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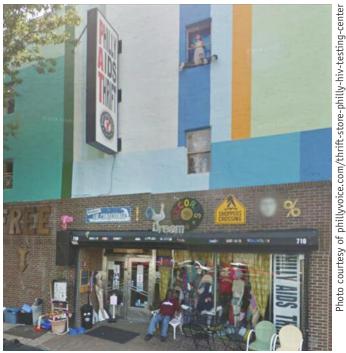
A Lot of Caring for a Low Price: Philly AIDS Thrift

Martha Cornog

t's several weeks after Christmas, and that dreadful sweater from Cousin Louise is still sitting in its box. Or maybe that abandoned gift is a portable drill from your former best man Charlie, who thinks you still do home repairs. The sweater might make good bedding for a hamster, vou muse. But oops! Pet rodents are a no-no according to the Hopkinson House Code of Regulations. So it's trashville for the sweater and the drill, too...or is it? How about donating them to our friendly Philly AIDS Thrift, just a short walk down 5th Street?

"This place always makes me feel like an adventure still ongoing," chirped a happy thrift-shopper on Yelp. There used to be a tree outside that was bedecked with stuffed animals of every description, which attracted admiration even from performer Miley Cyrus when she was in town a while back. (Alas, that tree fell down a few years ago.) But stuffed animals as tree decorations? Just a typical strategy at Philly AIDS Thrift (PAT), where a dizzying variety of objects simply beg to be repurposed. When one of the store's volunteer staffers was asked about his "best purchase" there, he confided, "Dinosaurs I use as art." PAT also repurposed a donated skull by putting it on display with a sign: "Shoplifter of the Month."

It's easy to imagine other creative ways to use thrift store purchases. Naturally,



Philly AIDS Thrift

you might hope to snag a deal on lightly-used, highend garb like a North Face jacket for \$12 (actual price reported online by a satisfied customer), or a portable drill if you do need one, or perhaps some wild-child earrings to wear dancing. You can also pick up presentable yet cheap tableware for parties or a second house (if you don't want to feed more plastic to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch), the makings for unique Halloween costumes or cosplays, vases and baskets galore, kitchenware gadgets like melon ball scoopers, funny door prizes or favors for parties, toys and board games for younger relatives, or all kinds of containers for storage. And the wide array of electronics, movies, music, tchotchkes—even "really nice wedding dresses"—will certainly spark your imagination. The store sells gift cards

for its merchandise, a terrific present for friends needing an oddballtreasure-fix like old Paramount promotional posters or a 1945 newspaper announcing WWII troop discharges.

PAT has also taken over Giovanni's Room, the LGBTQ bookstore at 12th and Pine, under the new name Philly AIDS Thrift at Giovanni's Room. Founded in 1973, Giovanni's Room is the oldest gay bookstore in America still operating. Stock includes new and lightly used LGBTQ books plus music, art, videos, comics, clothing, and "much more." All the proceeds go into the same pot as from the flagship thrift store, tagged to support local AIDS charities.

Indeed, Philly AIDS Thrift isn't just a store—the "AIDS" in the name really means something. Its four co-

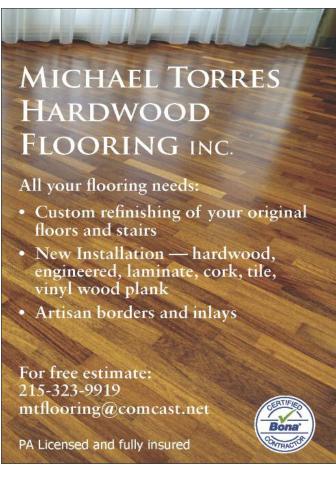
founders all worked with various HIV/AIDS organizations throughout the 1990s, and then Peter Hiler launched a predecessor store, Thrift for AIDS. That venture closed in 1999, but Hiler plus Christina Kallas-Saritsoglou plus two others reincarnated the concept on Bainbridge in 2005. By 2011, stock and commerce had outgrown that space, and the whole operation moved to the current, larger building where they could do more than just sell stuff.

