MONTHLY MUTUAL

LETTERS FROM THE COMMUNITY

BY BECCA KRALL

About a year ago, my life was in a much difference place. My fiancé and I were embarking into a new chapter in our life, when I was abruptly let go from the job that brought us to Phoenixville. That same month, my fiancé's company went under due to DOGE cuts. Suddenly, instead of dreaming of buying a house in town, we were afraid how long we would be able to keep making rent. Despite that, we decided to double down on Phoenixville. We showed up to community events and protests. We did our best to spend our limited budget at local businesses, befriending owners and workers along the way. We volunteered with Better Days Ahead, acutely aware of the quick reality of housing insecurity. We tended to our garden plot in Reservoir Park. Our growing community kept us afloat, giving us hope on the hardest days.

We got lucky. I found a job, then my partner did. As our lives felt more stable, the world felt even less so. An violent ICE raid in town, chaos in Minneapolis, and looming threats of global insecurity seeped into our hope. Elected officials offered no solutions. At a protest, I found myself realizing that I was surrounded by friends who were all strangers a year ago. The solid ground of community was the only thing that had kept me standing the past year. I wanted everyone to have that. So I made an instagram to see if this community (my community) would join me in starting a mutual aid network.

> "Mutual aid is the radical act of caring for each other while working to change the world."
> **- Dean Spade**

To me, mutual aid is collaborating with your neighbors, making sure we all have what we need to survive. Its community care. Its working together, as equals, so we can build the world we want to live in.

Mutual aid looks like community potlucks, bail funds, block parties, and babysitting co-ops. Mutual aid is baby showers for new parents, top surgery GoFundMe's, and little free libraries. Mutual aid can be as big as city-wide natural disaster response and as small as offering a water bottle to an unhoused neighbor. At its core, mutual aid is building a network, inviting people in, and trusting each other enough to know we can weather whatever storm comes our way, together.

About 4 months ago, I made that instagram hoping it might bring people together. Within days it had dozens of followers, now up to 450. Folks have shown up in person to meet up, share in our worry, talk about solutions, and find hope in the future. Our ideas are already becoming reality. A dozen of us met to clean up trash by along French Creek. Others have organized an regular support group and an upcoming meditation workshop. This newsletter is an amazing effort that aims to report on important Borough information, highlight local artists, and share community events. While I may have started the instagram, my community is who actually showed up to lead the mutual aid efforts.

So no matter who you are, if you're reading this, I want you to join us. Check out our instagram, swing by a meeting, or talk to anyone involved. Bring what you can, take what you need.

PXV MUTUAL AID

Bring what you can, take what you need.

COUNCIL MINUTES



MAY

In the first public comment a 4th Avenue resident stated that the tree removal the previous month was not following borough code. He encouraged council to follow protocol, and noted that the trees were cut down during nesting season, which flies in the face of Phoenixville being a "bird town".

A member of the Tree Advisory commission stated that there was a historical neglect of trees within the borough and there was room for improvement. She pushed for more transparency and advised the council to shift focus from removal to pruning.

A resident called in via Zoom and expressed concern about prospective developments just being 'rubber stamped'. She noted the lack of balance between businesses and residential needs and pushed for more transparency from the borough council.

Council President Ewald made a statement regarding the tree issue. He stated that public safety is the main priority of the borough, and noted years of de-emphasis has created a prevailing issue of neglected trees. President Ewald wants to instate a preventative maintenance policy regarding the trees in town, and noted the 250 thousand dollar budget for the urban canopy.

Mr. Moore blamed PECO for the tree removal on 4th Ave, saying PECO had the "right of way".

The Starr St expansion project was awarded to Construction Masters LLC for 2.26 million. This construction will take place at the intersection of Bridge and Starr Street.

A call for an ordinance amendment chapter 6 re: ICE- this blocks any 287(G) agreement unless legally required by the federal government. This amendment was passed.

Borough has bought the land at 17 Cromby Rd. It is undeveloped land and will be added to Reservoir Park, expanding the green space available across from the Civic Center.

