



POLISH AMERICAN ARTS ASSOCIATION of Washington, DC

Winter 2021

NEWSLETTER

Member of the American Council for Polish Culture, Inc. since 1966

Life and Art in the Virtual World

It has now been a year since life as we knew it stopped and we all had to adjust to the new reality. Although most of the regular activities we were used to enjoying came to a halt, we soon found new ways to stay in touch, socialize and mark special occasions. Of course, we do miss the human closeness and are looking eagerly towards the horizon from where we expect to finally get the necessary medicines and other solutions that will put the worst of the past year into a box of memories that will be opened only to pass these extraordinary experiences on to posterity. For the Polish American Arts Association, one of the more pleasant memories from 2020 was our Virtual Wigilia. Its success encouraged us, as well as set an example for others, to plan similar online events that can be shared beyond local audiences and bring the entire Polish community together. Below and on the next pages are some pictures and words that we hope you will remember in years to come about the Wigilia, as well as some upcoming events over the next months.

PAAA Virtual Wigilia



Last December, we held a gathering in a way that has become more and more usual over the past year. To celebrate the annual PAAA Wigilia in 2020, we didn't gather with friends, as we usually do, in some festively decorated venue, like the Arts Club of Washington, to eat a traditional Polish dinner, share *opłatek*, exchange wishes and sing many beloved *kolędy*. The reason is that this year has been anything but usual. It was difficult for many, indeed, tragic for some, and merely inconvenient for others. Those in the latter category can be thankful that the worldwide pandemic that has put our activities on hold in the past year, is happening in the time when, for the most part, we have enough food, warm shelter, and can be together through the wonder of science and technology, which lets us visit with each other while remaining in the safety of our own homes. So we gathered around our computers or other devices, with a catered traditional dinner on the table or simply a glass of wine in hand, and shared the *opłatek* while expressing hope that the next one will be simply usual.

Turn to page 4, for more on how it went.

Virtual Meeting with Author Annik LaFarge



On Sunday, March 21 at 3:00 PM, the PAAA hosts a virtual presentation: **Chopin on the High Line: The Romantic Spirit in Music and Landscape**, by the acclaimed writer **Annik LaFarge**, author of *Chasing Chopin: A Musical Journey Across Three Centuries, Four Countries, and a Half-Dozen Revolutions*.

The event is being held instead of our Chopin Concert, which each year benefits the PAAA Scholarship Fund. Participation is free and open to all, although voluntary donations to the fund will be welcome. Please see inside for details on how to register, and where to buy the book.



Message from the President

Dear fellow PAAA members and friends,

This past year will be examined and reexamined for years to come. I wrote the below paragraph for the *Polish Heritage story* on the PAAA's Virtual Wigilia held last December. I think it's worth repeating here.

By any measure, 2020 was not the best of years. But was it the worst? For some it was, indeed, tragic with personal loses. But overall, life goes on and as we look at history, we realize that things are never so bad that they couldn't be worse. The current pandemic affects us all in ways that the past ones didn't because we see all its extent and details in real time right in our own homes. There is no place far enough nor a village so remote that it cannot be added to the statistics. By the same token, the closer an afflicted locality happens to be, the greater anxiety it causes in all of us. So yes, this is the worse pandemic ever in terms of having to deal not only with physical discomforts but with constantly fueled fears. There is another side to the story, though. The same electronics that bring us the bad news with admonitions to isolate, also keep us connected with our families, friends, and for better or worse, the entire world. We converse on the phone that shows us a face of a loved one or through Zoom where smaller or larger groups can meet. We hear of people having virtual weddings, birthday celebrations and holiday gatherings. So let's make the best of what we have as we look forward to next year with a feeling of hope and the knowledge that this too shall pass.

So we had our Wigilia without leaving home and it was very successful in bringing together people not only within our nearby community but in far away states and even across the sea. We received greetings from Poland and had a special program prepared especially for us by our own board member, actress and theater director, Hania Bondarewska, who is in Warsaw, where she works on her own play and appears in a Polish TV serial.

Our next online event is the meeting with the author of the book *Chasing Chopin*, Annik LaFarge on March 21. Matthew Stefanski is the chairman of this event and promises us an interesting afternoon. Please register to participate and consider making a donation to the PAAA Scholarship Program which is now in existence for twenty years. Applications for this year's scholarship grants are being accepted now.

