



# That Interesting THING

By Bob Waite

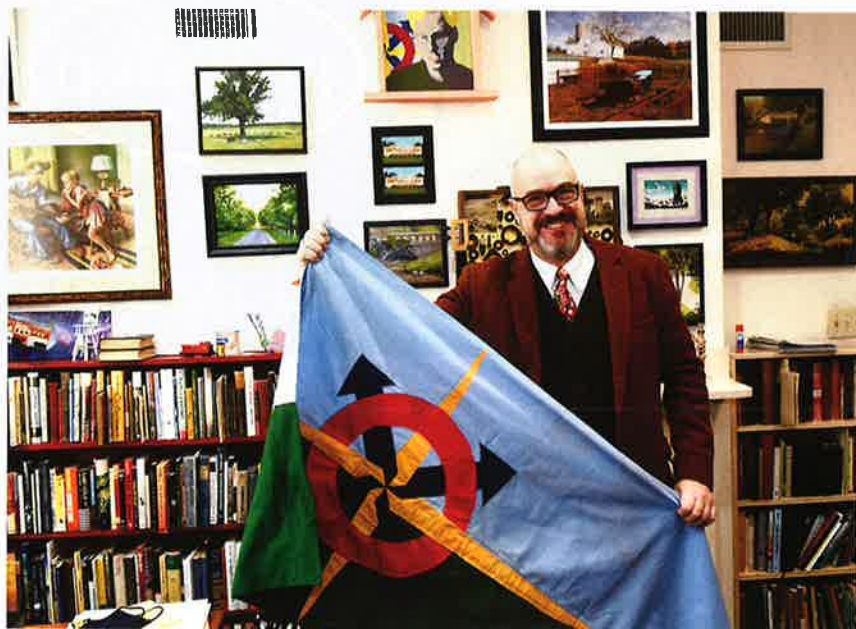
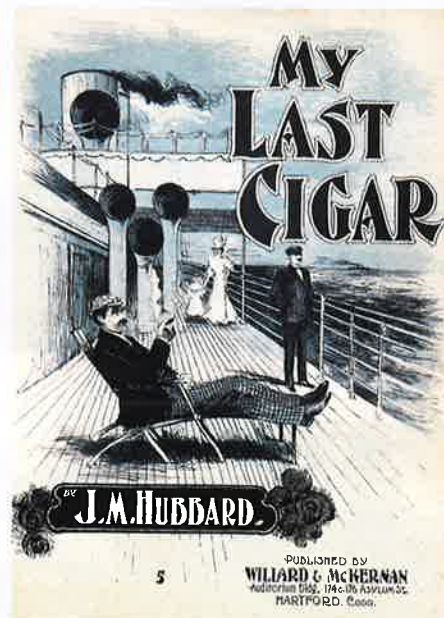


Photo: Paul Wesley



*The Doylestown Lair of the Rascals, Rogues & Rascallions meets every quarter to have dinner, make presentations about seemingly insignificant things and finish the evening with a cigar*