The owner of 99 Bridge St (aka "The Suite Life") was attempting to get additional signage approved. A very spirited debate ensued on the merits of the proposed sign between the property owner and a member of council, including what can be defined as a "billboard". The main concern from council was that the sign did not fit the overall character of Bridge Street. Council approved the signage.

Councilmember Weiss made a statement regarding tree removal stating that there was "tremendous alignment" between residents and council, but tree maintenance and the coordination of it can be "confusing".

Councilmember Vogel brought a procedural vote to block any 287(g) agreement between the Borough and the Federal government. Councilmember Vogel also brought an ordinance stating borough property will not be used by ICE for staging purposes or other immigration enforcement activity.

For clarification on what a 287(g) agreement is, the official ICE website outlines the 287(g) program as follows:

"The 287(g) Program allows your law enforcement agency to enforce certain aspects of U.S. immigration law, expanding your department's authority to:

1.Identify and process removable aliens with pending or active criminal charges.

2. Enforce limited immigration authorities with ICE oversight during routine duties.

3. Serve and execute administrative warrants on removable aliens in your jail.

ICE has three 287(g) Program models. Your law enforcement agency can use one or more of the following to keep your community safe:

The Jail Enforcement Model. The Jail Enforcement Model allows your officers to identify and process removable aliens currently in your jail or detention facility who have pending or active criminal charges while they're in your custody.

BETTER DAYS AHEAD
IN-NEED OUTREACH FOR SUBURBS & PHILADELPHIA
BDA
IN-NEED OUTREACH

The Task Force Model. The Task Force Model allows your officers to enforce limited immigration authority while performing routine police duties, such as identifying an alien at a DUI checkpoint and sharing information directly with ICE. An ICE supervisor determines next steps. These officers may also exercise limited immigration authority as active participants on ICE-led task forces.

The Warrant Service Officer Program. Under the Warrant Service Officer Program, ICE trains, certifies and authorizes your officers to serve and execute administrative warrants on aliens currently in your agency's custody."



PASS THE PLATE

STRAWBERRYCHEESECAKE THUMBPRINT COOKIES

Cookie base:
2 sticks salted butter, softened
2/3 cup sugar, plus more for rolling
1 egg yolk
1 tsp vanilla extract
1/8 tsp salt
2 cups flour
1/2 cup graham crack crumbs (about 5 sheets)

Filling:
4 oz full fat cream cheese (1/2 block), room temp
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 cup sour cream, room temp
strawberry jam

1. Beat butter in a large bowl using a handheld mixer or stand mixer until creamy. Scrape down the sides and bottom with a spatula. Add sugar and beat on medium speed for about 1 minute. Add egg yolk and vanilla. Mix until combined and scrape down sides again.

2. In a separate bowl, combine salt, flour, and graham cracker crumbs. Add to butter mixture. Beat on low speed until just combined and dough is formed. (Dough will be a bit crumbly but will come together.)

3. Using a cookie scoop or your hands, shape 1 Tbsp size scoops into balls and roll in granulated sugar. Place on a plate lined with waxed paper. Using your thumb or the back of a measuring spoon, gently press an indent into the cookies. If they begin to crack, just pinch back together.

4. Chill in the freezer for 20-30 minutes.

5. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

6. Using a handheld or stand mixer, beat cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Add vanilla and sour cream and beat until combined.

7. Remove cookies from freezer. Spoon cheesecake filling into each cookie just up to the brim. Then, add a tiny bit of strawberry jam.

8. Bake for 12-13 minutes or just until the edges are beginning to turn light golden brown. Do not overbake. (The filling will deflate a little as it cools.) Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

STORAGE: Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a week or in the freezer for up to 3 months. When ready to use, thaw overnight in the refrigerator. Unbaked cookie dough may be frozen for up to 2 months.