As far as activities for the rest of the year go, we'll just have to wait and see. Let's hope we can soon meet in person and in the meantime, let's keep in touch through the means offered to us by science and technology.

Keep well and stay safe.

Celia Larkin

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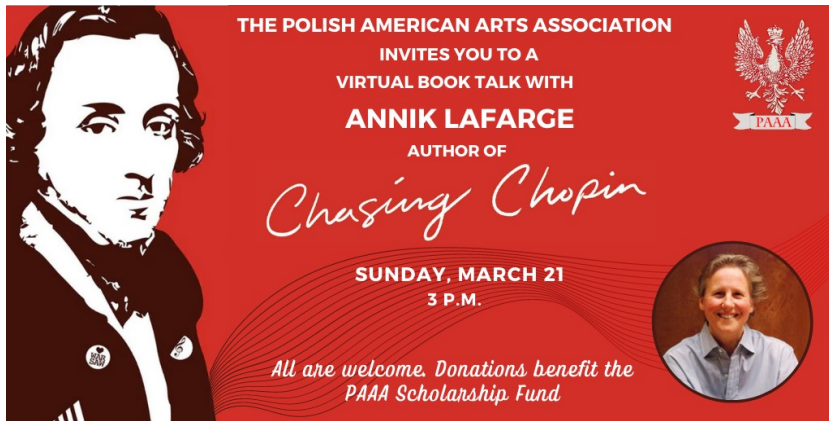
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A CHOPIN EVENT: Meeting with Author Annik LaFarge



On Sunday, March 21, 2021 at 3 PM, the PAAA will host a virtual Zoom presentation: *Chopin on the High Line: The Romantic Spirit in Music and Landscape*, by the acclaimed writer Annik LaFarge, author of *Chasing Chopin: A Musical Journey Across Three Centuries, Four Countries, and a Half-Dozen Revolutions*.

To participate, please visit the [PAAA Facebook](#) or the <http://paaa.us/events/index.htm> website and click on the link for registration. The event is free and all are welcome to attend. Since the ongoing pandemic situation prevents us from holding our annual Chopin Concert, voluntary

donations to the PAAA Scholarship Fund will be warmly welcomed and can be made while registering for the event.

The author, Annik LaFarge, will also donate a portion of proceeds from sales of *Chasing Chopin* to the PAAA Scholarship Fund. Purchases must be made through the [Politics & Prose online bookstore](#). Please include the code **SPECIAL10** at the checkout. We look forward to seeing you on March 21.

2020 PAAA Scholarship Winners

We are a little late with recognizing the PAAA Scholarship winners for 2020 because, due to the coronavirus pandemic, we were not able to hold a membership meeting last year during which the students receiving the grants are presented with their scholarship certificates. The Scholarship Committee, chaired by Mary Beth Sowa, and including Dr. Renata Greenspan, Dr. Laura Kafka-Price, Rose Kobylinski, Thomas Payne, and PAAA President Cecilia Larkin as ex-officio member, deliberated during a Zoom meeting and selected the four outstanding students named below. Their checks and certificates were mailed to them and we hope that we will be able to meet them in person as soon as it becomes possible to do it safely. For now, we hope they will join us at the Chopin Event on March 21. Congratulations to every one of the winners!

We are now accepting applications for the 2021 grants. Information can be found at: <http://paaa.us/scholarship/>



Olivia Dul is studying political communications at George Washington University. Originally from Wallington, NJ, she has previously received a *liceum* certificate and a diploma from the School of Language and Polish Culture of Catholic University of Lublin. Olivia is passionate about supporting efforts to promote Polish language and culture, saying, "As someone grateful that I had

the opportunity to attend Polish school, I want to ensure that other children have that same opportunity to learn about their cultural identity." She hopes to work internationally, including helping asylum-seeking children.



Jakub Lipowski is pursuing a biomedical engineering major and computer science and engineering business minor at the University of Virginia. "Although my area of study is my biggest passion" Jakub writes, "I set aside a significant amount of time to develop a Polish community within the UVA student population." In doing so he helped found the Polish Student Association at UVA where he organizes language lunches for members to practice their Polish and other events which promote Polish history and culture among the UVA student body. He says, "The U.S. is a melting pot of cultures and I feel that it is almost my duty

to contribute to it by giving others the opportunity to experience a piece of Polish culture."