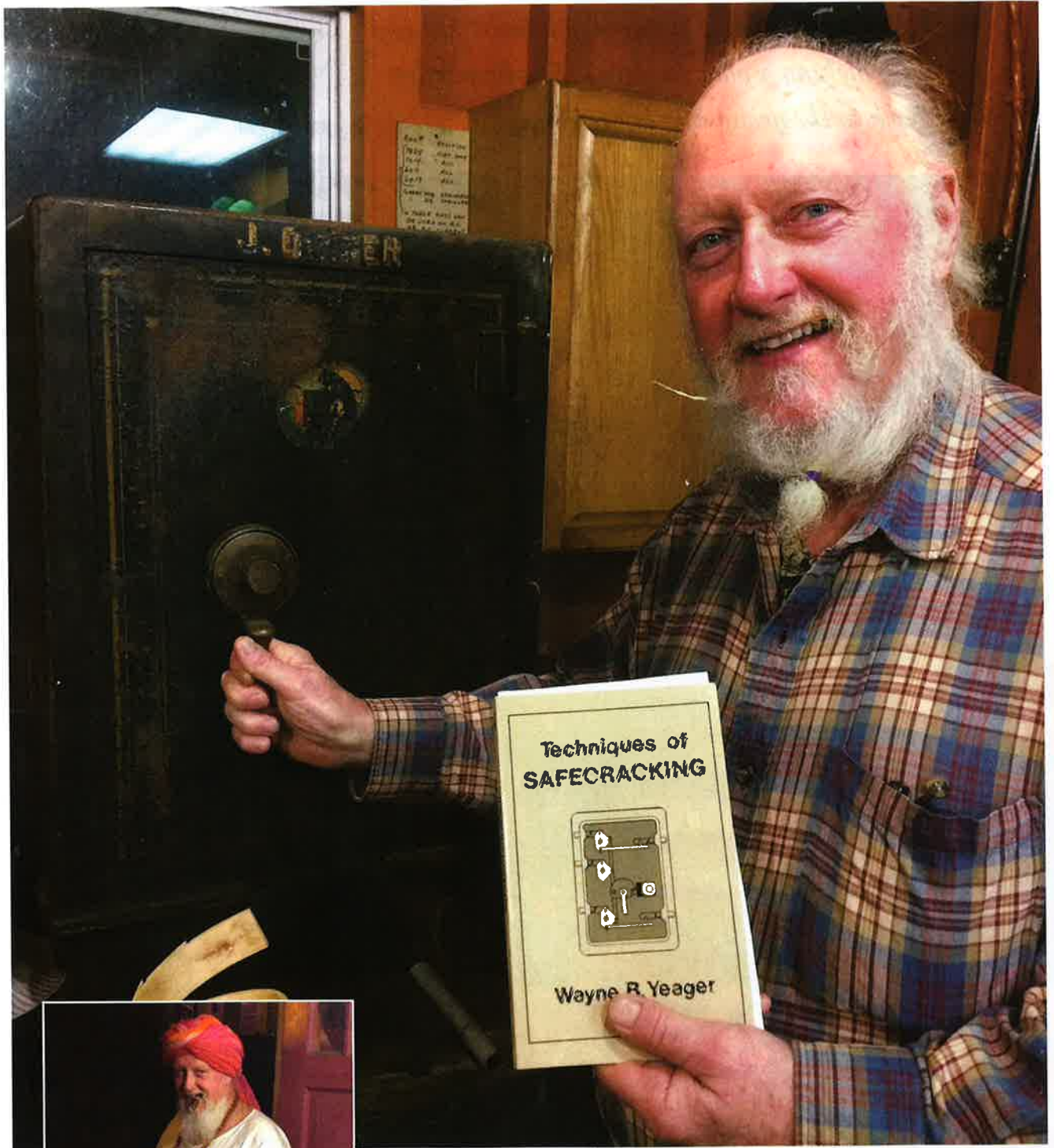
**D**aniel Morrison, now the pastor of Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church, was then in his twenties and a student at New York's New School for Social Research. He was feeling dejected, because his girlfriend just dumped him. Heartbreak hurts and he was up for some kind of a diversion. He had been reading a book about a group of Englishmen who had met for dinner one evening and had pulled out a gazetteer and randomly picked locations around the world. He says, "I sent an invitation to all the fellows I knew and we met at Harvey's Chelsea Restaurant on 19th Street in Manhattan." And he noted, "This was back in the days when you could smoke a cigar at a restaurant."

On a February 3, 1989 nine men actually showed up. They ranged in age from 24 to 64. It was an amazing night for Dan,

who says, "It was great. It was an unusual thing in the 1980s for just guys to get together. You would go out dating with women or maybe there would be a couple who would get together but just men getting together was kind of an unusual thing. Maybe it was common at an earlier time but at that time it wasn't common. I mean they probably thought we were a bachelors' party. They just couldn't imagine why nine guys would get together for any other reason."