A CONVO WITH JES FROM PERCH PLANTS & ODDS & ENDS

BY DANIEL CALLAHAN

I popped into my new favorite store in town to catch up with Jes, the owner of Perch. I first came by to check it out to get a gift for a friend a few weeks back, and when I saw the sticker of a shrimp, I was immediately sold on the place. Not only does it smell absolutely great, they have a lot of really cool plants, and an incredible assortment of stickers (for sticking). I am not a botanist, or incredibly well versed in the world of horticulture, but I love the natural world and am in constant awe of its splendor and beauty. Walking in, I got incredible vibes, and it just feels like a place where you want to hang out. It also seems like it would be a fantastic place to dispose of a self absorbed dentist, or perhaps procure a lovely smelling flower that will assist in replacing humanity via pods.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GET INTO BOTANY? So I had done something different previously for almost 12 years. I worked as a prop maker in kids television. And then I had just wrapped up a gig before the pandemic. It was like a 10 month gig, and so I knew I'd probably be out of work for a little bit, and then everything shut down. My dad was also really sick at the time, and so plants kind of became this really helpful thing for me during that period. That's why I got into them.

It just kind of became this nurturing type of relationship, and I started a pop up with a friend for a little while, and then after my dad passed away, I ended up working on a flower farm for a season. I just didn't want to go back into production, even when stuff started opening back up. I had always wanted to open up a shop, so it was kind of this perfect thing where I was like "ok, well maybe I can use my love of plants and how much they helped me, and combine that with having a shop and create an accessible place where people can come and learn about plants and not have it be this intimidating thing. After the flower farm stint, I worked at a plant shop for about a year and half in Philly just to see if it was something I wanted to do.



Perch's store front on 22 W Main Street.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD THE S
HOP? I was down on Bridge Street for a little over two years, and then I moved in July, so it will be three years.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PLANT RIGHT NOW? So my first loves were cacti and succulents, because when I started the pop up with my friend, we had planted them in different types of vintage containers, and we did that just for fun during the pandemic. So it kind of started out as this hobby, kind of combining my love of old things, and then plants together. So I feel like cacti and succulents are my first love.

But since then, it kind of changes. I feel like I'm really drawn to fuchsia, which used to be the plant that I associated with my great aunt. It was always the plant she had in her house. I was always like "oh this is an old person plant". But now I'm more drawn to those plants that I thought belonged to my grandma. So yeah, I'm drawn to Phicuses and more of these kinds of iconic plants, now I think.

DO YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE ANY EXOTIC PLANTS ON THE PREMISES? FOR INSTANCE, SAY A STRANGE TALKING PLANT GOING BY THE NAME OF AUDREY 2? Not right now… but a couple of years ago I did have an Audrey 2 in the shop. I did a pop up with 323, and we did a Little Shop of Horrors theme, so we made a big Audrey 2 and had a really cool event and they sponsored the movie at the Colonial. It was really cool. Then I made a bunch of little Audrey's, but I actually gave the big one to my friend who is a special ed teacher in New Jersey, and he loves everything horror. He asked if he could have it for his classroom, and it was way too big to store, so I said "YES, please" Give it a home.

IN YOUR THREE YEARS IN TOWN, HOW HAS THE AREA BEEN TREATING YOU? You know, I think that this town is really amazing and that it supports each other so much. I've found that a lot of businesses and shops and restaurants are so collaborative, which isn't always the case. I talked to some people

who had shops in Philly and other places, and it feels much more competitive for them. I think being here and owning a shop, collaborating with other shops is the only way to really stay afloat, and thrive. We work together, because if the shop next door is succeeding, then you're going to succeed, it lifts everyone up. I think what's really special about this town is that it seems like the people that live here are the people that come here and really take pride in supporting the local shops and businesses.

