



Sarah Goldman
photographing the
Leighton family on
their front steps

SPENCER STREBE

Positive Steps

Sarah Goldman and her husband had just moved to Arlington's Tara-Leeway Heights neighborhood from South Carolina—on March 9, to be exact—when Covid sent all of Northern Virginia into lockdown. Goldman, a professional photographer, wanted to get to know her new community, and she wanted to help. She signed on to a viral photography initiative called **The Front Steps Project** and began offering pro bono portraits to local families in exchange for good-faith donations to area charities.

Being new and not knowing many of her neighbors, Goldman posted a notice on Nextdoor. Within two days she had about 100 interested families. A week later she was snapping photos from a safe distance outdoors—with many folks posing on their front steps.

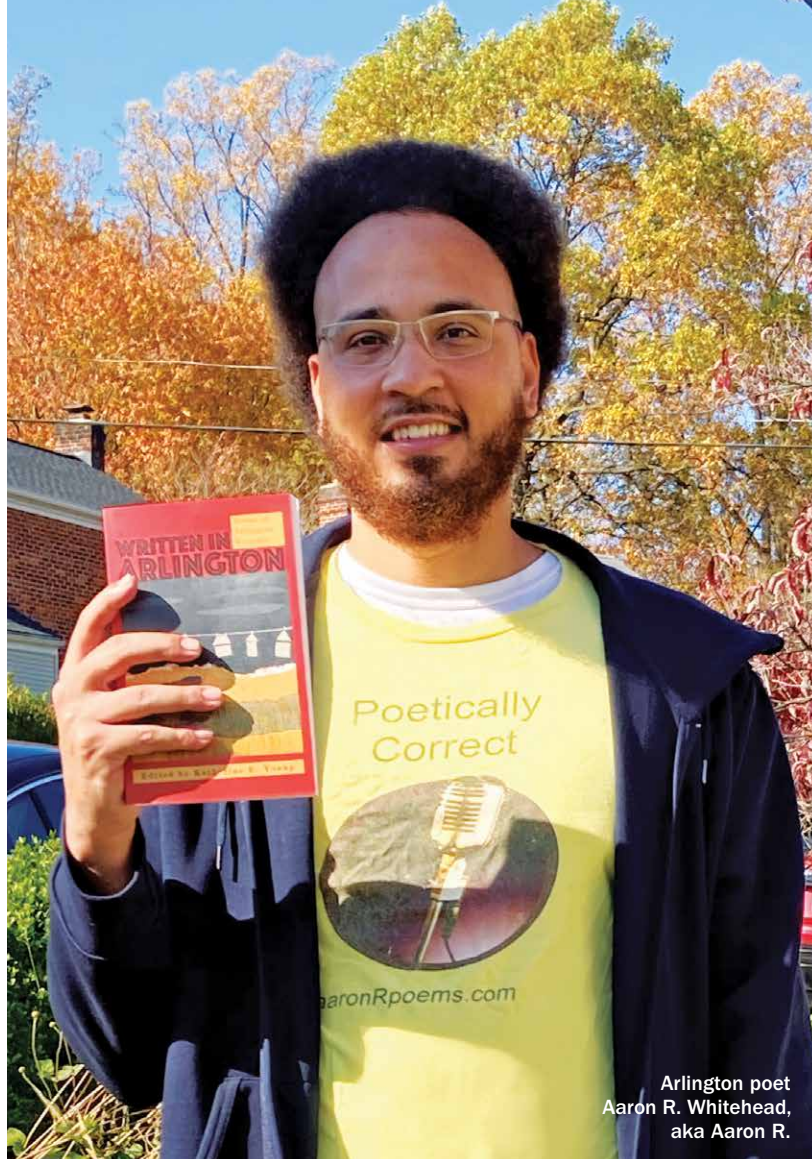
"It felt good to do something—*anything*," she says. "It kind of gave me a sense of purpose."

In the end, she left nearly 200 families with a nice memento from their time in quarantine, while helping to raise more than \$19,000 for local organizations such as the Arlington Food Assistance Center, Calvary Women's Services and the Virginia Hospital Center Foundation.

One especially grateful couple was photographed while boxing up 25 years' worth of memories as they prepared to move out of the Falls Church house in which they'd raised their kids. When their adult children stopped by to help them pack, they seized the opportunity to capture a family portrait to hang in their new place.