The invitation was simple: On the outside it read, "Rascals, Rogues & Rascallions will meet." Inside the folded invitation it continued, "for an evening of fraternal merriment." It also said, "Please leave the women at home."

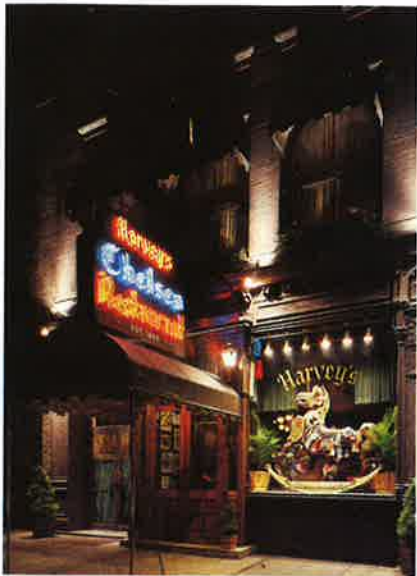
At this first meeting at Harvey's Chelsea Restaurant in Manhattan, the idea of consulting a gazetteer and randomly picking a place, visiting it and reporting back to the group was bantered



Opposite left, Daniel Morrison holding the Rascals, Rogues & Rapsallions flag in his office at Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church where he serves as the pastor: Opposite right, the sheet music for *My Last Cigar*, sung at the end of every Lair meeting. Above, at the 2016 Research Reports meeting, the late Ray Hull II talked about how he managed to open an old locked safe he found at an antique store. Bottom left, Ray Hull II, at a Rascal meeting about a pilgrimage that he and two other Rascals took to India, April 20, 2013. Ray passed away in December 2020. At his funeral, conducted by Reverend Daniel Morrison, a quintet of Rascals sang with much sadness *My Last Cigar*.



*At this first meeting at Harvey's Chelsea Restaurant in Manhattan, the idea of consulting a gazetteer and randomly picking a place, visiting it and reporting back to the group was bantered around*



Top left, nine men, aged 24 to 64, gathered on a winter's evening at the Harvey's Chelsea Restaurant, a century-old clubby eatery in Manhattan, February 3, 1989. That night, the Rascals, Rogues, and RapsCALLIONS, a men's club devoted to exploration and discovery, was conceived. Thus far, three Lairs, or chapters, of the RR&R have been created. Lair No. 3, headquartered in Doylestown, was launched in November 2000. Top right, Maestro Greg Scheer, composer of *Interesting Thing*, a song which begins every Rascal meeting, enjoys a stogie. Bottom, Dr. Michael Moscherosch with the Ark-of-the-Humidor, the trophy of the Lair, awarded annually to the best Rascal.

around. Everyone seemed to like it. The initial gathering was a success. Dan says, "We had a good time, just a bunch of guys from a lot of different backgrounds."

The Harvey's Chelsea Restaurant informal gatherings continued, but Dan moved to Pittsburgh for a doctoral program at the University of Pittsburgh, and there he started to get a group of guys together just like he did in New York. Here Rascals, Rogues & RapsCALLIONS began to coalesce into a more structured group. The meetings always had a theme.

By 1993 the Pittsburgh get together included meeting at a good restaurant and gathering in a room for drinks and conversation. This would be followed by a cigar for anyone who wished to indulge. Dan reminisces, "We created a constitution and a charter and kind of defined what this group was. And the core of the group was this idea of a challenge. A man would be assigned a topic that sounded like it couldn't possibly be interesting and they had to go back and find an interesting story, bring it back and entertain the rest of the group. We always had a theme, but by the time we got to Pittsburgh we decided that the group will give one guy an assignment and he comes back in three months. So that's where the Rascal challenge came from and that continues."

The group in Pittsburgh flourished and quite a few of the original members were from the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh. Dan, though, moved to Doylestown in 1997 and continued to go to meetings in Pittsburgh.

Dan explains how Rascals, Rogues & RapsCALLIONS came to Doylestown. "I lived on East Oakland Ave and there was a fellow two blocks down from me who was a German chemist working for Johnson & Johnson. We had become friendly—his kids and my kids were in school together. He heard about the group from me, and he knew I was going to Pittsburgh every once

in a while, so he said, 'Let's start one here.'

