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MARCH 2026

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At Home

'BELONGING' IS A POWERFUL HUMAN MOTIVATION



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

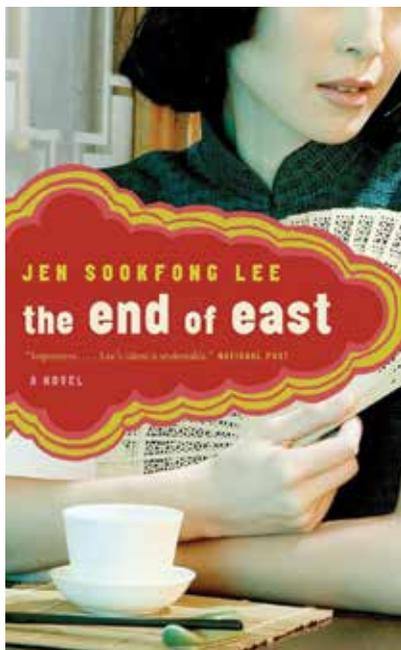
Tres Cinco Cinco. That's what my children and their friends affectionately call our home in the Central Beach neighborhood here on Orchid Island.

Yes, "tres cinco cinco" is Spanish for our house number, 355, but to my children and their friends it represents something more: a point of departure to start the

day, wherever they may be off to, and a destination to return to at quitting time, whatever activity one may be winding up at the end of a long day—a safe, stable, nurturing home where everyone feels like they belong.

三百五十五, pronounced "sān bǎi wǔ shí wǔ" is what Seid Quan would call my home. I met him last January as the protagonist in Jen Sook-

fong Lee's heartbreaking novel *The End of East*, which tells his story as the first member of the Chan family to emigrate from China to Vancouver in 1913, at the age of 18. His aim is to establish a new home for his wife, Shew Lin, and his young son, Pon Man. They eventually arrive, a daughter is born, and over the years the family extends its generations.



The End of East by Jen Sookfong Lee

Despite the budding population in his Chinatown neighborhood, Seid Quan is lonely, a theme that remains throughout the novel. When he was a young man, hostilities toward him and other new arrivals brought isolation. Later, as a shopkeeper, head of household, and civic leader, he experienced various obstacles that left him feeling like an outsider. As an old man, having his wisdom and rich life experience overlooked and ignored made him feel as if he no longer belonged in this world.

“I suppose I am too old to even really be seen anymore,” he remarks

while taking an afternoon stroll along the waterfront with Pon Man near the end of his life. A similar sentiment has inspired the missions of organizations like Senior Resource Association and St. Francis Manor in our own community. SRA is dedicated to providing many resources and services bolstering the quality of life of our elderly neighbors as they retain the independence and dignity of living in their own homes. Likewise, St. Francis Manor helps local elders feel at home by providing affordable housing options in a scenic and supportive setting.

Starting last year, I continued a resolution from the prior year to read every day. Reading Seid Quan’s unfortunate perspective of someone whose nearly lifelong home remains a place where he feels as if he does not belong has made me curious to know other stories like his.

There are some stories in which it may seem as if you can never go home. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s story is one of those, albeit from the perspective of someone whose sense of belonging disappeared when he was expelled from his home. Born in 1918 in Kislovodsk and raised in a Russian



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Orthodox household during the Russian Civil War, Solzhenitsyn served in the Red Army during World War II. He fought against the Nazis, only to be imprisoned in 1945 for almost a decade for writing anti-Soviet propaganda criticizing the government for its failures protecting its people in the war.

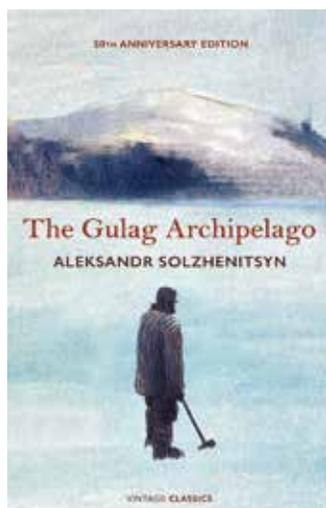
I was reintroduced to Solzhenitsyn last year while reading *The Gulag Archipelago*, his nonfiction account of life in the Soviet prison labor camps. Following its publication, the author was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and

exiled in 1974, first deported to West Germany and eventually settling in the United States until his citizenship was restored in 1990. He returned home to Russia in 1994.

By all accounts, the Gulag was a systematic violation of human rights and a stain on the history of a great country. It caused generational trauma of the kind that entire organizations in our own community, such as Tykes and Teens, are focused on healing. What could ever compel someone to return home to a place that sanctioned such atrocities? Solzhenitsyn's reply is sur-



Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote about his experience in the Soviet Gulag.



prising, albeit familiar.

“The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts.”