SOME PEOPLE ARE ALMOST BRAGGADOCIOUS ABOUT THEIR UNCANNY ABILITY TO KILL THEIR PLANTS. WHAT KIND OF HARDY BREED OF PLANT SHOULD THEY GET TO KEEP THIS PLANT MURDER AT BAY? So, everyone says that a snake plant is the easiest plant, but I actually disagree, because they are prone to overwatering. So if you get a snake plant and you're watering it once a week, it's gonna die, because it is prone to root rot. It's an easy plant if you know how to leave it alone for three weeks at a time. I think pothos are one the easier ones, especially because you can propagate them, so you can take cuttings and reroot them. I do think cacti are, too, because they like a lot of sun and they like to be forgotten about. But I've killed a lot of plants to learn how to take care of them. Just to think that you're going to get plants, and then automatically be awesome at them, isn't really a thing, unless you get really lucky. There's a lot of trial and error. It's a lot of observing and being like "okay, I watered it this way one time, and it died" or it seemed to dry out really fast. I'm going to change it up next time. So you just have got to pivot, make adjustments, and learn from mistakes. It's just part of it. So if someone kills a bunch of plants- well, you're learning something and you'll try again… I want people to keep trying. It's an allegory for life.

WHAT KIND OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE JUST STARTING OUT ON THEIR PLANT JOURNEY?
Hmm…man. Advice…. I guess, don't be too hard on yourself and don't be too precious about the plant. Give it some time to settle in. Yeah..and PLEASE USE DRAINAGE HOLES. Don't pot something without a drainage hole.

ANY COOL EVENTS COMING UP?
I should be doing another event in July, and I will do some clipping swaps. I usually do them once a month. It's a free event, people can bring in one to three clippings. You come in between 7 and 9, trade it for a new one. I have snacks, music, stuff like that. I also do workshops but I like to have free events, it's low risk, low pressure, and it's fun for people just getting into plants. They can come in and try something without putting a bunch of money down, it feels accessible, and I like to offer that to people.

Go check out Perch Plants & Odds & Ends at 22 Main St in Phoenixville! Store hours are Wed, Thurs: 11-6 Fri, Sat: 11-7 and Sundays: 11-4
Support local businesses! Especially this one! No talking plant tried to eat me, so it's safe. A talking plant did not type up this interview, I am a human man. I am also not a dentist, but if you are a dentist, and have some humility, you should be fine.

@PERCHPLANTS

COMMUNITY CARE

FRIDAY 6/12 AT 7 PM
Community Sing. Singing Resistance Phoenixville leads us in old and new protest songs! Come meet your neighbors and connect to community. Every second Friday at Fellowship Hall in First Presbyterian Church.

MONDAY 6/15 AT 6 PM
Surviving Fascism Support Group facilitated by members of Phoenixville Mutual Aid. Bring a blanket or towel and gather to exchange support as we navigate increasingly oppressive systems. Every third Monday. Reeves Park (meet at the clock on the corner of 2nd and Main.)

SUNDAY 6/21, 12-7 PM
Solidarity Solstice at The Gem in Spring City. This will be a full-day event with speakers, bands, singers (including Singing Resistance PXV,) visual art, and more. All proceeds going to Alianzas.

WEDNESDAYS, 9:30 AM
Free Yoga in the Park! May 6th-August 5th at Baird Park. 715 N. Ship Road, Exton. Join in for the 60 min session.



COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP

Members and friends of Phoenixville's mutual Aid met Sunday, May 17 for the FIRST community clean-up along French Creek. It was a successful event with folks braving the heat to pick up trash and have a bit of fun in the process.

STAY CONNECTED AND LOOK FOR MORE EVENTS BY FOLLOWING US ON INSTAGRAM: *@PXV_MUTUAL_AID*

ICE MELT

BY SARAH HOWELL

Phoenixville council passes new ordinances to limit federal immigration enfoncement and create restrictions on building detention centers. In early February, amid escalating violence perpetrated by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement nationwide, Phoenixville witnessed two highly publicized detainments by the agency. Phoenixville community members demanded action from their local representatives, as well as accountability and clarity from their local law enforcement regarding their involvement with federal agents. In response, the borough's policy committee, chaired by Councilperson Tanya Vogel, presented an ICE Out Initiative to be implemented in three phases. Two ordinances passed on May 12 were part of this initiative. The first ordinance, Chapter 6 section 13, codifies a 287(g) non- compliance agreement with ICE; stating that, “except as required by state or federal law, no Borough official, consultant,or employee shall provide any assistance to ICE”. The second, Chapter 27 sections 202 and 301 created zoning regulations limiting detention centers from operating within the borough.