So the process was repeated. Dan says, "And we did the same thing which we did before, so we just called up all the guys we knew and invited our whole universe of male friends."

The first meeting was upstairs in the Doylestown Maennerchor. Since it is a private club, they would put up with cigar smoke and they were given a private room. Food would be ordered from the restaurant downstairs.

The turnout was great. About twenty men showed up and few came from Pittsburgh to offer support to the meeting.



They chartered the group (Lair) that very night. Some men from the original group in Manhattan came regularly to Doylestown.

**M**embership in a Rascals, Rogues & Rapscaillon Lair begins with the postulate. He is someone who is nominated by another member and is unanimously voted in by all the members of the Lair. He can become a Rascal by participation in both a mass challenge and a research reports meeting within a two-year period. Once he becomes a Rascal, he will receive a Rascal Challenge from the other members of

Top, the Rascals of Doylestown gather in the basement of the Van Lieu's Brewery, March 16, 2019: Posing are (left to right) Eric Erb, Ray Hull III, Daniel Morrison (kneeling), Jim Barr, Esq., Calvin Morrison, Leon Moscherosch, Ray Hull II, Dr. Michael Moscherosch, and Roger Hull. Bottom left, because of the COVID crisis, the Rascals gathered out-of-doors on the lawn of Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church to hear the Rascal Challenge presentation of Prof. Dr. Dan Bramer, of Holy Family University, on UFOs in religious history. Bottom left, the Jon Landgraf Prize medal, named in honor of a fallen Rascal, is awarded to the winner of the annual Mass Challenge competition. In the Mass Challenge, all the Rascals and guests answer a common challenge.



the Lair. When he completes a Rascal Challenge, he may become a Rogue. The next and final challenge would be a Rogue Challenge, which no member has achieved yet. Upon completion of a Rogue Challenge, a Rogue would become a Rapsallion. So far there are no Rapsallions

Dan's Rascal Challenge in Pittsburgh is very much responsible for a major pastime at the end of Lair meetings. He says, "In Pittsburgh we came up with the idea of the Rascal challenge based on this book about picking out a random location out of a gazetteer. You can only do that so many times, so the Rascal challenge is a version of that. So, I was given a random date—it was some date in 1872." In trying to find something that was interesting about that date, Dan discovered that "some guy from Brooklyn on that date had patented a gas fired cigar lighter."

Dan pursued this lighter with a great deal of zeal. "I began to investigate the apparatus and the technology around cigar

lighters in Brooklyn at that period and who this man was. I went to visit his grave and tried to find a descendent and—the puzzle was on it, and I never resolved it at that challenge meeting. I was trying to find a drop handled cigar lighter—well you can't find them anywhere, right? I even went to the Smithsonian and searched their archives. So it was at that meeting where I said, 'Well since we are having something about cigars and lighters we should have a cigar together after dinner.'

**D**an went all out. "Sam Hazo, was Poet Laurette of Pennsylvania, and I knew him because he and I were at the same university. I asked him, 'Sam would you being willing to write a poem in honor of cigars and give a recitation on it?' And he wrote *When The Evening Gets Down To Cigars*. It's a good poem actually. It all kind of stuck—we have dinner, a presentation and after everything we pull

out cigars. About half of us smoke."

A Rascal Challenge is a research project on something that seems insignificant or uninteresting that is made interesting in the presentation before the Lair. So, for example, a small, unheard town in Western Pennsylvania was given as a challenge to a Rascal, and he found out about a choir director who had been dismissed to make room for a new one, a pot belly pig that lived in the hardware store and even brought Rascals to the town to sing at a local event songs by the old choir director while wearing pot belly pig shirts. Other Rascal Challenges included a deep history of a man's house, UFOs in religious history, the caves of Marcus Hook, tales from Norristown, a mayor or Pittsburgh who was elected while in jail and other ideas that the group as a whole assign to a Rascal who desires to become a Rogue.

