

the sunday break



That's so RAVEN

A weekend journey reveals many Edgar Allan Poe connections to Tidewater

By James F. Lee
Correspondent

Our plan was simple: Spend a weekend commemorating the death of Edgar Allan Poe — on Oct. 7, 1849 — by checking out sites related to him within a short drive of Norfolk.

One of America's greatest poets and short story writers, Poe produced such unforgettable works as "The Raven," "Annabel Lee" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." He is credited as the inventor of detective fiction and was a pioneer in science fiction.

Lots of places claim him. He was born in Boston, died in Baltimore at age 40, had a cottage in the Bronx, and lived in Richmond for most of his life. But Norfolk and Hampton have a claim, too. Poe lived in Norfolk briefly as a child, and his younger sister was born there in 1810 in a boarding house on Brewer Street, near present-day MacArthur Center mall (neither the house nor the street still exists). The children were orphaned in 1811. Edgar was raised in Richmond by foster parents John and Frances Allan.

As a young man, he served in the Army at Fort Monroe. And just weeks before his death in 1849, he gave a very successful reading and lecture at the Old Academy Building on St. Paul's Boulevard in Norfolk.

And that's where my wife, Carol, and I started our trip.

Driving by on St. Paul's, it is hard not to be impressed by the six massive columns and front portico of this building, modeled on the Greek Temple of Theseus. Famed architect Thomas U. Walter designed the structure, which was built in 1840. We walked its perimeter just imagining the excitement of crowds entering the building and waiting to hear the great poet.

Today, it is the home of the Hurray Players, appropriate because Poe's birth parents were itinerant actors. That night, he lectured on his essay, "The Poetic Principle," but that is not what the crowd was there for. Audiences in those days loved to hear

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TOP: Edgar and Pluto are resident cats at the Poe Museum in Richmond. ABOVE: A copy of the last photograph of Edgar Allan Poe, taken two weeks before his death. The original is missing. The copy was made about six years after the original was taken, making it the oldest known copy of the photograph. THE POE MUSEUM PHOTOS

'A double blessing'

Florida woman donates running chair to two Virginia women after she read their story online

By Sandra J. Pennecke
Staff Writer

VIRGINIA BEACH — At home in Florida, a woman knew she needed to find the two Hampton Roads runners.

She'd read about them — best friends Julia Prendergast and Tyme Fiedorczyk, who love to run together, with Julia pushing Tyme in a special chair. Tyme has cerebral palsy, and Julia is her caregiver, driving each day from Virginia Beach to Chesapeake to see her.

They've been relying on a loaner push chair, and started raising money to buy their own. The loaner weighs 30 pounds; Tyme, 105. And sometimes the women travel to races. A lighter, foldable chair would help.

When Irene Koumendouros, in Tarpon Springs, read a Virginian-Pilot story about them, she knew she had the help they needed. She wanted to give them her nephew's running chair.

"It's as if I heard the Lord say to me, 'You will be a double blessing to them,'" she says now.

The chair — a practically

brand-new, high-end 2017 Hoyt Blade Racer — sat idle in a spare room of the family's home. It's aluminum, it disassembles, and it supports the body well. Koumendouros purchased it several years ago for her nephew, Alex Boudreau, who's now 22. Like Tyme, he has cerebral palsy and is nonverbal.

His cousin, a marathon runner, had suggested the chair so she could push him and he could feel the thrill of the race. But things didn't work out as planned. She married and moved away, Koumendouros said.

Boudreau, an artist with work in three Florida galleries, was strolled around the neighborhood in the chair but never participated in races. The family thought about selling the chair and posted it briefly on Facebook Marketplace.

All that changed as he and his aunt were touched by Julia and Tyme's relationship, having seen their story at Disability Scoop, an online site for developmental disability news.

"All of the sudden the idea of selling it did not make sense," Koumendouros says. "I felt the

Lord said, 'You want to do something really good with this — give it to these girls...'"

