On a chilly evening on Friday, December 2nd, hundreds of people gathered in downtown Richmond for an event they’d been anticipating all year.

VCU’s very own Peppas set the tone beforehand with jazzy renditions of Holiday classics (and occasionally some Adele). VCU students and Richmond natives milled about food trucks outside with hot chocolate in hand. As six o’clock drew closer, parents hoisted their kids on their shoulders and the music dwindled down.

Then, after an animated countdown, hundreds of buildings, reindeer, and—of course—a four-story tall Christmas tree in the middle of the James Center shimmered to life. Richmond’s 32nd Annual Grand Illumination had begun.

The tradition has a rich history that started in 1984 and has continued this year...
Grand Illumination, cont.

amid doubts after the sale of the James Center. As in every year, a choir (this time the Rock n’ Roll chorus) sang carols after the lighting and local theatre groups performed classics like A Christmas Story. Food trucks sold everything from fried Oreos to Mac n’ Cheese bites, and guests wandered into the Omni hotel to take pictures in front of holiday decorations and a ten-foot tall statue of The Nutcracker. Under normal circumstances the densely packed streets would have led to some disagreements; but that day, a sense of carefree holiday cheer laced the air. For one evening, at least, people’s troubles were left at home.

However, this year’s illumination has also been a touch bittersweet. Inside the Omni hotel was a red sleigh full of shiny new toys, manned by Richmond Stop Child Abuse Now (SCAN). The sleigh is part of an effort to collect presents for children whose parents can’t afford them. At the end of the drive, parents will be able to come in and do their Christmas “shopping”, providing a sense of normalcy to otherwise struggling families. The drive is a reminder that the normally blissful Holiday season can be just another reminder of hard times to many.

Also bittersweet was the end to some of the smaller traditions that have sprung up over the years.

In past years, a tour guide from Canal Cruises would speak about Richmond history as the boats glided through dark waters, enrapting both VCU students and Richmond natives alike. The ride was also the perfect place to see the city lights from afar. This year, however, the dock that normally hosts the free rides holiday canal rides was eerily empty. The apparent end of this tradition is just one of many changes that Richmond is going through. MCV hospital recently changed its name to VCU Health; the Landmark

features

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An Ode to Hip-Hop

Ho...
Dry Season

In the duststorm since, we found no survivors only splinters of bone—pieces of angry skin carried by the wind.

Our desert home will surely perish in the coming rain.

And we will wash into the streaming rooftops, into the flooded streets and condense into mud

The last time I thought of camellia blossoms, I spent a day and night in the shower, waiting for the mountain of water to melt my body through the drain, through the walls.

Oh Heart

Oh Heart, why are you so sad?
When you have everything in the palm of your hand.
You have a family, friends, shelter and food
While even the unfortunate ones don’t even have as much as you.
Oh Heart, why do you cry?
Don’t you know each and every moment is passing you by?
You are worried and anxious about tomorrow
Does the future hold happiness or even more sorrow?
You regret your decisions about yesterday.
But your worries and regrets have slipped today away.
Oh Heart, why are you so scared?
This life, this body and mind have already been declared
To perish at a certain point
So don’t wait until that last checkpoint, To complete everything your heart yearns,
Before that last ultimate spark burns.
Oh Heart, be thankful now That you got this far anyhow.
Creative Corner

You’re looking at him
But he’s not looking at you
His eyes are dancing around the room
Searching and seeking someone new.
He’s on the hunt for the next chase
Now that he’s won first place for this race
By winning your heart and getting what he desired
Leaving you behind like a burnt wood chip in the fire.
You feel used, alone, broken and shattered.
Feeling foolish for falling for his stupid flatter
And of course those three words that made you fall even harder.
You were so naive to believe you had found the one.
Little did you know, your life had only just begun.

Beauty.

Through the dirt, flowers grow and bloom.
Those who go for the beautiful kinds inhale such dangerous fumes.
The bees and hummingbirds hover around such beauty
But temporary beauty cannot last.
For the flower soon wilts when the seasons change and pass.
Oh mind, remember beauty comes from within
It is within the soul inside, not the outer skin.

Unfaithful

Poetry by Manleen Kaur Bajaj

Symmetry

i struggle
to dream the
careful mountains forgot
the art of sleep
that sweet planet to
balance, so naturally
a blue rain melts
the corrugated sheets of
stolen cloud
wind floods the knolls
keep dancing, the music
of my blood parades on
toward the symmetry of the evening
where oceans unbound,
we travel further still
to the jeweled past and
the invention of light

tired, i drift away

Photo courtesy of the Internet

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