On National HIV Testing Day 2015, Kallas-Saritsoglou announced the official opening of an HIV testing center at the shop, providing free, confidential testing every weekend by health professionals from other Philly AIDS organizations. (For current days/times, consult the schedule posted at the store or call them.) At quarterly wee-hours "Thrifty Discos," Drexel University's WKDU DJs "turn Philly AIDS Thrift into the Funkiest Lil Club while Raising Money for Charity & Rockin it Afterhours Style!!" PAT also holds voter registrations and provides free store vouchers to needy AIDS patients.

Now back to those local charities. Because PAT runs mostly on volunteers, the 501c3 nonprofit can actually raise serious money to support HIV/AIDS relief. How much?

Cumulatively, some two and a half million dollars to date.

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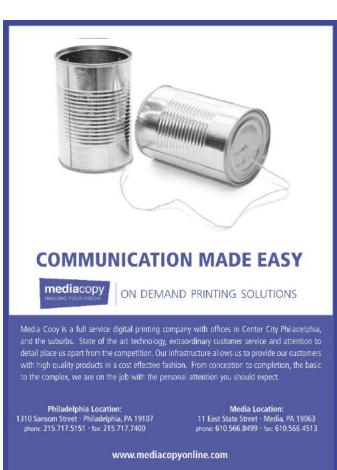
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A Lot of Caring for a Low Price

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Last February, income from the thrift store and bookstore funded PAT's 2019 annual contributions to twenty-three Philly area HIV service organizations, with grants totaling close to \$250,000. Grantees include the Gay Community Center of Philadelphia, the Mazzoni Center, the LGBT Elder Initiative, the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania, and MANNA.

Now back to that dreadful sweater and unneeded drill—you can help support all this worthy community activism by schlepping them to PAT. Lately, donations to the store have been booming, partly because

of Marie Kondo's "tidying" books and her Netflix series, and sales have kept pace. So that's how PAT can give away so much money while recycling "lovely, useful, amusing, and sometimes mysterious stuff" to make both donors and customers happy. (Check the website for lists of items accepted and not accepted.)

And while dropping off the sweater or drill, you just might see something-youcan't-live-without for a tiny price. For if other people's gifts can be your trash, other people's trash can seem like a gift to you, if it scratches that itch you didn't know you had.



P.S. Can you think of a better first date than a trip to a thrift store? You will have plenty to talk about, and you can get a real idea of what your date is interested in. Moreover, the visit is free—actually buying that something-you-can't-live-without is optional.

Philly AIDS Thrift

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Philly AIDS Thrift @ Giovanni's Room

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Getting to Know the Athenaeum

Lynn Miller (www.lynn-miller.net)

s many Hopkinson House residents know, the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, facing Washington Square from Sixth Street, is a treasure. For those who don't know this 206-yearold institution, here's a taste of what you're missing. Behind the elegant brownstone façade, fascinating programs, book events, and exhibitions unfold in some of the grandest spaces in the city. Established in 1814 as a subscription library at a time when free libraries were nonexistent, the Athenaeum has, from the beginning, also emphasized programs where members could meet and discuss historical, literary, and cultural topics. Today, that

tradition is more vigorous than ever, and with a greater number and variety of programs open to the public. Non-members are welcome, sometimes for a small event fee. Revolving exhibitions and many other events are free to all visitors.

In its early years, the Athenaeum met in rented rooms in our neighborhood. Then, in 1847, the impressive building that has been its home ever since was completed on Washington Square. Designed by John Notman, it is regarded as the seminal American structure in the Italianate Revival style. Unrevealing on the outside, the second-story rooms have 24-foot



The Athenaeum on Washington Square.

ceilings, columns painted to resemble marble, and graceful chandeliers. There quiet reigns, as befits a library, except for the times when programs unfold in these chambers. Portraits, sculpted busts, and other artifacts are sprinkled throughout (see the box for an anecdote regarding the Athenaeum's namesake bust, Athena, Goddess of Wisdom).

