

MONTHLY MUSINGS

SHARON VIRT



Celebrating Life's Moments in a COVID 19 World

For well over a year, my husband and I have anxiously anticipated the wedding of his daughter at our home over Memorial Day weekend. As part of our planning, we built a gazebo and colonnade for the ceremony with the construction finally finished in March.

Then everything changed. With the response to COVID19, not only have our lives been disrupted, so have our traditions in celebrating life's moments. My step-daughter initially decided to postpone her wedding to a later date when the pandemic was over. But the question became "and when might that be?" Certainly not by the fall. What about next year? Will we be allowed to congregate in groups larger than 10, or 50 or 100? And how do you ensure "social distancing" and adequately protect the many relatives "at risk" that would be in attendance? The next question became "Why wait?" Because, as we all know, life waits for no one.

When God gives you lemons... Make the best of it, right? Welcome Zoom! If you had asked me six months ago about Zoom, I would have told you it was some new online exercise program. Since the pandemic began, I have learned not only what

"zoom" is, but have come to really enjoy the virtual experience of "zooming in". A few weeks ago, my husband and I had cocktails with friends via Zoom for the first time. On our get-togethers in the past, the wife and I would natter the evening away while our husbands would have their own Man-Speak. But on "zoom" we all were "forced" to converse together, which was really fun. Since then, "Zoom Cocktail Parties" have brought us together with many of our friends from across the globe who we normally wouldn't see for years. COVID19 has served not only as a catalyst for us to do things differently, but as an enabler to connect (and reconnect) in new and exciting ways. And while I know how horrible this pandemic is for our economy, our small businesses, our hospitality industries and hospital workers, our graduating seniors and senior citizens, and all of those on the front lines in fighting this disease, the optimist in me is compelled to find some good in it. It has caused me to change how I see things and do things. I'm learning to do more with less. Working from home and maybe saving the environment in the process. Spending less and hopefully saving more. Helping my neighbors in need. Protecting those most vulnerable. Thinking of others more than myself. I can always hope these are some of the more positive outcomes anyway.

A final note. My step-daughter was married on the date she chose - May 23, 2020. She and her groom made their vows via Zoom to a crowd of more than 150 friends and family. There were eight of us in physical attendance on the lawn that fronts the colonnade and gazebo that we built for her. The day was bright and the ceremony beautiful. Virus or no-virus, we are celebrating life's moments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mara', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.



MASQUE OF HONOR

Update: Production Time!

After countless edits and revisions, cover design decisions, end paper modifications, illustration placement, and other seemingly impossible deadlines, *Masque of Honor* is finally (finally) in production. My publisher is happy, my editor is relieved, my publicist is thrilled, and I am MORE THAN READY for this next phase! Keep an eye on your inbox for some very exciting news in the coming weeks!



THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

Thomas Jackson and the origins of Memorial Day

On May 10, 1863, "Stonewall" Jackson died after being [accidentally shot](#) at the battle of Chancellorsville. Known as one of the most gifted tactical commanders in US History, much has been published about his war record. But did you know that the anniversary of his death became the date selected by many towns in Virginia for honoring fallen soldiers and the impetus for today's Memorial Day? While over two dozen places have been named in connection with the origin of Memorial Day, Virginia attributes the start of [Decoration Day](#) to the [Ladies' Memorial Associations](#).

The first Ladies' Memorial Association was organized in Winchester VA. When Mary Williams, a Winchester resident, heard about a local farmer who had plowed up the bodies of Confederate soldiers while preparing his field, she was horrified by the lack of proper burials for these men. She shared the story with her sister-in-law, Evelyn Boyd, and the two called together the town's women to take action. At the meeting, the women agreed to organize a memorial society that would gather the dead soldiers within a fifteen mile radius and inter them into a single graveyard. They planned to decorate these graves annually to honor these fallen soldiers.

Women all over state followed suit. Once the task of collecting soldiers' remains and interring them was complete, the women of these associations organized a day of remembrance. Many towns and cities in Virginia chose May 10, the anniversary of Stonewall Jackson's death as their [Decoration Day](#). Hundreds and even thousands of citizens gathered at the town's center, and marched in procession to the cemetery where the women and children decorated the graves with flowers and evergreens. [Below: *Mourners at Jackson's grave*]



[Right: Thomas Jackson in 1848]

Coincidentally, in researching my new novel, I stumbled across a story involving Professor Thomas Jackson before his attribution to a "Stonewall". At VMI, he had quite a different nick-name: "Tom Fool" Jackson. Not popular among his students, Jackson was often the brunt of pranks and practical jokes. Interestingly, while in Lexington, Jackson taught Sunday School classes to slaves, a violation of Virginia law. In my research on his life before the war, I have been intrigued by this quiet, quirky man. Follow the links [HERE](#) and [HERE](#) to learn more.



"You may be whatever you resolve to be."

