thank our staff both past and present for their many, many contributions; our advertisers for their commitment to and belief in us; our writers, who have always made the editor look good; and finally our readers, whose warm regard for our magazine is what continues to fuel our energies and send us out beating the bushes yet again, to discover even more . . . ONWARD!



KAREN WALDAUER
Publisher & Editor