On the ground floor, space was originally rented out to lawyers and other

continued on page 19

Photo by Lynn Mil

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Getting to Know the Athenaeum

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professionals. Today, these rooms are largely open to the public. There, in addition to a large gallery for temporary exhibitions, you may be surprised to find a fascinating collection of memorabilia from the estate of Joseph Bonaparte, who lived in Philadelphia and across the river in New Jersey for some fifteen years after the fall from power of his younger brother, Napoleon. Why is that collection here? Because Bonaparte gave these things to his neighbor, friend and Athenaeum member, a doctor who willed them to the Athenaeum years later. Art by, and images of, members of the Bonaparte family share space with Napoleon's death mask, letters, and furniture from Joseph's estate, Point Breeze, at Bordentown, New Jersey.

I sat down recently with Dr. Beth Hessell, the new Athenaeum director. She acknowledged that this somewhat austere building may look forbidding to strangers. Her goal is to make it welcoming to all. She was happy to report that First Friday receptions have become increasingly popular, bringing many, especially younger,

Philadelphians into the building for the first time. (As you probably know, the first Friday of every month is when many arts and cultural organizations in and near old city open their establishments for free, and often serve refreshments.) In increasing the Athenaeum's visibility, she is eager to increase its membership, which consists of three categories: shareholders, who buy a share, which may be passed on to another family member, then an annual fee; subscribers, who pay an annual fee only; and young friends, members under the age of 35. If you are interested in joining in any category, phone 215-925-2688, or visit their website: www.philaathenaeum.org.

In 2018, an arrangement was made with the University of Pennsylvania libraries to permit Athenaeum shareholders to have immediate and free access to Penn's sevenmillion-volume circulating library. By the mid-20th century, when much larger, public libraries existed in every major city, the Philadelphia Athenaeum decided to focus much of its more limited resources on the history of architecture and interior design, especially in America. While theirs is now one of the most important collections of its kind in the nation, the arrangement with Penn allows members with more general and eclectic reading and research interests to borrow from a pre-eminent general collection. The Athenaeum's librarian is also continually adding new books of general interest to their own collection.

The organization now sponsors discussion groups, one of which is in French for those who wish to brush up their skills in that language. There are conversations over brown-bag lunches; talks about movies by the Philadelphia Inquirer's longtime critic, Carrie Rickey; and member bus tours. In February, a group will visit the Michener Museum in Doylestown. Chamber music is sometimes on the menu, as are other musical moments presented in cooperation with Opera Philadelphia.

Washington Square's prominence in the life of Philadelphians owes much to the presence of the Athenaeum overlooking

its green space for a centuryand-three-quarters. Thanks in part to that presence, the square became the center of publishing early in the 19th century, and the heart of what was Philadelphia's most desirable residential quarter. But through the first half of the 20th century, suburbanization, followed by population decline, greatly reduced this neighborhood's fortunes. The Athenaeum survived as one of the few legacies of the square's rich past. Then, after World War II, the revitalization of Society Hill began. Mayor Richardson Dilworth helped inspire that rebirth by building his new home adjacent to the Athenaeum, the neighborhood's anchor.

Today, increasing numbers of Athenaeum members live in the city, many of them, like those from Hopkinson House, nearby. If you would like to learn more and visit this august institution, please let me know via our Building Link's Neighborhood Dashboard so that I can arrange a group tour with a staff member.



Was Poe's "The Raven" inspired by a visit to the Athenaeum?

In 1838, Edgar Allan Poe visited the Philadelphia Athenaeum in its rented quarters. A "Book of Strangers" from that period records the names and dates of all who came as guests of members. A bust of the goddess Minerva—Pallas Athena to the Greeks—was on prominent display at the time, as she still is today on the second floor of the Athenaeum's 1845

building. Some staff members believe that she inspired the poet to envision "a pallid bust of Pallas" above the narrator's chamber door when he wrote his wildly popular "The Raven" after his visit. To memorialize that possibility, a stuffed raven now appears around Hallowe'en at the Athenaeum, perched on the goddess's head. The bird's name? Nev R. Moore, of course.

