

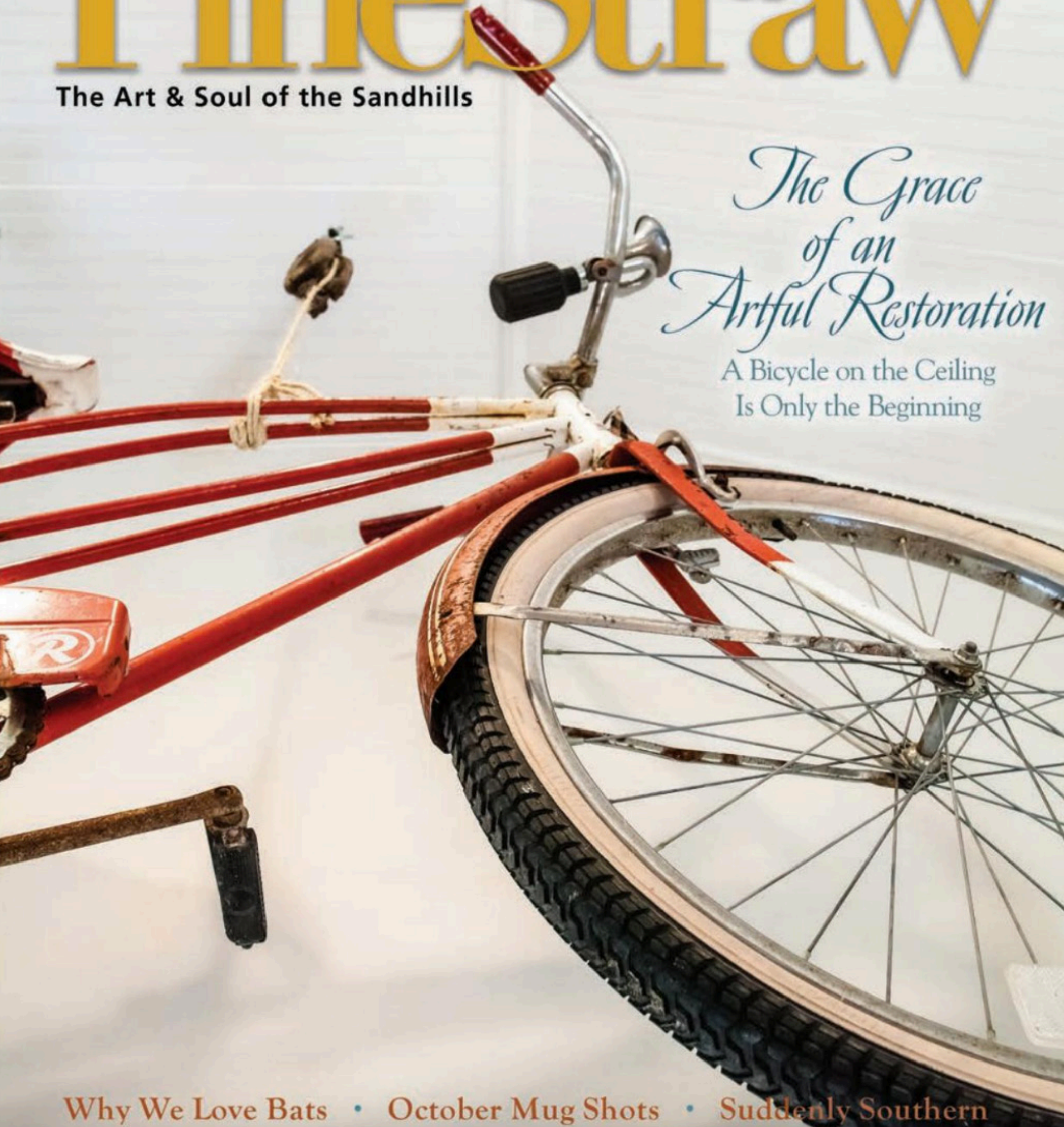
October 2013

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Major Nelson and Me

At Ojai, not even Jeannie could have dreamed up the night I had with Larry Hagman

BY GAYVIN POWERS

The rest of the world was dreaming of Jeannie; I was dreaming of Larry Hagman. I desperately wanted to be Jeannie, not because of the flowing pink harem pants or magical ability – I had all of those things plus Major Nelson on my speed-dialing Snoopy phone. No, that was too mundane. At the age of six, I wished more than anything to pop out of my enchanted bottle and find Major Nelson devoted to me.