Nicole Rybak is a linguistics and Spanish major at Georgetown University. A native of Chicago, Nicole was always surrounded by Polish culture and earned her *matura* in Polish Saturday school. As a student she co-founded a Polish club on campus and interned at the National Office of the Polish American Congress. Nicole is

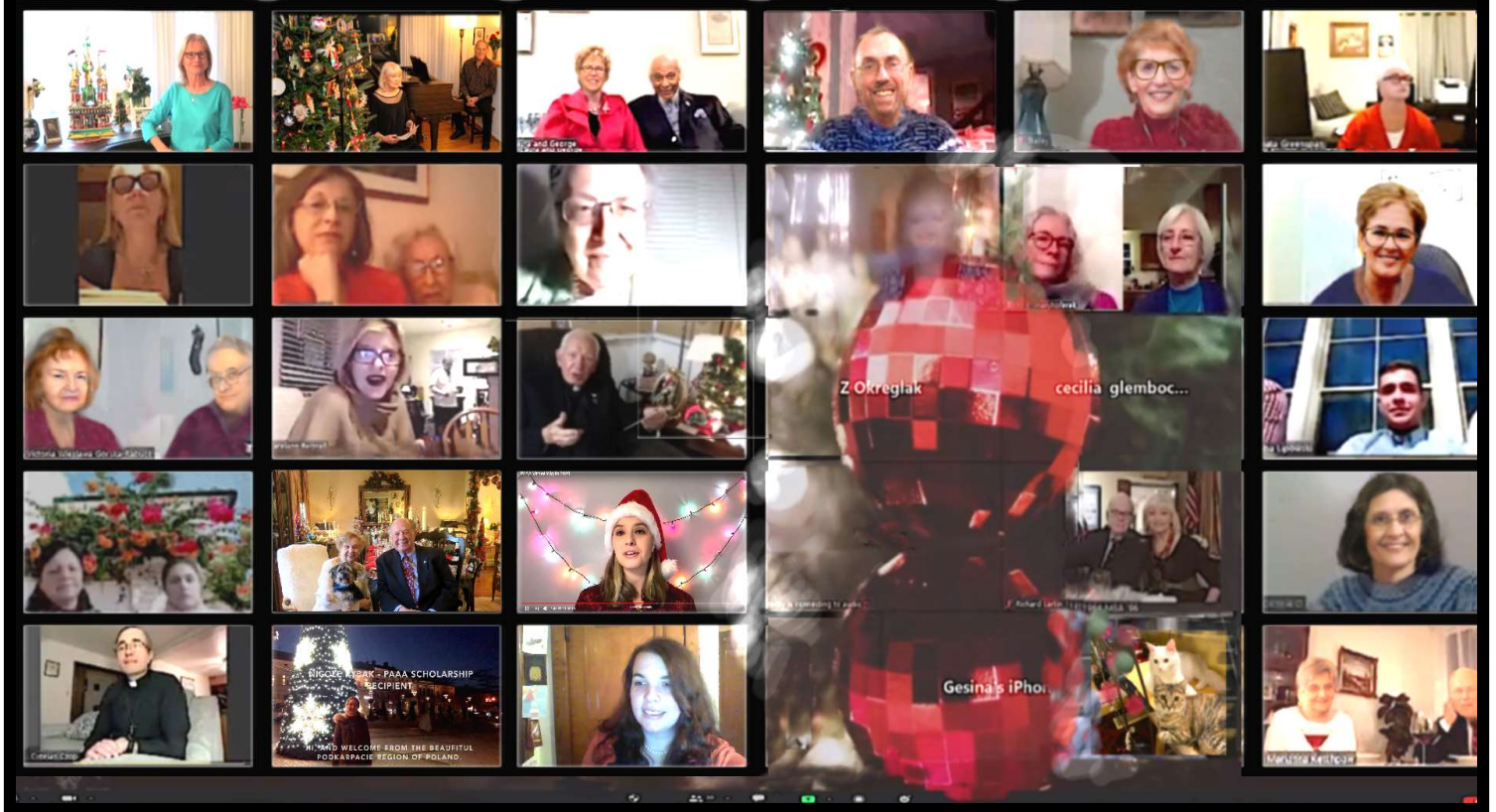
passionate about getting more young Polish people connected to their roots. About her own experiences, she writes, "I was never involved for anyone but myself - I wanted to help my roots thrive in order to not lose them."