Not only did she donate the chair — valued at more than \$5,000 — but she also paid to ship it to Virginia.

Meanwhile, Tyme's mother, Kim Fiedorczyk, had started a fundraiser. She raised a little over \$1,000 and has returned half. Some people wanted her to keep their donations, to go to chair accessories and race fees.

And Tyme and Julia are making plans.

"We're really excited and we've signed up for all the races," Julia said.

The duo planned to run the Crawlin' Crab Half Marathon in Hampton on Oct. 2, but that was canceled as the remnants of Hurricane Ian approached.

Julia can't wait to run and push Tyme in their new chair. And Tyme said she can't wait to race.

"It'll be easier to push and more comfy for Tyme," Julia said.

Koumendouros hopes she and her nephew will one day be able to cheer them on from the sidelines. But they won't be looking for that blue chair.

Julia and Tyme have already made it their own, spray painting it yellow and sprinkling it with glitter.

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Julia Prendergast and Tyme Fiedorczyk were surprised when they walked into the Ability Center of Virginia on Sept. 22 to find that the running chair, donated by Irene Koumendouros of Tarpon Springs, Florida, had arrived.

SANDRA J. PENNECKE/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT



The Generic Theater kicks off its season with the romantic comedy **"Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World."** 2:30 p.m. today down under Chrysler Hall, 215 St. Paul's Blvd., Norfolk. \$20. Discounts available. Performances run through Oct. 30. To purchase online, visit generictheater.org.

Events may change. Check before attending.

MORE FUN

Peppa Pig Live! Peppa Pig's Adventure is coming to Norfolk. Join Peppa on a camping trip into the woods with her friends. 6 p.m. Wednesday at Chartway Arena, 4320 Hampton Blvd. Tickets start at \$28. To purchase online, visit chartwayarena.com.

Virginia Symphony Orchestra presents **"Never Break the Chain," the Music of Fleetwood Mac** featuring musical act Jeans'n Classics. 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Ferguson Center for the Arts, 1 Avenue of the Arts, Newport News; and 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Chrysler Hall, 215 St. Paul's Blvd., Norfolk. \$25-\$79. To purchase online, visit virginiasymphony.org.

Biography offers raw details of Bourdain's life

But TV star's family and friends criticize unauthorized book

By Kim Severson
The New York Times

After Anthony Bourdain took his own life in a French hotel room in 2018, his close friends, family and the people who for decades had helped him become an international TV star closed ranks against the swarm of media inquiries and stayed largely silent, especially about his final days.

That silence continued until 2021, when many in his inner circle were interviewed for the documentary "Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain" and for "Bourdain: The Definitive Oral Biography." The two works showed a more complex side of Bourdain, who had become increasingly conflicted about his success and had in his last two years made his relationship with Italian actor Asia Argento his primary focus. But neither directly addressed how very messy his life had become in the months that led up to the night he hanged himself at age 61.

On Oct. 11, Simon & Schuster is publishing what it calls the first unauthorized biography of the writer and travel documentarian. "Down and Out in Paradise: The Life of Anthony Bourdain" is filled with fresh, intimate details, including raw, anguished texts from the days before Bourdain's death, such as his final exchanges with Argento and Ottavia Busia-Bourdain, his wife of 11 years who, by the time they separated in 2016, had become his confidante.

"I hate my fans, too. I hate being famous. I hate my job," Bourdain wrote to Busia-Bourdain in one of their text exchanges. "I am lonely and living in constant uncertainty."



Charles Leerhsen on Sept. 20 in the yard of his New York home, where he wrote most of "Down and Out in Paradise: The Life of Anthony Bourdain." **EMON HASSAN/THE NEW YORK TIMES**

Drawing on more than 80 interviews, as well as files, texts and emails from Bourdain's phone and laptop, journalist Charles Leerhsen traces Bourdain's metamorphosis from a sullen teenager in a New Jersey suburb that his family couldn't afford to a heroin-shooting kitchen swashbucker who struck gold as a writer and became a talented interpreter of the world through his travels.