Little did I know how much this mythical man of my childhood would impact my life, one special night, decades later.

Throughout my youth, Larry Hagman was a name often heard around the house or seen on T-shirts. When the country was desperate to know “Who shot J.R.?” I was banned from watching *Dallas*. My mom declared the show too old for my pre-adolescent eyes, as I feverishly pondered who could possibly have it in for Major Nelson.

Fast forward to 2006. Finally grown up, I still had a secret penchant for genie-inspired pajamas, but I had long since given up my youthful plight for Larry Hagman. At the time, I was in graduate school, majoring in screenwriting at the American Film Institute (AFI) and made *1916*, a short film that was known, at the time, as the most ambitious student film project at AFI. Set in the trenches of World War I, the film showed the effects of shellshock and how humanity and grace can be shown even in war. Who knew that this would bring me closer to my Major Nelson?

I felt the magic of wish fulfillment when I wrote *1916*. I felt it again when I filled out the Ojai Film Society application – I knew that the award was mine. What I didn’t know at the time was that my very own major, aka Larry Hagman, would be presenting the award to me. When I did find out, my response was more of shellshock than relishing the grandeur of wish fulfillment.

When the night of the Ojai Film Society Award dinner arrived, and I was not disappointed with my knight in a harvest orange jacket. The choice was bold and striking. I’d expect nothing less from the Major. I set eyes on him: He was older, yes. But he was filled with life – it poured from his eyes. I noticed a bit of mischief. A bit of edge hovered around him – from years of working in the film industry. But genuine warmth that emanated from him.



Any guesses at the first question I asked him?

“Who shot J.R.?”

Of course. Larry answered, but clearly, he had more important things on his mind, like dinner and chatting with me. The fact that Kristin Shepard shot him was old news.

He sidled up next to me for an hour over dinner, asking me about my ambitions, dreams, and plans for the scholarship money. To his disappointment, I planned to use the money to pay bills. I never got to tell him that I used his gift in true Virginia Woolf form, affording myself a room with a view while I wrote *Julia Fae*, my young adult novel coming out this year.

That night, no less than three times, Larry told me he wished I would travel with the money instead. Little did he know that he had a kindred spirit. Prior to marriage, all I needed was a passport and plane ticket. Traveling was my *joie de vivre*. Once my writing practice took hold, I discovered a world of infinite possibilities where even travel couldn’t take me.

During dinner, I met his incredible wife, Maj. In fairness, I think that the word “incredible” may be an understatement. Maj was clearly a woman who was educated, wise beyond her years (practicing green living before it was fashionable), down-to-earth and stunningly beautiful in the way a wholesome woman ages. In meeting Maj, I remember thinking that Larry Hagman was not only a lucky man but he was also smart. I imagined that he could have chosen any number of women to marry, and he chose Maj. He chose well.

At the ceremony, Larry charmed the crowd and called me up to the stage. I looked out to the crowd and froze. Instantly, I became a writer without words. Words, my constant comfort for so many years, had abandoned me. Suddenly, I

remembered all the times that my mind dumped every thought I had when speaking in front of a large group. How could I have forgotten what to say now? Desperately, I turned to the stylish, harvest orange coat walking toward stage right and urgently whispered, “Larry!” While the packed theater watched, Larry followed my beckoning finger to where I asked in hushed tones, “Will you hold my hand?”

Without a thought, he smiled and took my hand. “I will.” There was Larry Hagman, who, at that moment, seemed more chivalrous than Major Nelson. Miraculously, he held my hand until I finished my acceptance speech.

I got my wish the night of the Ojai Film Society Award. It wasn’t bestowed by Jeannie, in typical genie fashion, with a folding of the arms and head-bob. It was from Larry Hagman himself. Better and more gracious in person than Jeannie could have conjured. **PS**

Gayvin is an award-winning filmmaker, author, and freelance writer. Iona Fay, her young adult fairy novel, will be coming out soon.