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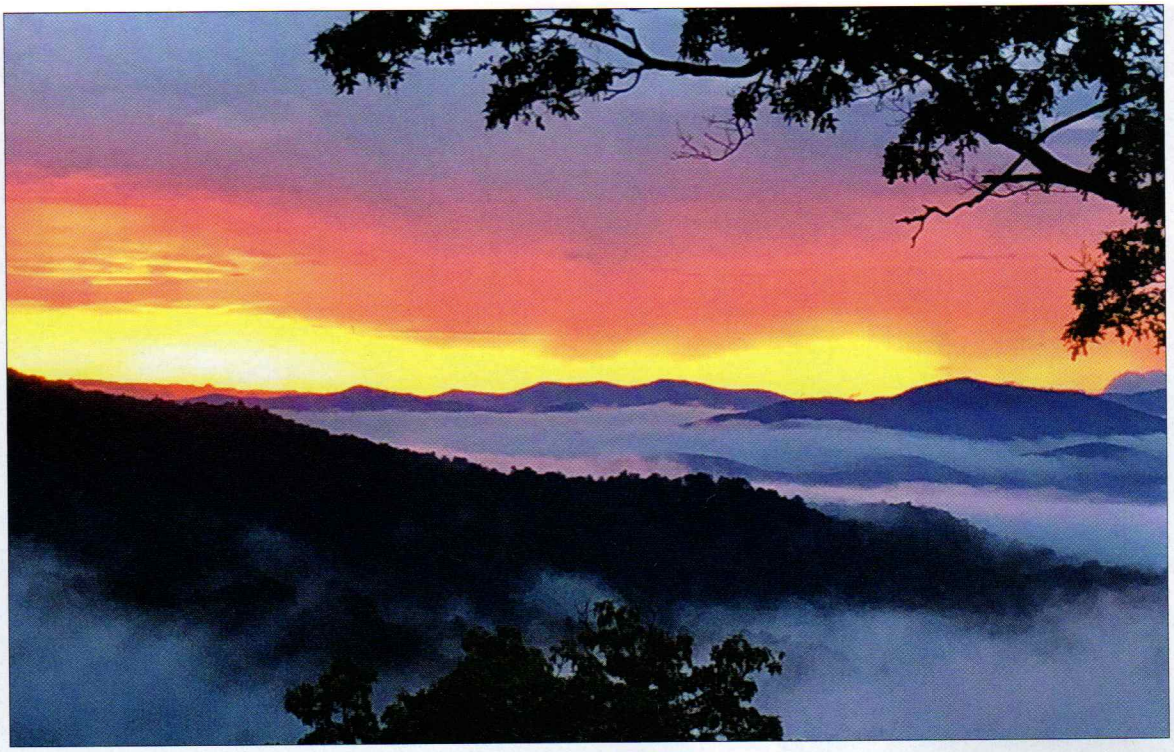
CELEBRATING THE ARTS | MARCH 2020



SLICE *of* LIFE

Moving On

LISTENING TO THE VOICE | BY CRAIG GRALLEY

"A bed and a desk and a couple of tacks, no sign of someone who expects to be back . . ."
from "Only a Dream," by Mary Chapin Carpenter

The big truck had just rumbled away. Our Ford pick-up in the turnaround was overflowing with the picked-over remains of a 30-year life in Great Falls: an ancient schefflera, a half-filled bottle of Tanqueray, worn garden tools. It was 4:30 pm and the refrigerator still needed cleaning; the floor, a good mopping. The new buyers' walk-through was scheduled for 5:00.

Janet and I snapped at each other, and though we didn't say it, we were thinking, *Why would we ever leave our comfortable life, and dear friends and family, for a small town more than 500 miles away, where we know no one?*

It was all a big experiment without the promise of success.

Brevard, a town of about 7,000 in the mountains of North Carolina, is not like northern Virginia. The stranger in NOVA is asked, "What do you do for a living?" In our new town, it's, "What brings you to Brevard?"

When we arrived and were asked that question, we shuffled our feet. We stammered.

There wasn't an easy answer. It was a voice, an internal clock, something that challenged us. The voice seemed to say, *there's another chapter, there's something more.* Maybe this feeling was fed by TV ads touting nearby Asheville, perhaps it was the James Taylor song, "Carolina in My Mind," or earlier trips that included waterfalls and mountain hikes. Whatever it was, we listened and we followed.

A year later, we're still settling into life in rural North Carolina, but there are plenty of good reasons to stay. The greatest and most enduring charm of this small town is its people, who open up and proclaim who they are without hesitation. It's the grocer who told me about the recent loss of his pet. The church pastor who rallied his congregation to welcome home a young man who had finished serving time in a local jail. The stranger who stopped me on the street to say she likes my corny Christmas tie. I could go on.

We still miss our friends and seeing our family regularly, but this experiment is offering the new chapter we were hoping for. We're glad we listened to the voice. There's a good life beyond the beltway.