Council has limited jurisdiction; their authority is superseded by county, state and federal laws. Despite this, council members responded to the public outcry in February with urgency and concern. On February 24th The ICE Out Initiative was presented at the Policy Committee meeting. The three phase initiative is meant to strengthen the protections of residents that are vulnerable to ICE and to rebuild trust amongst the community at large. Phase one was implemented immediately. It included a commitment to centering the immigrant community in all decision making on the matter, immediately retraining of police in de-escalation tactics, and codifying the detention center zoning ordinances. Phase 2, intended to roll out between May and August of this year includes an audit to assess if vendors and contractors used by the borough support ICE. Council will prohibit ICE from entering non-public areas of borough facilities without a judicial warrant and clearly identify areas of borough buildings that are areas of asylum. Additionally, they aim to train personnel and staff on procedures if ICE enters government facilities and codifying 287(g) non compliance. Phase 3 essentially acts as is a promise that they will continue to assess the needs of all borough residents throughout the next year. Council will attempt to gather support at a state level and adapt to future ICE maneuvers as they arise. Adaptability is critical in this current climate; ICE tactics have changed from outwardly aggressive and to confrontational to a “quiet way”, according to a statement made by current DHS Secretary Markwayne Mullin in April. It is unclear the extent to which ICE is still operating in our community. “ICE is still pretty active but they seem to be sneakier.” Says Rachel Rutter, executive director of Project Libertad, a Phoenixville based non-profit providing legal and social support to immigrant youth facing deportation. “We are still hearing of detentions but not getting as many reports of ICE activity, which makes me think they are being more discreet”

On March 20 the New York Times published a data analysis of ICE

arrests from January 2025 - March 10, 2026. Despite the high profile surges in cities like Chicago, Minneapolis and Washington DC this past winter, the data showed the highest percentage of increased ICE arrests occurred from the Miami, Dallas, Atlanta and San Antonio field offices. Florida was the first to mandate participation in 287(g) at a state level, with Texas and Georgia requiring participation to the fullest extent allowable. A spokesperson for Homeland Security told the New York Times “We need state and local law enforcement cooperation” and the data backs this up. Codifying 287(g) non-compliance in Phoenixville is a demonstrably useful tactic to fight back against this federal government Goliath. The council's actions have significant value in adding protections for Phoenixville, but they are not capable of keeping the federal government away if they choose to keep coming. “We’re still deporting illegals” DHS Secretary Mullins remarked on April 16 “but we’re doing it in a more quiet way because my goal in 6 months is to not have DHS on the lead story every day.” If you or someone you know is detained by ICE, contact the Philadelphia Habeas Project as soon as you are able. This will ensure the best chance of getting out of detention through a federal habeas petition. To refer someone, send their contact’s name and number to PAIFUP@philadefender.org.



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: *ELISSA JANELLE VELETEEN* BY DANIEL CALLAHAN

I caught up with my extremely talented friend, Elissa Janelle Velveteen, at Tuned Up Brewing Co and had a great conversation about creating music and art. If you have been to any local shows in the area since the revitalization of the area began, you have probably seen her perform. If you have seen her perform, then you wouldn’t forget it, as she is a true rock and roll animal. Not only is she extremely talented, but she’s also a great person- which is probably why she makes such cool stuff.

WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU TO START PLAYING IN BANDS?

