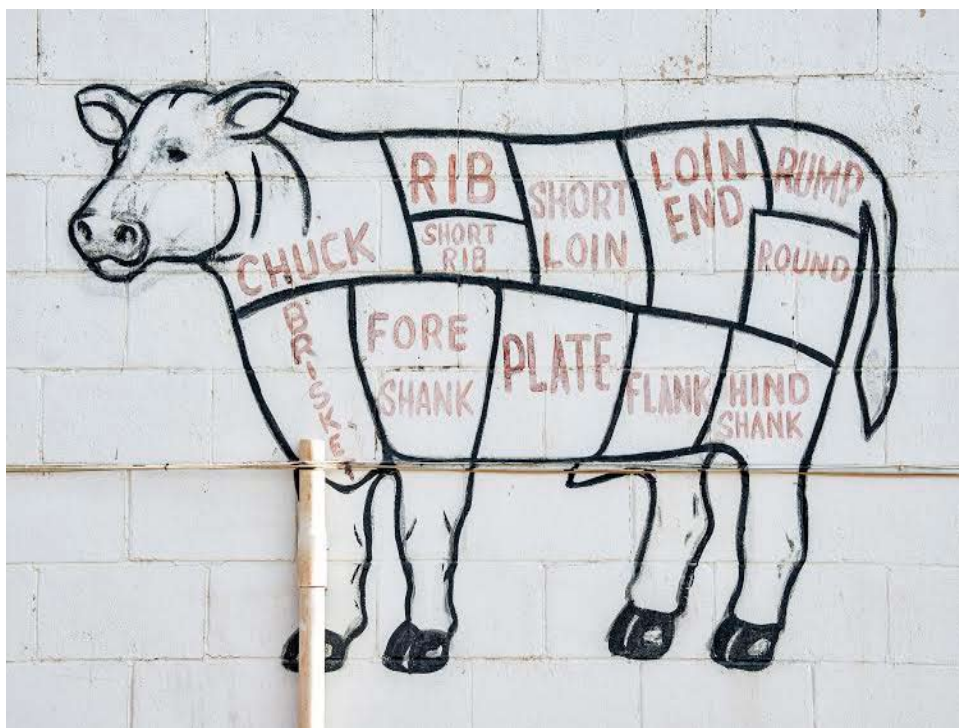


VLACHOS' VIEWS

America through the lens of PAUL VLACHOS

This was the issue where I was going to tell the story about my faithful dog, Elko, who died about 5 weeks ago. Elko was a true son of the West, the Great Basin, in particular, and it's a story that I would like to tell. Unfortunately, every time I begin to go through my photos of Elko, I get all teary-eyed and just want to lie down, so that story will have to wait until the January or March issue, when it gets too cold outside to cry.

Anyway, all we have in this life is the moment and, for this moment, I'm going to talk about a subject that's dear to me: stuff people paint on walls. I was considering going with an theme like "the things walls can tell us" or "the secret messages of walls," but they are both too contrived, pretentious - not to mention silly - and, worst of all, inaccurate. While it may be inelegant-sounding, I prefer "the stuff people paint on walls." Here is a small sampling from the many times I have been walking or driving somewhere and then become transfixed by an old brick or cinderblock wall...PV



2. Fort Stockton, Texas - 2013

What can I say about Fort Stockton that hasn't already been said? It's a dusty crossroads town with weak coffee and cheap motels - all the attributes of a place where I inevitably will spend the night, over and over again. It seems as though I'm always going through Fort Stockton, but never lingering for long. That being said, it's a good place to photograph, as are so many towns in Texas, the state that's just too big to gentrify. There is a lot of old signage and peeling walls. This is from the side of a small building next to Gomez Auto Mechanic. It's a small meat processing plant, the kind where you can bring in a deer that you just bagged and they'll dress it for you. Somebody clearly thought it would be good for business to paint this butcher's anatomical guide on the back wall. Little did they know how much joy it would give me one day as I was driving by.

