

April 2020

Neighbors

A little paper big on community

FREE

No. 182 Serving the inhabitants and environment of northeastern Connecticut and beyond

Dear Readers-

I hope you are reading this issue of Neighbors online. I will be using social media to inform the community of the greatly reduced pick-up locations during this pandemic and the safety and convenience of viewing the paper online. Unfortunately, there are many folks who don't have computers, internet access or both. If you know someone who would like a printed copy of Neighbors, I will make every effort to deliver one to their mailpost. I've had the bags for years, but didn't need them, until now. Please call or text (860-933-3376) or email (neighborspaper@yahoo.com) with the address. I reduced our press run by one-third but that still leaves 5,000 copies to be picked up or delivered. If you feel safe venturing into grocery stores, post offices or other open businesses, the paper will be there. Please be safe.

Tom King

GenX Rising. From the Couch. But Just to Stretch a Bit.

By Dagmar Noll

It's been widely noted that my generation, Gen X, is especially well-suited to cope with the main action required of ordinary humans in the COVID-19 pandemic struggle: social distancing and isolation. A generation of latchkey kids in single-parent homes or in homes where both parents worked outside the home, we fended for ourselves in daily, solitary confinement, alone with just our thoughts, a box of Nerds, and a land line. I totally agree with commentators and am super proud that my generation's skills are finally needed! While I wasn't a latchkey kid personally, many of my friends were, and I certainly wasn't allowed over a friend's house when their parents weren't home, so I did a lot of self-entertainment. Case in point, I had around thirty imaginary friends and pets, though only one of these was my BEST imaginary friend, and that was Elizabeth from the Waltons. I spent hours reading Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden in my treehouse. I taught myself needlepoint while watching Star Trek Next Generation and reruns of Little House on the Prairie. The idea of weeks alone in my apartment sounds like vacation, like all the promises of my childhood fulfilled. People are often amazed that I cycled alone for four weeks at the edges of society in a foreign country. "Didn't you get lonely?"

Nope.

And yes, I'm GEN X. I've never thought much about being a part of a generation until recently, when I have found myself suddenly and repeatedly misidentified as a Millennial, always by disgruntled Boomers. It is startling. "Wait, you're mad about what? I did what? Hold up...I said which thing? When? I was just sitting here quietly rereading Baby Sitters Club."

Heed, Boomers, cut it out. I'm not a Millennial. I'm not mad at you. As a GenXer, I like/dislike everyone equally based on whether or not they are bothering me while I am reading. You gave me plenty of room for day-dreaming and all the potato chips my heart desired, so I've got big love. And I'm certainly not mad at Millennials. They give me tips on how to unleash cool features on my phone, like deleting unwanted apps and using selfie mode to take a picture of that itchy spot on my shoulder that I can't quite see in the mirror because my eyesight isn't what it used to be. I experience millennials as totally useful with special skills they will happily share—if I am nice to them.

So, again, Boomers coming after me regarding this Millennial/Boomer war, your fight is not with me and the other GenXers. It is with those young people I watched you pick on for the last thirty years. From where I'm sitting—which is in front of my Nintendo eating Cheetos, surprised you noticed I exist—I've observed that all those snarky comments about avocado toast and condescension about the "me generation" didn't foster good feeling and connection with the youngins you are now dependent on as the civilization you built tanks around us. I am zero surprised they're mad.

Now, unless you need me to run to the grocery store for crucial quarantine supplies or perform CPR on someone who is in respiratory arrest, please leave me alone. I am trying to complete a level.



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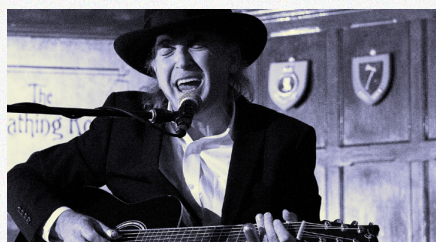
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On our cover: 3.24.20 My wife, Karen, and I needed to get out of the house and exercise. We took a nice walk that started in Bigelow Hollow State Park and continued into the Nipmuck State Forest in Union where we came upon Breakneck Pond.
T. King photo

This is our time on earth.
What are we doing with it?