My first band was with my older brother, he's an awesome human being. He started learning from my dad, so I started learning to play, just being around the house with my dad who plays piano. So as soon as I could reach up over the top of the piano I started playing. My brother was like, "Yo, let's start a band." That was the first time I was really like, "oh ok, we're gonna do a thing". I was living in Long Island, so I was about 11. It was me, my brother and a drummer. They had a tape recorder and they decided we were gonna make songs. I forget what we named the band? It was something awful. But he would always funnel music to me and be like, "Listen to this, listen to that." So we wrote a song and performed it at my grandmother's church in Long Island. My grandmother really wanted me to sing Amazing Grace or something like that, and we're like "Oh no, we're going to sing this song we wrote" It was definitely rock, but we weren't exposed to too much of that music because we were homeschooled Christian kids. So grandma was very proud but also disappointed. I think she had hyped us up to her friends because I had been singing at church since I was little (laughs) Mind it was still Jesus themed, I think it was about drowning in a desert of sin...but it was still rock and roll.

WHAT INSPIRES YOUR SONGWRITING THESE DAYS? DO YOU FEEL YOUR INTENTIONS HAVE CHANGED FROM WHERE YOU STARTED, TO WHERE YOU ARE NOW? I think when I was younger, a lot of it was very "hey look at me" because I was the middle child, you know what I mean? And then when I was in a band that started to be more successful and there was a point when we were playing three and four shows a week between my multiple projects, I got really burned out and I realized how self-indulgent it was...the performance

side of it. I think I wrote about myself trying to be a cool guy for a really long time. Then I started to think about how these songs affect other people and what do I want other people to get from them? I started getting a little preachy for a while about fossil fuels and stuff like that. Still very important shit that I'm proud of...I think at my age now, I've almost come full circle again where I just like to write music, and it's more about the creation and

enjoyment of what's best for the song. Aesthetically I almost prefer instrumental music.



ELISSA JANELLE VELETEEN

LIVING TRUTHFULLY IN THE MOMENT IS A CONCEPT IN ACTING THAT I FEEL IS VERY TRANSLATABLE TO LIVE MUSICAL PERFORMANCE; HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT CONCEPT WHEN YOU PERFORM YOUR COMPOSITIONS? I think I went through a phase where I got burnt out and it was feeling fake, when I was in the bigger band. I was chasing that dragon as we started getting more known as a band. I would think, "Oh they're going to want some crazy stuff, like I'm gonna throw my body around the room and fall off some scaffolding and climb on the bar." And that was very truthful for me for a long time. I think, you know, the very visceral feeling of getting this energy out because I was such a people pleaser. So I found that alter ego to just do whatever I wanted.

And now as I kind of got over that, it's become less "look at me look at me" and more about taking control of my own life as I matured. I think what I love most about it is what you're saying: it keeps me honest. While I perform, it's one of the few moments in my life where I'm able to, if I do it correctly, empty my brain and really connect with the audience, and write, create a report with the people in the room. My whole goal is to create a connection.

I want to pivot and dive into your visual art, which I am also a fan of. Was drawing an early love for you?

Oh yeah, and a big thing I want to say about that is I'm very grateful for my mom and her encouragement of my art and my passion. I have a lot of friends whose parents are like "No, get a real job. And my mom is my biggest fan. She's so sweet. One of my earliest memories is drawing these paper dolls on the old green and white printer paper that had the little holes on the side. A lot of kids now won't remember that shit. When we had extra she would allow me to draw on it, even though it was expensive. We had a computer, which was a big deal. But she would let me draw on the paper, and I spent hours and hours on these paper dolls. I remember her loving them so much, and she put them in my box of treasures and I didn't see them for years. When I took them out, I didn't remember what they looked like. I was really excited because she kept telling me I did such a great job.. And then I pull them out and they were like literally circles with sticks for legs (*laughs*) but it kept me drawing! And I have never stopped. That's what I love my mom for. I'm so grateful for it. It's the same with my music. She saw my love and my passion, and she told me to just do that. It's really… It's so important.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST GET INTO TATTOOING AND WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO DIVE INTO THAT WORLD?