All the men are Rascals, since that is not only a rank, but the generic name for members of the Lair. Officially they meet quarterly. Their meetings revolve around

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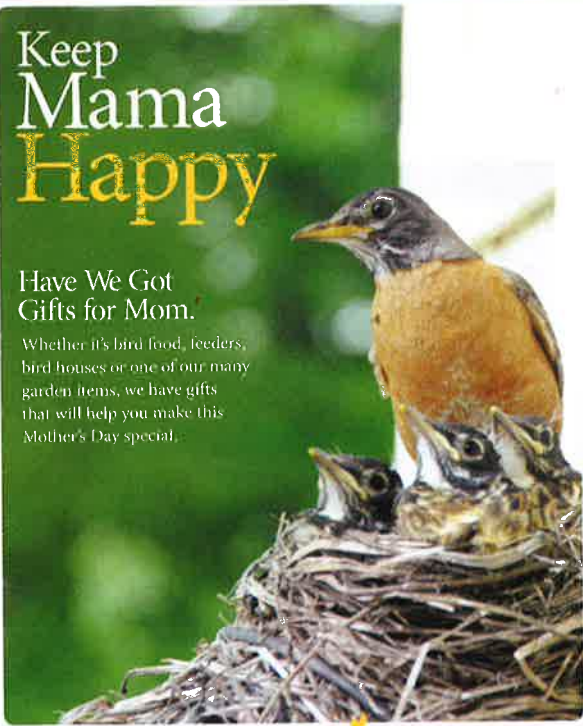
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various challenges and are open to Rascals and others brought by a Rascal. Two of the meetings are devoted to Rascal Challenges or other extended presentations, one is a Mass Challenge and the other a Research Report where members bring a five-minute update on his latest research interests.

The first Rogue Challenges came out more than 20 years ago and no one ever completed them. In 2019 they created a list of 70 challenges. Currently several members have claimed one of these challenges. Examples of Rogue Challenges include: have lunch with a deposed dictator, raise the RR&R flag over the high points of each of county in Pennsylvania, make a Rascal film and have it screen in a local cinema ... A few of the challenges claimed by members include: have a feature on a planet officially named after the RR&R, undertake a hundred-mile trek, without motorized vehicles, above the Arctic Circle, Get a beer named after the RR&R to be sold in at least four bars ...

In the Mass Challenge the same challenge is given to all who are in the Lair and the members who makes the best presentation wins. The mass challenge is open to guests and there are always guests at every meeting. Anyone is allowed to compete in the mass challenge. Winners of the Mass Challenge receive the Landgraf medal, a prize created in the memory of deceased Rascal Jonathan Zerse Landgraf, who created the Rascal's flag and died in February of 1995.

A Mass Challenge in 2003 was to "produce a patentable in-

vention." Winning the prize by a majority vote was Michael Moscherosch with "his Rube Goldberg-esque device to keep cigars lit." A patent application was actually filed in 2004 and in 2008 received a patent number. This years' Mass Challenge is "to produce a chain of an unusual substance." It is left up to the imagination of the presenters to decide what that chain is and what an unusual substance means. Dan emphasizes that "You have to really hone that thing down. You have to go for high impact and then get out of there."

Every Rascal meeting begins with a song and ends with a song. At the beginning of each meeting the unofficial theme song, *Interesting Thing*, written by Rascal Greg Scheer is sung. The chorus begins, "Oh, We will search for that interesting thing, where others believe nothing of interest could be. We already know what the obvious will bring, so we will search for that interesting thing!" Every meeting closes with *My Last Cigar*, an 18th century song by J.M. Hubbard.

According to Dan Morrison, not everybody gets the idea. One guest couldn't see why they were not pursuing some social good, some form of community service. Dan thinks that's missing the point, "For people who get it, it becomes very important to them. We walk this funny line. It's kind of serious but it's not, but we know what we are doing and we take it pretty seriously."

Bob Waite is the editor of Bucks County Magazine.