In the case of Tykes and Teens, healing is fostered by behavior health services for children who have suffered loss or other trauma, which can take many forms. The goal is to build the resilience that enhances a person's ability to

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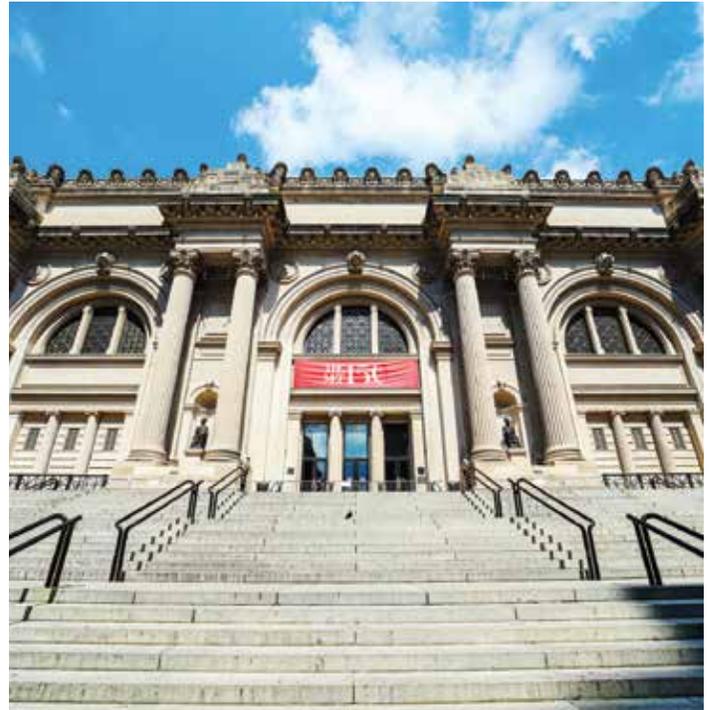
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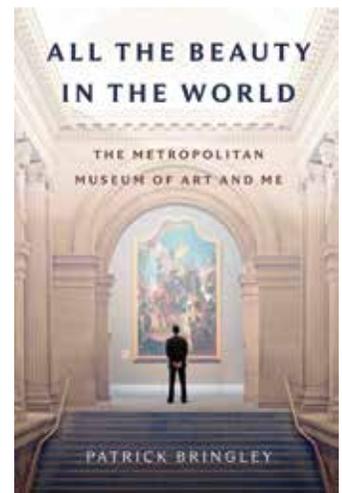
navigate life's many challenges.

It is fascinating to ponder the reality that a person can fail to feel at home in even the most familiar of places and, conversely, feel quite at home in seemingly unlikely settings.

Is it possible to feel at home in an art museum? Patrick Bringley believes it is possible.

I met Bringley in his memoir *All the Beauty in the World: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Me*, wherein he tells the story of his decade working as a guard there. While I know several docents at our own Vero Beach Museum of Art, I do not believe I've ever met one of the guards.

As a fledgling writer at *The New Yorker*, Bringley began visiting The Met for peace of mind and solace when his brother was diagnosed with cancer. At the time, the guards bore silent witness to his anticipatory grief. After his brother died, Bringley left



All the Beauty in the World: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Me by Patrick Bringley

the glamour and prestige of his job at the magazine and started working as a guard himself.

His story spans the continents and epochs and mediums displayed through the art and antiquities collected by the museum. It also offers a unique perspective of the people who tend to this iconic



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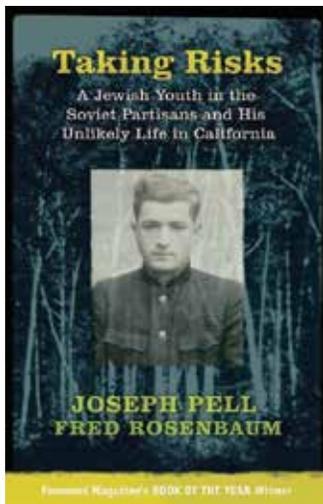
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Taking Risks by Joseph Pell

cultural treasure—foreign to most, but right at home for Bringley. This is something to aspire to here in Vero Beach as we imagine all the possibilities

of “Museum in the Garden: The Campaign for VBMA.”

Are there stories that can offer hope for those who have lost their homes? I feel lucky to have discovered Joseph Pell’s.

On the night of September 3, 1942, 18-year-old Yosel Epelbaum’s family was at home in Nazi-occupied Ukraine, preparing to celebrate the Sabbath. From the garden in his backyard, Epelbaum was startled to hear the roar of motorcycles and truck engines, accompanied by bullhorn shouts of “Juden raus, Juden raus.” Jews out. Jews out. After crawling on his stomach to a nearby forest, he heard the gunfire that took the lives of

his parents and siblings and drove him from his childhood home.

Taking Risks is the gripping personal account of how Yosel Epelbaum (later Joseph Pell) survived the Holocaust by joining a diverse band of pro-Soviet partisans who fought the Nazis for almost a year and a half from primitive wilderness camps, saving hundreds of civilians. Pell’s journey all the way from Europe’s postwar black market to an ice cream shop in San Francisco’s Sunset District is hardly believable were it not for the dozens of thriving properties that remain in his family’s commercial real estate firm today. That com-

munity welcomed him, and he made it his home.

Last night I had a dream. I was hosting a dinner party and these new friends I’ve mentioned were all there. Seid Quan brought dim sum. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn poured some vodka. Patrick Bringley shared a reflection on his favorite painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Harvesters*. Joseph Pell scooped ice cream.

As the conversation quieted down, I raised a glass and offered a toast: “Welcome to Tres Cinco Cinco. You belong here.”

Everyone seemed to feel as I hoped they would: right at home. ❁