I always wanted to be tattooed. I always thought it was so cool. I wasn't allowed to watch any TV at home, except for Bob Ross and educational stuff, but when I would babysit the neighborhood kids, I could watch anything once they would go to sleep. So I would watch Miami Ink which was the first show about tattooing, and I thought it was amazing! I remember seeing people around with tattoos and thinking that's so freakin cool. I had this imposter syndrome, like they were so much cooler than me (*laughs*) And then I started doing stick and poke tattoos with friends at home. I had a bunch of girlfriends, we would hang out every Tuesday. Then two of us were moving, so we decided we were going to get "C U Next Tuesday" in braille on our fingers in homage to our group. So that was the first tattoo I ever did on another human being (*laughs*) That's when I realized "I can do this" so I started making a portfolio and started meeting and hanging out with tattoo artists. My biggest mentor and person who has helped the most is my friend Taco. At the beginning while COVID shut everything down, he helped me set up some machines at my house, and then I apprenticed with him once things got back to normal.

GOT ANY BIG THINGS COMING UP? I'm playing at 118 North in Wayne with Caitlynne Curtis on Sunday, June 21st at 7pm!

Elissa's an artist at Seven Stars Tattoo, and you can find her music at elissajanellevelveteen.bandcamp.com. Go see her show with Caitlynne Curtis on June 21st at 118 North in Wayne! She also hosts the open jam at Tuned Up Brewing Company in Spring City every Wednesday from 7pm to 11pm.

FILM REVIEW

THE REFLECTING SKIN (1990)

BY THE PROPHET OF DUMB

You Lose Two Stars for Cat Death

Do you remember your perception of the world before you were even ten years old? How naive you might have been or susceptible to suggestion, superstition, and myth? Mostly, do you recall your sense of powerlessness at not only just being physically small, but the lack of control in your life just as you're beginning to grasp how much it truly sucks?

The Reflecting Skin is a movie that becomes off putting almost immediately as we watch a trio of children pull the old exploding frog gag on the local weird English widow just wandering down a rural Idaho road. Seth Dove is eight years old and is perfectly cast by Jeremy Cooper because I both dislike this kid and feel a great deal of sympathy for his plight. He's in the middle of nowhere where his dad runs a solo gas pump stop to the chagrin of his hateful mother that has a hypersensitivity to the smell. Mom's got buried inappropriate feelings toward Seth's older brother Cameron (a young and pre-Lord of the Rings Viggo Mortenson) who has been away at "the pretty islands" in the Pacific blowing them up in World War II. Seth is the presumed mistake child that's stuck there with nothing to do but get into trouble with his dumbass friends and get carried away by his imagination and his naive perceptions of the world around him. Just before getting into trouble for the whole frog incident, Seth gets an earful from his old man about vampires. "Vampires, son....They're not very nice. They bite your neck and drink your blood … It's 'cos if they don't, they get old. They do it to stay young."

So with that bit of info rattling around in the noggin and his mother forcing Seth to march right over to the English woman's house and apologize, Seth properly meets Dolphin Blue (Lindsay Duncan). She invites him in to sit awhile, enjoy a gander at her souvenir whale-killer harpoon as she claims to be nearly 200 years old. Later, when Seth is telling his two chums about Dolphin, he hits the vampire angle hard and won't let up. Pretty soon, one of the boys ends up dead right outside Seth's house. The cops suspect the father but can't prove anything. It doesn't end well for the old man. And in a move that is a marker of this movie being unique and on its own cold level, Seth watches it happen with a look that ping pongs between child-like wonder and a sociopath's glee. The movie blurs this line so much and so often that the message could be read that there is no difference. Kids are simply terrible animals that don't know any better.