Some 500 photographers worldwide contributed to The Front Steps Project, raising more than \$3.35 million for food pantries, animal shelters, hospitals and other causes across all 50 states and 12 countries. One of Goldman's portraits is now featured in a book created by the project's originators. sarahgoldmanphoto.com

KATHERINE E. YOUNG (AARON R.)



Arlington poet
Aaron R. Whitehead,
aka Aaron R.

Poetry in Motion

April is National Poetry Month and Arlington is a literary town. So here's a new one for your reading list: ***Written in Arlington***, an anthology of more than 150 poems by 87 hometown writers, edited by Katherine E. Young, who served as the county's inaugural poet laureate from 2016 to 2018. Cover artist Anya Getter is also based in Arlington. So is the book's publisher, Paycock Press, run by editor, author and poet Richard Peabody.

Young says she was inspired by the talent she encountered during her tenure as poet laureate and wanted to find a way to highlight local voices. Released in November, the collection covers a spectrum of themes. Some poems reference Arlington landmarks and history—including memories of a county cleaved by racial segregation.

"Anyone can read any of these poems and find something beautiful or touching or meaningful," Young says. "The book does what I wanted it to do, which is create community—especially when we're sitting inside during a pandemic and can't [be together]."

Made possible with a grant from Arlington Cultural Affairs, the anthology is available for purchase at Trade Roots in Westover (\$17.95) and online. katherine-young-poet.com

■ good stuff



Naturalist Alonso Abugattas

Nurturing Nature

Alonso Abugattas usually spends his days amid the flora and fauna that make up Arlington's ecosystems. During his three decades as a naturalist—the past nine as natural resources manager for Arlington County—he's tracked wild turkeys, treaded through bogs, led preschoolers on wooded scavenger hunts and studied the building habits of carpenter bees. He's happiest when his boots are muddy.

In December, however, Abugattas was sitting in front of his computer when he learned he was named a Regional Environmental Champion

by the D.C.-based Audubon Naturalist Society. The award was announced during the organization's Naturally Latinos Conference, which was held virtually in 2020.

Though clearly an authority in his field, "he is also a very humble, very approachable person," says Serenella Linares, a school programs manager for Audubon. "He helps build that sense of inclusion, that nature is for everybody."

Abugattas is an instructor for five master naturalist chapters in Virginia, co-founder of the Washington Area Butterfly Club and a member of the

Virginia Herpetological Society's identification team. His passion for nature is palpable.

"When you learn about one thing, everything else is connected to it," he says. "I have this philosophy that it's a nature puzzle. Everything fits together, and when you learn about one thing, you can't help but learn about everything else."

As we look forward to spring and an end to the pandemic, many Arlington families are eagerly anticipating a return to the woods, with Abugattas as a guide. Read his nature blog at capitalnaturalist.blogspot.com

■ good stuff



Love Notes

When Arlington schools shifted to remote learning last spring, Kenmore Middle School student Marlene Reyes noticed the toll the pandemic was taking on her teachers. She applied for and won a \$250 grant from Peace First, a global nonprofit that empowers youth to cultivate a more compassionate world with tools like community support and startup funding. That's how Reyes' **Jars of Appreciation** project began.

"Several of my teachers would email us to check in on us, which was really sweet," says the 14-year-old Westover resident. "I thought, *What is something I could do to show them I appreciate them?*"

With the funding, Reyes created 25 jars, which she gave to Kenmore teachers, as well as cafeteria, front office and janitorial staff. Each mason jar contained 101 carefully curated and colorful notes—a mix of the teen's own words of encouragement and positive famous quotations—with a personalized tag tied around the top.

One of the very first jars went to her math teacher, who had gotten so frustrated during a virtual class that she cried in front of her students. Coincidentally, the first note the teacher read from the jar was an uplifting message about trying again.

"This has all been such a strange and hard time," says



Marlene Reyes

Reyes' mother, Stefanie Cruz. "I'm so proud of her for taking the time to think about her teachers and how they are feeling, too."

After the response to her first batch of jars was so positive, Reyes applied for and won a second \$250 grant, which she used to expand her efforts.

Now she sells the jars through a website she built herself, and is donating 10% of the proceeds to a rotating list of nonprofit organizations. weappreciateyou.org