Ethan Walker studies fine arts at Northern Virginia Community College in Loudon as well as George Mason University. He has an interest in digital animation and film making, and recently participated in a design apprenticeship at the National Building Museum. His Polish ties go back to his great-great grandfather, Aleksander

Tabor, who emigrated from Zdzierzec in southeastern Poland and settled in Johnstown, PA. Ethan looks forward to exploring the dynamic Polish animation scene and visiting Poland soon.

PAAA Virtual Wigilia 2020



In celebrating our annual PAAA Wigilia online this year, using prerecorded messages and live presentations, we tried to keep as close as possible to the format that became the standard for our in person gatherings. So first, our *duzpasterz* Father Philip Majka talked about and virtually blessed the *oplatek* for all to share. Then Celia Larkin, Stefan Lopatkiewicz, Mary Ann Evan and Marianna Eckel described the early PAAA Wigilias, starting with 1979 up to 1990 when we were invited to celebrate the tradition at the Embassy of the newly liberated Poland. This was followed by greetings from Polish Ambassador Piotr Wilczek who extended the wishes to all of the Polish community and we, in turn, wished the people of Poland happiness in the New Year. Greetings were also extended by Henry Sienkiewicz, president of the Arts Club of Washington where the PAAA holds Wigilia each December since 2014.

After the ACPC President Raymond Glembocki shared some of his family's traditions, his wife Cecilia talked about the traditional Wigilia food she prepared and beautifully displayed among the many Polish Christmas decorations in their home. Rose Kobylinski relayed the story of the *Krakowska szopka* and displayed *pawie oczka* and other ornaments her mother, Róża Nowotarska, always made at Christmastime. Among other greetings, we heard from Father Cyprian Czop and his parishioner in Minneapolis, Minnesota, our scholarship winners, Nicole Rybak who was on a visit in Poland, and Olivia Dul speaking against the backdrop of holiday lights.



Henry Sienkiewicz
President of Arts Club of Washington

Top: Computer screen with images from online Wigilia. Above, clockwise from top left: Alvin Smithson, Celia Larkin, Dominik Mikolajczyk a few minutes before airtime; ACPC President Raymond Glembocki brought a bouquet of roses to wish us good luck; Arts Club President Henry Sienkiewicz; recording session at the Arts Club with Celia Larkin, Alvin Smithson, Laura Kafka-Price and Dominik Mikolajczyk. Right: PAAA Polish bombka ornament.



The evening's highlight was a very special Christmas program produced especially for us in Poland by the Ambassador Theater, directed by our board member, actress Hanna Bondarewska, with artists from Warsaw, Sydney, and Florida: Halina Chrobak, Stanisław Górka, Eliza Anna Falkiewicz, Lidia Kosk, Gosia Bondarewska and Aki Che, Magda Bentkowska, Roland Okula, Mariusz Adamczak and Dariusz Sztajerwals. Thank you to all.

Soprano Laura Kafka-Price, a Wigilia regular, sang several *kolędy* with piano accompaniment by Alvin Smithson, recorded earlier in the week at the Arts Club. We also heard Rosalinda Sherman singing *Cicha Noc* and Ann Margaret Zelenka performed the song *The Angel Gabriel*.

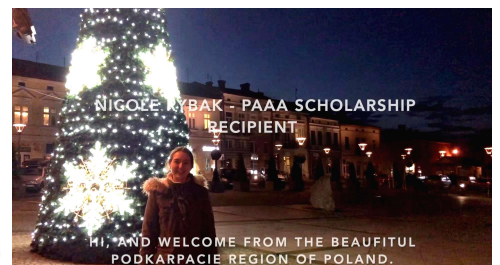
In keeping with the PAAA tradition, the Wigilia program was culminated by Stasia and Olek Skrupczuk leading the *kolędy* singing and many joined in at home, following the text of the songs on the screen.