3. The South Bronx, NYC - 2007

This was painted before the word "gentrification" was ever used in connection with the Bronx. I'm not certain whether this was just a local stab at wall art or an actual attempt to scare drug dealers. Either way, it's hard to resist this life-sized mural. Some truly clueless developers are now trying to rename part of the South Bronx "The Piano District," much to the very justified chagrin of the locals. That has been a disturbing trend in New York City and, I suspect other parts of the country - real estate developers changing the long-established name of a place in order to better sell it. I am no longer surprised at anything. When I recently heard that they are calling Spanish Harlem "Spa-Ha," I repressed the urge to vomit. When a formally nameless zone north of Little Italy became "Nolita," I suppressed the urge to move. There is only so much I can take, though, and maybe "The Piano District" will be enough impetus to finally get my butt out of this once-vibrant metropolis.



1. Robersonville, North Carolina - 2014

This is one of my favorite things - a remnant of the past. People are now calling such things "ghost signs," which is fine, I suppose, but I don't know if it's a real ghost or not. Everything in Robersonville has a patina on it, and I did not bother to look down the alleyway where this arrow points, so I don't know if the establishment is still open. All I know is that I was making a three-point turn to return over the tracks, a freight line runs down the middle of this town, when I saw this sign. I got out and photographed it and moved on. It was not until I got home to my motel that night and really looked at it that I deciphered the name of the salon: "Styles Just For You."





4. Portland, Oregon - 2015

Every once in a while, an old sign or mural can trigger long-dormant brain cells. Such was the case with this one, near Swan Island, the industrial district in Portland, which instantly and without warning made me start to sing the Coke jingle at the top of my lungs. Elko, who was in the back of the van on this, our last road trip together, took it all in stride. He curled up and tucked his head under a pillow as I bellowed “that’s the way it should BEEEEEE. WHAT THE WORLD WANTS TO SEEEE...is the REAL THING...” All of this from turning my head and looking up.



5. Southeastern Nevada - 2003

This is from the interior wall of an abandoned commercial hot spring, now an old cinderblock ruin by the side of the road. I was looking for remnants of hot water and found only this, which could have been painted while the place was in business or after it was abandoned. It took some skill and thought to put this up. Somebody had to consider the placement, the wording, the yellow surround. The artist in question also decided to italicize the “AT YOUR OWN,” which makes me crack a small smile. There you go! I smiled. I haven’t done much of that since Elko left this planet, 5 weeks ago. Maybe I’m slowly getting better, whatever that means. Look for the story of the desert dog soon on the racks of your local Zephyr newsstand.



PAUL VLACHOS lives in New York City



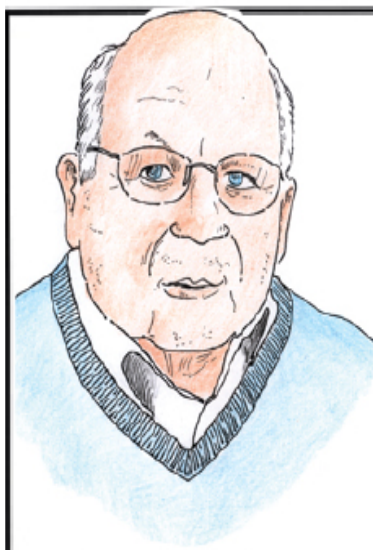
www.sorenomore.com
info@glogerm.com

Sore No More! is a fast acting pain relieving gel that begins to work immediately once massaged onto affected areas. For years Sore No More! Has provided temporary relief of pain associated with simple backaches, arthritis, bruises and sprains with its unique heating and cooling ingredients. Our special blend of six natural plant extracts in combination with menthol, capsaicin and witch hazel will get rid of pain the natural way



LIFETIME
BACKBONE
MEMBER

ANNE
SNOWDEN
CROSMAN



CHECK OUT
OMAR TATUM'S
AmeriCandy

in LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

www.easysite.com/AmeriCandy