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On Top of the World!

Joseph Quinn

Well, almost. I never got close to the 29,000 ft. peak of Mt. Everest (except by air). But my 26-day trip to Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet in November 2019 had many memorable "high" points. What a privilege it was to travel in these fabled lands, experience such cultural richness, be moved by such deep spirituality, and astonished by such natural beauty.

These countries (Tibet is considered an autonomous region within China) are clustered to the north of India, with which they share a border, and are contiguous with the massive Himalayan range. Yet they are different culturally, spiritually, and politically. What they do have in common is the incomparable beauty of their landscapes, made all the more intoxicating by being sometimes forbiddingly inaccessible.

And then for some there is their association with the mystical/mythical idea of *Shangri La*, an Edenic paradise supposedly hidden in the far reaches of the Tibetan Himalayas, hauntingly described by

James Hilton in his 1933 best-seller, Lost Horizon.

Mountains and mysticism, particularly that of a Buddhist nature, were what drove my curiosity and around which I centered my journey. I encountered plenty of both wherever I went.

During two weeks in Bhutan, our group travelled westward from centrally-located Bumthang to the capital city of Thimphu. We traversed endless winding roads up hills and down into valleys, our eyes popping with the staggering beauty of the landscape, so cherished and protected by the Bhutanese people and their leaders.

The guiding principle of Bhutan's governing process is the much-discussed (and Buddhist-inspired) Gross National Happiness (GNH). Unlike Gross National Product, which focuses on the productivity and financial well-being of a country and its workers, GNH is a tool for measuring and supporting sustainable growth, environmental conservation, and the total well-being—financial, social, and even

psychological—of individuals and society.

In Bhutan, mountains are admired from afar, even worshiped as repositories of sacred mysteries. Recreational mountain climbing is forbidden by law. Every monastery and residential or commercial dwelling adheres to mandated architectural principles designed to create aesthetic uniformity and also allow for the practicalities of urban and rural life, including the presence of a Buddhist altar in every home.

We visited several major dzongs, majestic fortress-like buildings, usually situated on promontories visible for miles around, that combine active Buddhist monasteries and offices of the local civic government. Every dzong is built around a large central courtyard that becomes the stage for frequent tsechus, or festivals, like the Jakar and Black-necked Crane festivals we observed. These are religious rituals or pageants presided over by the resident monks. Each one is a dazzling, sensory-rich combination of colorful costumes and masks, processions, music, and

dancing, with some comic relief thrown in for children. Every village family attends, staying for hours, as the primary reasons for attending a festival are to receive blessings, be cleansed of negativity, and gain merit in the Buddhist tradition.

We rafted the Pho Chhu river in Punakha, hiked through serene woodlands, were served delicious meals in village farmhouses, and stumbled upon an archery tournament that looked like something out of Sherwood Forest. Who would have guessed that Bhutan's national sport is archery? We visited museums that preserve the heritage of Bhutanese art and culture, and toured a school where boys and girls are trained in practical arts and crafts to ensure that the tradition of harmonious Bhutanese design will thrive and continue to beautify homes and religious spaces.

Our visit culminated in two ascents that tested our physical endurance and lung capacity. The first was an arduous, day-long trek from the Haa valley up to the sky burial site on the continued on page 22



A typical dzong in Bhutan, combining a Buddhist monastery and local government offices.



A huge religious painting is unveiled at the conclusion of a religious festival in Bhutan.



Monks-in-training and their teachers actively "debate" the finer points of Buddhist philosophy in Lhasa, Tibet.

Photos by Joseph Qu

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highest ridge of Cheli La Pass. There, at almost 14,000 ft., we caught our breath and contemplated a stunning view of the distant Himalayan range. On the final day of the tour, we slowly negotiated the perilous-looking climb to the fabled Tiger's Nest Monastery, spectacularly situated on the side of a dizzyingly steep cliff at 10,400 ft. You gaze in awe and ask yourself, how did it get there? Legend has it that the founding monk arrived on the back of a flying tigress. When you finally rest your aching feet and trembling knees at the entrance, you ask yourself, how the heck did I get here!