We wish to thank Dominik Mikołajczyk for coordinating the technical side of the program and on site video recordings. Renata Greenspan made sure that all who wished to participate had no problem with the Zoom online admittance.

It was truly a memorable evening and the good thing is that the memory was preserved and can be viewed on the PAAA YouTube. Come next December, though, we hope that it will be possible to see you all in person for Wigilia 2021.



Clockwise from the top: Ambassador Theater presentation; Soprano Laura Kafka-Price; Stasia and Olek Skrupczuk; Soprano Rosalinda Sherman; greetings from Poland; Kraków szopka; Tartinka and Molièrek Larkin are fascinated by the preparations; Father Majka with opłatek; Rose Kobylnski with painting on glass by her mother Róża Nowotarska; Cecilia Glembocki shows her Wigilia dishes and Polish Christmas ornaments.





Polish-born poet Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka is the author, translator, and editor of several books of poems in English and Polish, including the recent *Szklana góra/Glass Mountain* which features Lidia Kosk's poem in 22 languages and *Meadows of Memory: Poems and prose by Lidia Kosk*. Her book *Oblige the Light* won the fifth national Clarinda Harriss Poetry Prize. She has translated poems by Polish, as well as American, Catalan, and German poets. Danuta is co-editor of the literary journal *Loch Raven Review*. She holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry; her scientific career encompasses professorships at the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University. To learn more about Kosk-Kosicka, please visit her website: <https://danutakk.wordpress.com>

Being interviewed for the Library of Congress in the time of the Covid-19 Pandemic



In a heart-warming recognition of my work as a poet, translator and literary journal's editor, who bridges languages and cultures, I was selected to be interviewed for The Library of Congress "The Poet and the Poem 2020-21 Series." The interview, conducted by the Tenth Poet Laureate of Maryland, Grace Cavalieri, was to take place at the Library of Congress recording studio on March 17, 2020. A dream come true, except due to the growing threat of the Pandemic the Library was suddenly off limits, and the interview had to be conducted by phone. Actually, by two phones: the Q&A over the stationary phone, and my readings to be recorded on the cell phone. With the spare hand I needed to hold my book, turn the pages, and keep calm when the sound was disappearing. I was answering the questions, I was reading my poems and my translations. While technically difficult, it was a great honor and pleasure, and an unforgettable experience.

As the first poem I read "Lilac Lilacs," from my book *Face Half-Illuminated*. In it, I allude to the poem "Żal" ("Regret") by Antoni Słonimski. My Polish version, titled "Liliowy bez," won the 2011 "Srebrne Pióro" poetry competition in Poland in the "Polonia" category and was recognized with the The Senate Eagle of the Republic of Poland.

The entire, 27-minute-long, interview is available at:
https://www.gracecavalieri.com/images/Danuta_Kosk-Kosicka.mp3

Lilac Lilacs

A big branch of lilac. Lilac.
Like the ones along the village road.
The carriage wheels through the sand,
yellow splashes of warblers whir
through the fragrance. Lilac smells
like ...lilac—May in Poland, warm days,
evenings not willing to sleep, simmering
desires. And then the verses
sound, better than any before. I can't open
my eyes to write them down. So I repeat
them over and over and slip
into another dream. I am gliding
through the air of music
toward luminous mountains.
I see myself as Chagall's
figure, long hair floating
parallel to my long dress. An orchestra
plays Elgar's "In the South"
and for the whole time I am there,
and the mountains, and the light.
Then a phone rings and I wake up
to answer, but the phone
does not ring. The birds
sing into my room. I come
down and can't find that poem.
But the lilacs,
the lilac lilacs...

Liliowy bez

Bez, liliowy bez. Jak tamten
przy wiejskiej drodze; koła bryczki
toczące się w piachu, żółtość wilg
migoczących w odurzeniu zapachem.
Bez pachnie jak... bez: maj w Polsce,
dni rozgrzane, wieczory do snu dalekie
w budzących się pragnieniach.
A potem słyszę wiersz, piękniejszy
od wszystkich mi znanych.
Nie mogę otworzyć oczu aby go zapisać,
więc powtarzam go wiele razy i odpływam
w inny sen. Unosi mnie w muzyce
w stronę lśniących gór.
Widzę siebie jak namalowaną
przez Chagalla: długie włosy
płyną za suknią. Orkiestra gra
"Na południu" Elgara,
ja przez cały utwór szybuję
w tym samym miejscu ku góróm i światłu.
Nagle dzwoni telefon, więc budzę się
aby podnieść słuchawkę, lecz telefon milczy.
Śpiew ptaków wpływa do pokoju.
Przytomnieję i nie pamiętam już
tamtego wiersza.
Ale bez,
liliowy bez...