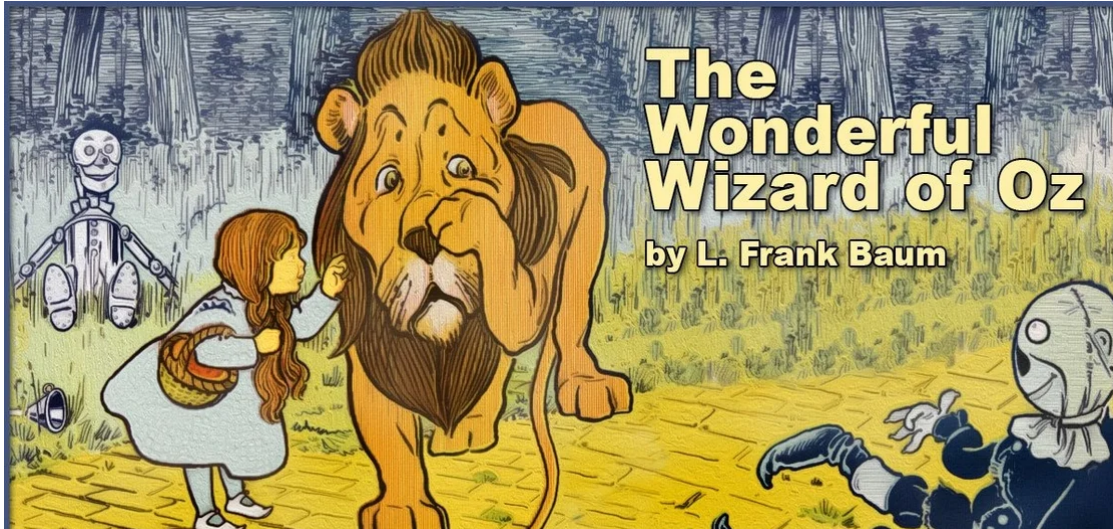
—Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson



From My Kitchen to Yours:

Skinny Summer Splurges

If you're like me, with the stay-at-home orders and with summer just around the corner, you're a little more than worried about your waist line. Here are a few low carb/low calorie deserts to enjoy without the guilt. Get the skinny on 51 recipes [HERE](#).



L. Frank Baum and 120 Years of the Land of Oz

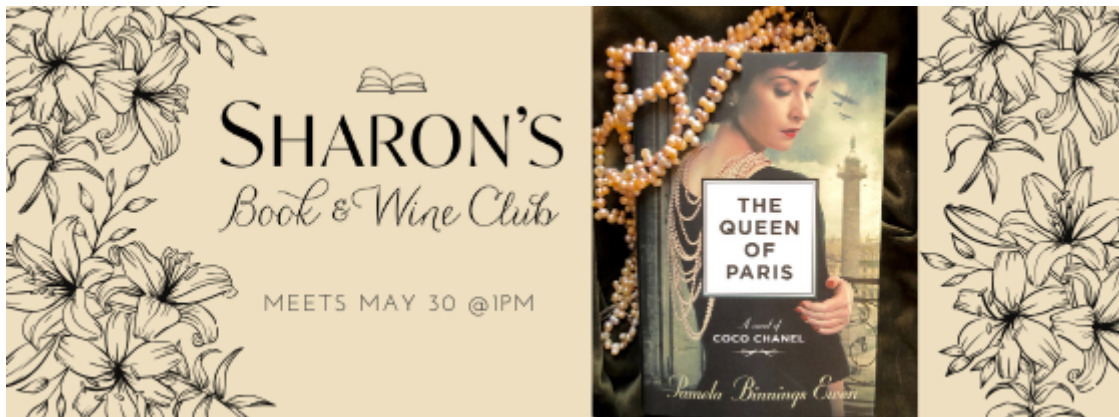
Would you have imagined that Oz was inspired by the second drawer of a filing cabinet labeled "O-Z"? Written in 1899 and published in 1900, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was an aggregation of many elements both nostalgic and contemporary in the mind of L. Frank Baum. For example, when Frank was a kid, the road to his school was, in fact, laid with yellow brick. Scarecrows were a familiar sight in the fields not far from his hometown, and the rusty joints of a tin woodsman was exactly the type of mechanical object in need of the oil that Frank once sold. Tornadoes were a familiar sight out on the Great Plains of the Dakota Territory, and the notion of all-powerful wizards was not altogether bunk in the age of patent medicines and spiritual revival.

After stints as a newspaper journalist and businessman, Frank Baum started writing for children in his forties. He had discovered his talent for storytelling from the nursery rhymes and tales he told his four sons. In 1900, Baum introduced readers to a fantastical land filled with witches, munchkins and a girl named Dorothy from Kansas in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Baum wrote about his intentions in the book's introduction: "*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was written solely to pleasure children today. It aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heart-aches and nightmares are left out.

Click [HERE](#) learn more about L. Frank Baum on this 120th anniversary of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. And don't forget to enter the contest for my [GIVEAWAY](#) of Wizard of Oz books.

"I think the world is like a great mirror, and reflects our lives just as we ourselves look upon it."

— L. Frank Baum



Sharon's Book Club: The Queen of Paris

I'm excited to bring The Queen of Paris AND Pamela Binnings Ewen to this month's book club! Not only will we talk about her book, but we'll interview the author herself to get an inside look into her creation of Coco Chanel. And you can be a part of it! Send [ME](#) your email address and I'll send you a ZOOM invitation to join us on THURSDAY MAY 28 at 4pm Eastern. It will broadcast on Saturday May 30 at 1pm.

Don't forget to check my [FaceBook](#) or [Instagram](#) page for details on our June Book Club selection.



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