Tranquility, beauty, spirituality, reverence for nature, love of ritual, and a belief that everyone has a right to happiness and prosperity these are some of the characteristics of Bhutan and its people that you will experience if you venture there.

After the Bhutan tour group dispersed, I continued my journey solo into Nepal and later, Tibet. My visit to Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, began with an early-morning Mountain Flight, offering jaw-dropping views of the Himalayas and a brief photo-op of Mt. Everest itself from the cockpit.

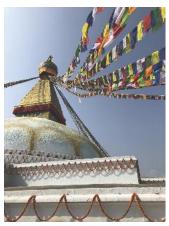
As my guide pointed out, Nepal is about eighty percent Hindu and ten percent Buddhist. The country may be unique in how people of different faiths coexist and respect each other's spiritual traditions and spaces. Signs of the devastating 2015 earthquake that killed over

8,000 people and partially destroyed many historic buildings are still evident as you walk through the bustling palace squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur.

Experiencing Kathmandu means visiting both Buddhist and Hindu sites. The signature Buddhist shrines are huge, domed, spherical stupas like the one at Boudhanath, the largest in Asia, which is actually the tip of a massive threedimensional mandala. The most revered Hindu temple is in Pashupatinath, where one can observe solemn cremation rites at the Ayra Ghat on the Bagmati River. Fresh air and mountain views are available at the resort-like town of Nagarkot up in the hills outside of town.

After four days in Kathmandu, I received my visa for Tibet and was off to Lhasa, a city combining elements both ancient and modern, situated on a vast, barren 12,000-ft. plateau referred to as "the roof of the world." To feel the true pulse of Lhasa, you have to go beyond the modern central district, which is rather sterile, with broad streets, well-mannered traffic and glass-walled high rises. (Oddly, Lhasa was the only place where I saw westernstyle junk food for sale, like at Pizza Hut and KFC.)

Drepung and Sera are the two major Buddhist monasteries where visitors can observe the daily activities of monks in training and sense the deep spirituality pervading these

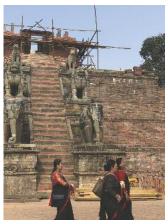


View of a Buddhist shrine near Kathmandu, Nepal. The eyes are watching you.

holy places. At the Sera monastery I watched the "debating" exercise that takes place every day in the courtyard. Student monks are energetically confronted by their teachers with shouted questions, vigorous hand clapping and foot stomping, all part of a good-natured educational exercise.

Lhasa's crowning jewel, physically and spiritually, is the sprawling Potala Palace, perched on a hill high above the city. Photographs don't do it justice, and nothing can prepare you for this heart-stopping vision. Once it was an active monastery and home of the current Dalai Lama before he was forced to flee to Dharamsala, India, where he established the Tibetan governmentin-exile. Now it is a monumental museum filled with vestiges of glorious Buddhist religious art and open to visitors who are able to negotiate its 432 steps.

The political situation in Tibet is, to say the least, complicated. My Tibetan guide explained he was not permitted to mention the current Buddhist leaderin-exile or discuss the tense relations between Communist China and the



A temple near Kathmandu still under repair as a result of the devastating 2015 earthquake.

Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Nevertheless, what impressed me most about Lhasa was the steadfast spirituality of its people. The citizens of Lhasa live their faith actively as part of their daily routine, savoring opportunities to express and deepen their spirituality. They live under an oppressive regime that, at best tolerates, and at worst can be openly hostile toward their religious beliefs. Yet you see them by the hundreds patiently walking clockwise around every sacred site for hours at a time, fingering their beads and murmuring prayers.

So, is there a Shangri La? Maybe not literally. But aspects of that mythical Eden-like world can be found in Bhutan, Nepal, even in Tibet, if you look closely. In the shadows of the looming Himalayan peaks, communities exist that strive to harmonize body, mind, and soul; honor and protect the natural environment; illustrate the power of faith to sustain communities in the face of repression; and allow people to live together peacefully despite their differences.

Photos by Joseph Quinn



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