Announcing: Children's Illustration Contest

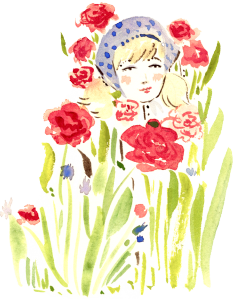
Are you a young artist or do you know one who is in grades 2-8? Would you like to help illustrate a book about classical music? If so, we would love for you to be a part of *The Children's Rhymes Project* illustration contest.

Original artwork in ink, watercolor, pastel, colored or graphite pencil, or any other two-dimensional medium is acceptable and being solicited from children of any heritage from everywhere to illustrate a book for children about the Polish composer Karol Szymanowski by our very own Dr. Laura Kafka-Price.

The book features 19 poems by the Polish poet Kazimiera Iłkiewiczówna set to music by Szymanowski. Children in grades 2-8 (ages 7-14) should submit original artwork that best illustrates the meaning of these poems. The best illustrations selected by qualified judges will be included in Laura's book. Winners will also receive monetary prizes and a copy of the book.

The illustration contest is underway, so get out those crayons, pencils, and paints and let's get illustrating!

Please visit <http://childrensrhymesproject.com/> where you will find detailed instructions about the contest, or contact Laura directly at laura@laurakafkaprince.com if you have questions.



Alvin Smithson at the Arts Club

The Arts Club of Washington, like every other institution, has moved most of its activities online. Still, every once in a while when conditions permit, the Club hosts events with limited participation, such as dinners in the courtyard and concerts in its gallery. On one such occasion last fall, pianist Alvin Smithson enchanted the lucky few in the audience with a recital of his own music.

A PAAA member and frequent performer at our events, Alvin is very familiar with the Arts Club's two Steinway pianos and felt right at home in its intimate setting. This showed in the moving and nuanced performance of his Toccata Mesa, Thunder Canyon, and Stony Man Wanderer, as well as other older and newer pieces.



National Philharmonic Performs Full Season of Concerts

You simply can't help but admire Maestro Piotr Gajewski, Founder and Artistic Director of the National Philharmonic. He doesn't let the worldwide pandemic stop him and his ensemble of musicians from performing music that they all love, and sharing that love with all of us. During the 2020-21 season we are treated two Sundays a month to beautiful music selected around particular themes. Concerts are free and can be watched online or on the PBS TV Channel. Our favorite was an all-Chopin performance by pianist Brian Ganz last December. We are happy that it will be presented again on Sunday, April 25 at 2 PM.

You can find the schedule and links to online performances on the National Philharmonic website: <https://nationalphilharmonic.org/>

The PAAA is fortunate to have Maestro Gajewski as our Honorary Board Member. Brian Ganz is the recipient of the American Council for Polish Culture's 2020 Cultural Achievement Award.



While things are improving as more people are vaccinated, the coronavirus pandemic is not over and the next few months are uncertain as far as full return to activities. We are hopeful but any plans must remain tentative. So here is a list of what our next few months will or may bring us:

**Online Chopin Event, Meeting with Author Annik LaFarge
March 21, 2021 at 3 PM**

Please see front page for details and register to participate

May Membership Meeting: no firm plans at this time but we may consider an online meeting. Scholarship applications are currently being accepted. Please see website,

Wianki Festival on the Mall

Tentative plans are underway for the third Saturday of June. Look for updates on the PAAA Website and Facebook page.

ACPC Convention and Accompanying Events Open to PAAA Members and the Public is tentatively scheduled for this fall in September or October, with the PAAA as host. Public events will be advertised on social media, via emails and in publications.

Please keep in touch and don't forget to renew your membership.
We are looking forward to seeing everyone as soon as possible.

[PAAA Facebook](#)

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