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The Purpose of Neighbors:
-To encourage reading
-To provide a place where ideas, writing, artwork and photographs of area residents can be shared
-To encourage people to get involved in their communities
-To begin to solve national and global problems on a local basis
-To provide useful information
-To serve the inhabitants and environment of our region

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Death of Old Life, Birth of New?

By Loretta Wrobel

In America, we experienced the passing of our ordinary normal life, and are being catapulted into an entirely foreign way of moving through our days. Because of the Covid-19 virus threat we dealt with the death of our old familiar patterns, which as humans we both love and hate. We are creatures of habits and patterns, and we do not adjust easily to change. However, when the change is abrupt and catastrophic and not our choice, we are tumbled into shock, confusion and denial. Here we are in the USA in March 2020 and within a few weeks, our country has come to a tumultuous halt and the majority of us are sheltering in place.



As a nation a short time ago, we were buzzing around leading our frantic lives with so much to do and not enough time to get it all done. We complained perhaps, but loved the rapid pace and living on the edge. We rushed here and there, agreeing to be part of the fast beat of life, and demonstrating our addiction to the adrenaline rush of it all. Some heard of the news of the virus spreading throughout China; we knew this did not have anything to do with us. We in the United States had important deadlines to meet and happy hours to attend, while we eagerly waited for March Madness. We were safe ‘cuz we live in this powerful country with all the consumer goods we need available at any hour of the day or night. We could get a coffee to go anytime, and watch movies, go to bars, plays, concerts, and sports on demand.

How quickly the bubble burst and we entered the interconnected, interrelated, and boundary-less world of 2020. One person on another continent, half-way around the globe, did one thing that unleashed a virus that within months stopped the whole world. If we ever believed we were not one world that is influenced by all that goes on anywhere in the world, we now have our proof. The virus demonstrates loud and clear: What happens anywhere in the world is felt or will be felt throughout the planet.

We are in uncharted territory and we desperately want answers. There are no definite answers, as the path of the illness is unknown and the trajectory of economic, social, business, and fiscal recovery is at best an educated guess. We have quickly transitioned to mainly sheltering in place and having to live with our families 24-7. As a nation we are in trauma and feeling lost, uncertain, frightened, and grumpy. What happened? Our known life died, and now we have time on our hands to...what? We can do all the cleaning and catching up we wanted to get done; however, we are frozen. How do we manage?

First steps are to make sure we are taking care of ourselves and our loved ones. Adequate sleep, good nutrition, and exercise. Set up a schedule, making sure you include relaxed and fun times with activities that appeal to you. The best method to cope with an earth-shattering shift is to get some routines going. Every one in your household

needs some sort of order to their day. This re-establishes a sense of control and safety, as you start moving through your day with an idea of how the day will unfold. I am hearing of ingenious ways of handling social isolation using all the tools of our advanced technology. Stores almost instantaneously are providing curbside pickups, and online communities are offering services to vulnerable folks who do not wish to venture out. Websites are offering advice on how to deal with unruly children, and meditation exercises to calm the frayed nerves. I marvel at the creative outpourings of our friends and neighbors.

One of the joys I feel in the middle of this far-reaching and crippling emergency is hearing how human beings are staying with their humanness, even in the midst of grave predictions, fear, and trauma. I salute every medical person who is serving on the front lines, heroically saving lives and restoring health. They are working to maintain order and provide adequate healthcare, while attempting to protect themselves, often with diminishing supplies. The school personnel who are delivering meals to children, the caregivers who are providing care to our seniors and disabled, and the postal carriers who are keeping snail mail coming to our mailbox. A woman volunteered for a trial of a new vaccine. When asked why, she replied that she is privileged with a job she can work from home, an intact family with healthy teenagers, and wanted to do something, as so many less privileged are being crushed by the pandemic. A friend of mine shared a story about a person who went shopping for her. She secured this young woman through an online post, and after shopping, the woman refused any payment for her services or gas.