Seth's older brother Cameron finally returns home to be the man of the house after the death of the old man. But the happy reunion bubble pops almost immediately. He's immediately off put by having to even be back home let alone be the surrogate father figure now. Cameron is quickly enamoured with Dolphin Blue

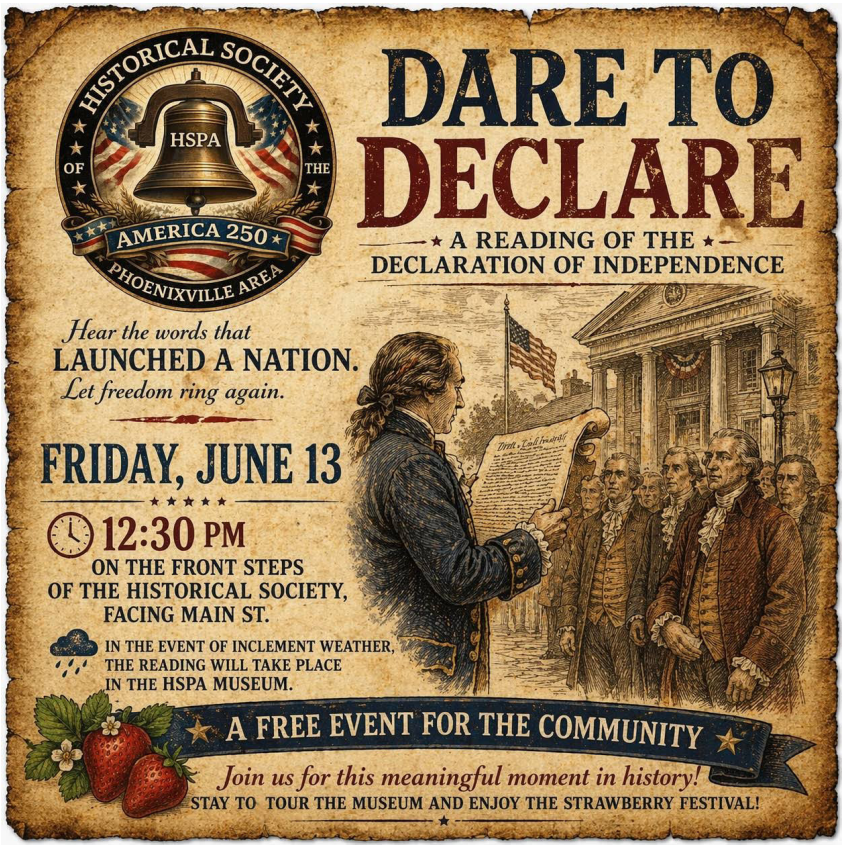


and when Seth tries to intervene with one tug at Cameron's arm too many, Cameron violently shoves Seth to the ground. Later, the apology couldn't be colder. "I'm sorry I pushed you," he says. "Except sometimes you're not wanted."

Is Seth right about Dolphin Blue being a vampire?For most of the film there's some successful ambiguity. If Dolphin Blue isn't a vampire, then it's a wonder why she wasn't one of my spirit breaking Catholic school teachers in the 1980s when she lets loose on this pitch perfect monologue late in the film:

"Poor Seth. It's all so horrible, isn't it? The nightmare of childhood. And it only gets worse. One day you'll wake up and you'll be past it. Your beautiful skin will wrinkle and shrivel up. You'll lose your hair, your sight, your memory. Your blood will thicken. Teeth turn yellow and loose. You'll start to stink and fart and all your friends will be dead. You'll succumb to arthritis. Angina. Senile dementia. You'll piss yourself. Shit yourself. Drool at the mouth. Just pray that when this happens you've got someone to love you. Because, if you're loved you'll still be young. Innocence can be hell."

For all the doom and gloom that this movie is setting up, it's balanced out by looking absolutely gorgeous. The cinematography showcases endless hills of golden wheat fields, beautiful farm houses that look like they could be castles from the perspective of a child, and magic hour sunrises and sunsets. It's a strange and somewhat jarring watch that you have to admire for its stylish and uncompromising spirit.







Chester County Balloon Festival
At Ludwig's Corner Horse Show Grounds
Fathers Day Weekend | June 19th thru 21st
More info @ Ccballoonfest.com