Leerhsen said in an interview that he wanted to write a book without the dutiful sheen of what he called "an official Bourdain product." Indeed, he portrays a man who, at the end of his life, was isolated, injecting steroids, drinking to the point of blackout and visiting prostitutes, and had all but vanished from his 11-year-old daughter's life.

"We never had that big story, that long piece that said what happened, how the guy with the best job in the world took his own

life," said Leerhsen.

The book has already drawn fire from Bourdain's family, former co-workers and closest friends. His brother, Christopher Bourdain, sent Simon & Schuster two emails in August calling the book hurtful and defamatory fiction, and demanding that it not be released until Leerhsen's errors were corrected.

"Every single thing he writes about relationships and interactions within our family as kids and as adults he fabricated or got totally wrong," Christopher Bourdain said in an interview.

Felice Javit, vice president and senior counsel for the publisher, responded to Bourdain with an email: "With all due respect, we disagree that the material in the book contains defamatory information, and we stand by our forthcoming publication."

Leerhsen said Anthony Bourdain's inner circle and even some of his interna-



Anthony Bourdain took his own life in a French hotel room in 2018. **ALEX WELSH/THE NEW YORK TIMES 2015**

tional fixers and former line cooks refused to speak with him for the biography, in part because Bourdain's longtime agent, Kim Witherspoon, told them not to. Witherspoon did not respond to a request for an interview for this article.

Leerhsen said that such resistance from the Bourdain camp helped open other doors for him.

"A lot of people were willing to talk to me because they were left behind by Tony and by the Tony train," he said, adding that some were moved to speak by their anger over the damage Bourdain had done to his daughter.

One person close to Bourdain who hasn't pushed back against the book is his wife, Busia-Bourdain, who controls his estate. The book's most revealing material comes from files and messages pulled from Bourdain's phone and laptop, both of which are part of the estate.

Leerhsen said he got that material from a confidential source, but added that "the estate has not objected, and I don't anticipate any objections." He wouldn't say whether he interviewed Busia-Bourdain, but she is quoted in parts of the book. She said through a friend that she would not comment for this story.

Chef Eric Ripert, a close friend who found Bourdain

dead in his Alsatian hotel room after a day of shooting for an episode of his CNN show, "Parts Unknown," said he did not provide information for the book, although he has read it. He said he found many inaccuracies, but was surprised that it contained intimate details from those days in France that he had told only to a few people.

The book starts with Bourdain's early years, analyzing his parents' marriage, his performance in school and his relationship with first wife Nancy Putkoski, who Leerhsen said was a helpful source.

Bourdain graduated from high school a year early so he could follow her to Vassar College. His grades there were terrible, and he was happier during the summers he worked in restaurants in Provincetown, Massachusetts. After two years, he enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America, 5 miles north of Vassar in New York.

The book traces Bourdain's career in New York restaurants, and his relationships with the intimidating chefs who molded him. It includes the well-known tale of how his mother, Gladys Bourdain, then an editor at The New York Times, handed an article he had written about the ugly secrets of a Manhattan restaurant to Esther B. Fein, the wife of New Yorker editor David Remnick, who ran it in the magazine.

The story turbocharged Anthony Bourdain's writing career, leading to his bestselling book "Kitchen Confidential." That piqued the interest of the fledgling media company Zero Point Zero, which developed his first show, "A Cook's Tour," and subsequent programs.

The book delves deeply into Bourdain's relationship with Argento. The two were involved for about two years in a tumultuous and very public relation-

ship that, Leerhsen writes, Bourdain seemed willing to do anything to preserve.

"I find myself being hopelessly in love with this woman," he wrote to his wife.

Bourdain spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on Argento, providing financial support for her, her two children and sometimes her friends, according to the book. He insisted to co-workers that she direct and appear in the show, and became a fierce advocate for the #MeToo movement after she told reporter Ronan Farrow in 2017 that Harvey Weinstein had sexually assaulted her.