I am awed by the amount of compassion and goodwill in the midst of this epic health scare. So many are using the skill sets they possess to add peace, calm, and sanity to our new unrecognizable world. Take a moment to consider how you might add to the resettling of our country and world. It may be as basic as taking care of yourself or calling a friend. Or asking a neighbor if they need something when you are grocery shopping. Or waving to your postal carrier. Smiling at your kids. Planting a seed. Doing a dance. Or telling someone you love them. Being grateful for your health and your home.

I see the potential for a rebirth of spirit out of the chaos and unsustainable lifestyle that drove America before the virus attacked us. This is the perfect opportunity to build a healthier and just society, where we reexamine what is dear to us and our priorities. Since most of us are restricted in our movements and have limited contacts, we are provided with the opening to look closely at who we are, and how we will dance through the rest of our lives. Do we want to return to our bizarre, hectic pace, or are we sniffing at a slower, saner lifestyle with more time to hang out with our families and loved ones? Each of us has the unprecedented chance to make that decision because of the magnitude of the virus impact.

I shake my head and ponder the unknown answer to my burning question: What shifts will I embrace as I stumble through this colossal crisis? And what will America choose for its future after Covid-19?

Common Sense Car Care

By Rick Ostien

I had an article written for this month about brake systems operation and repairs, but in light of the coronavirus infections in our state and country, I decided to wait until next month to put that article out. Car care seemed like the last thing on everyone’s minds.

I thought it would be more appropriate to say a special thank-you to all the first responders, doctors, nurses, small businesses, grocery store workers, and truckers who have gone over and above the call of duty to provide for us in this time of need. These people are what America is all about. Their dedication and selflessness have been a beacon of light in what is a very dark time to most of us. This team effort of young and old giving and helping others will somehow pull

all of us through this. These world events will forever change our country much like 9-11 did. I pray that our scientists and doctors will find a way to defeat this virus they way they beat polio, small pox, and other global plagues. For now, I hope that you and your family stay safe and stay well.

Be sure to follow the CDC guidelines so that we can all get back to the way things were soon.

- Always remember:
- handwashing,
 - social distancing,
 - avoid touching your face
 - cover your cough or sneeze
 - clean frequently touched surfaces
 - and above all stay home if you feel sick.

Rick Ostien is the owner of Franc Motors in Willington.

Mistakes

Oh to our bittersweet mistakes riding on the back of a double edged sword!

Haunting us or teaching us? Which one do you choose it to be?

The foolish cling desperately to their pride and profess to having made none.

But our mistakes reflection we can not hide.

Just as the sun and stars can illuminate our path, so too can our errors.

Embrace them as the stepping stones of personal growth.

Love them or hate them. You can do both.

Lynda Bowen



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Willimantic, Now and Then:

Laughter and Community are always the Best Medicine

By Mark Svetz

My mother always told me that laughter is the best medicine for pretty much everything that made me want to cry. I guess that’s as true today as it was then; we sure have a lot to cry about. The other day, I brought a little gift to my son and his family and, although it wasn’t my intention, we all had a good laugh. I think it helped.

Sarah and I, like most people the world over, are “sheltering in place.” I don’t go out at all – except to my son’s house, as I’ll explain – and Sarah has stopped all but the most essential errands. Gregory, Liz and Miriam are doing the same thing. I think we are all inside a “circle of safety.” We trust each other to minimize our risks. Being able to visit them has made my life bearable during this medical crisis. This week, it has also brought some laughter into our lives.

We were a week or so into this evolving emergency and I was getting ready to go to Gregory’s house and visit. We have some early flowers this year and I decided to pick a few daffodils to go with some forsythia we’d put in water to bloom. Searching for a container, I came across a couple of empty beer bottles on the back porch. One of them made a perfect vase. It wasn’t until I walked in Greg’s front door, and he and Liz burst into laughter that I realized they were in a Corona bottle.

I’m sure we are all shocked by the speed with which this virus, called Corona, or COVID-19, has disrupted our lives, here in eastern Connecticut and around the world. There has been little laughter around me in the last couple weeks. As the professionals struggle to understand and find a way to control this disease, we are left to our own resources to figure out how to weather this storm. It is frightening.