Leerhsen said he had exchanged a few emails with Argento, who he said quoted Oscar Wilde to him: "It is always Judas who writes the biography."

In an email to the Times, Argento said she had not read the book, adding, "I wrote clearly to this man that he could not publish anything I said to him."

Leerhsen is not the first person to try to explain the unknowable: why Bourdain killed himself. His book offers a theory.

Two days before Bourdain died, he joined Ripert for a meal at JY's, a two-starred Michelin restaurant owned by an old friend, chef Jean-Yves Schillinger. After the meal, the three men headed to Freiburg, a German city 30 miles away, for late-night beers. Schillinger said Bourdain was welcomed like the star that he was, and seemed his old self.

Leerhsen asserts that after that trip, Bourdain saw the cost of his demanding emotional pursuit of Argento.

"I think at the very end, in the last days and hours, he realized what he had become," Leerhsen said. "I don't respect him killing himself, but he did realize, and he did ultimately know he didn't want to be that person he had become."

Poe

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him deride popular poets such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, but more than anything they wanted to hear him recite "The Raven." It was wildly popular. Children would come up to him on the street and imitate a bird's walk while croaking "Nevermore."

Poe had another connection to the area. His beloved foster mother, Frances Keeling Valentine Allan, was a native of Princess Anne County, today's Virginia Beach. When he was a boy she took him to visit the Great Dismal Swamp, the dark, foreboding nature of which appealed to him. One of his earliest poems, "The Lake: To-," was inspired by his visits there.

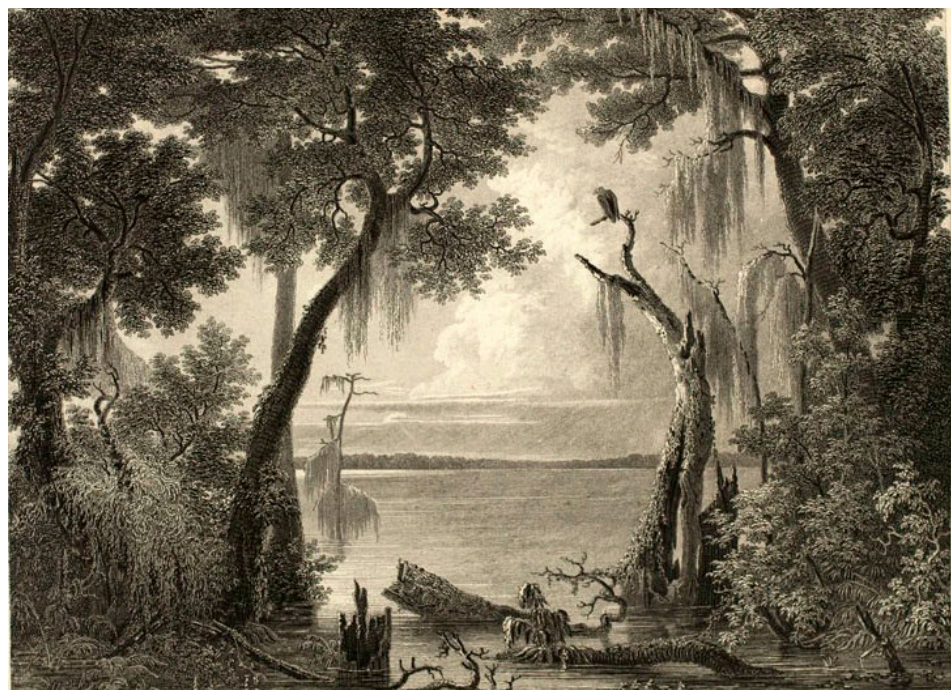
In that poem he writes:
So lovely was the loneliness

*Of a wild lake, with black rock bound,
And the tall trees that tower'd round.*

Later in life, he wrote that every American home should contain a print of John Gatsby Chapman's 1842 painting "The Lake of the Great Dismal Swamp."

My wife and I drove across the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel to Hampton, where the Casemate Museum commemorates the history of Fort Monroe. Poe was stationed at Fort Monroe with the 1st Regimental Artillery from December 1828 to April 1829. Despite his later reputation as a drinker and carouser, he was a good soldier, rising to the rank of sergeant major.

Casemates — vaulted,



John Gatsby Chapman's 1842 painting "The Lake of the Great Dismal Swamp."

COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

gloomy chambers built within the thick walls of the fort — housed soldiers and artillery emplacements. Where Poe was quartered is unknown, but an information panel illustrates his military career and shows two letters he wrote at the fort.

He had already published some poems before he entered the Army, and while he was at Fort Monroe most likely worked on such poems as the autobiographical "Alone."

From the Casemate we drove on to Richmond. To make our Poe journey complete, we stayed at the boutique Linden Row Inn on East Franklin Street, where the Poe Experience package includes tickets for the Poe Museum and a gift volume of the "Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe." There was even

a framed copy of "The Raven" on the wall of our room.

Poe's photo in the lobby keeps watch over Anabelle the friendly hotel cat, no doubt named after the differently spelled Annabel Lee. A sign in the elevator says that if Anabelle should try to hitch a ride, people should help her get back to the lobby.

Linden Row gets its name from the linden trees and walled gardens that once lined the block. When Poe lived across the street, he sometimes met his childhood sweetheart there. The gardens inspired his poem "To One in Paradise."

The ultimate Poe destination for any Poe enthusiast is Richmond's Poe Museum, set in three historic houses on East Main Street. Curator Chris Semtner showed

us the astonishing array of Poe artifacts, including his childhood bed, traveling trunk, waistcoat and correspondence, including the last letter he wrote. (The depth of the collection, Semtner said, "sets us apart from other museums.") There is even a silver candelabra that illuminated Poe's desk as he wrote his poem "The Bells."

During our visit, the resident black cats, Pluto and Edgar, sunned themselves in the museum courtyard. Pluto, more outgoing, even tagged along with us during our tour.

Poe's walking stick, engraved with his name, is on display. This is the same walking stick he left at his doctor's office just weeks after his last Norfolk visit. Perhaps he used that cane at his Old Academy lecture.

Poe's wife, Virginia, died



The bust of Poe at the Poe Shrine. Visitors leave mementos on the bust and pedestal. **JAMES F. LEE**

from tuberculosis in 1847, when she was just 24. Items from their household are on display, including her mirror, and her trinket box, cheaply made with fake leather, a testament to the grinding poverty in which she and her husband lived.

We also saw a receipt from the Southern Literary Messenger for \$10 for "The Raven," and a first edition of Poe's book "Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems," one of only 18 in the world.

A portrait just above Poe's childhood bed shows the museum's closest tie to the Tidewater area. It is a lovely painting of Princess Anne-born Frances Allan, Poe's foster mother, completed by artist Robert Sully about a year before her death. When she died in February 1829 at the age of 45, Poe was serving at Fort Monroe.

We ended our tour at the museum's Poe Shrine, a bust of Poe sheltered in a triple archway made from bricks from the old Southern Literary Messenger building in Richmond where he once worked. Visitors leave offerings on the bust and pedestal.

There were coins, a small seashell, a bottle cap, even a mint.

The seashell was most fitting — maybe it was for his foster mother from Princess Anne.

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IF YOU GO

Casemate Museum: 20 Bernard Road, Fort Monroe. Pick up a timed entry ticket at the Visitor and Education Center, 30 Ingalls Road. **Hours:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays (3:30 p.m. is the last timed entry) **Tickets:** Free **Details:** fortmonroe.org/place_to_visit/casemate-museum, 757-690-8181

The Poe Museum: 1914 E. Main St., Richmond **Hours:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sundays **Tickets:** \$10; \$7 for older adults, youths, veterans and AAA members; free for people 6 and younger and for active-duty military and dependents. **Details:** poemuseum.org, 804-648-5523