It was poignant for me to note the 10th anniversary of the beginning of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Occupy members told us the government can’t help us until we tell them what we want and need. My community is coping with the need to feed themselves, take care of their homes and families while at the same time trying to responsibly limit social contact to protect ourselves and our community. From my limited view, it seems we are doing a pretty good job around here. I take a great deal of pride in the strength of our community.

The Occupy movement asked our communities to have conversations and come up with solutions to our problems. As the corona virus threatens, it is our community institutions that have led the response. Our universities, community colleges, local school districts and town halls started taking steps, setting the example for the state to make it official. I heard on the radio that 33 Connecticut school districts made decisions to close their doors before the governor issued that order to all schools.

The Willimantic Food Co-op, Generations Family Health Center, the Willimantic Pharmacy are among the many local establishments that have been taking steps from the beginning to provide their services and protect the people who need them. I trust the people in my community to make choices that will help us all get through this.

My most fervent hope is for everyone to stay healthy and take care of one another. We have serious work ahead of us, but I hope we can all find a good reason to laugh.



Photo by Mark Svetz. Mark Svetz has been a journalist, activist, teacher and self-appointed knight errant in Willimantic for the last 45 years... and counting! You can read more of Mark’s writing at www.Willimantic-Today.wordpress.com

How and Why to Keep Kids on a Schedule During School Closures

(StatePoint) School closures have forced families nationwide to readjust to the current reality. However, a sense of structure is important for children’s developmental growth. To create a routine for your kids that sticks, consider the following tips:

Just because there is no formal school day doesn’t mean kids should sleep in or stay up late at night. Keep the same bedtimes, wake-up routines and mealtimes you always maintained during a regular school week. Doing so will bookend the mornings and evenings with a sense of normalcy.

Mimic a school day to the best of your ability. Use the distance-learning tools your child’s teachers offer as well as other educational apps and resources to have kids focus on different school subjects. This will help break up the day into little chunks just as would happen in the classroom. Be sure to build in time for art projects, exercise and music. Most importantly, don’t forget “recess.” If possible, allow children to play in the backyard where they can socially distance from neighbors, or set up an area of your home for playtime.

Evenings are a good time to relax and unwind together. Play board games, watch your children’s favorite movies or even use the many resources available online to enjoy a virtual walking tour of a museum, botanical garden or zoo. This is also a good time to allow children to connect with their friends using video chat or with family



(c) Wavebreakmedia / iStock / Getty Images Plus

members they are not currently able to see in-person.

For many children, screens are their greatest distraction. For this reason, one of the best ways to ensure your children stay focused on the schedule you create for them is by managing their screen time.

One easy way to do so with less direct intervention from you (since you are likely busy yourself!) is by using a screen time monitoring and scheduling tool like the OurPact app. Get started by signing up for a free account and pairing your children’s devices. From there, you will be able to manage devices remotely to create a schedule that keeps kids offline when they need to be focused on other

things. It can also be customized to allow children to visit and use only certain learning sites or apps during particular hours of the day. Because this schedule lives on the children’s devices as well, you’ll be giving them the comfort of a routine. To learn more or download, visit OurPact.com.

During these challenging times, it can be tempting to let your family routine fly out the window. By using new tools such as distance-learning programming and schedule management apps, you can keep kids to a schedule that makes them ultimately happier and healthier.

Kong-Ka-Ree

By Bill Powers

The older I get, the more I look forward to harbingers of spring. The various stages of my life continue to be meaningful as I observe the different signs of spring. For most of my life, the coming of Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Easter were undeniable signs of spring but not very punctual signs. The exact date of Easter Sunday changes from year to year, but there is a definite period within which the day will fall. It can occur between March 22nd and April 25th. Other signs of spring are more precise!

Having played, coached and umpired baseball, just knowing spring training for professionals had begun in warmer climates always gives me a welcomed indicator of a new season. Furthermore, not only being a big fan of buttered blueberry pancakes covered with freshly made Connecticut maple syrup but also seeing the sap being collected continues to give me a mouth-watering signal of good things to come.

As the opportunities for pleasant outings increase for walking and hiking, so does the viewing of nature’s beautiful new beginnings: new buds on trees, daffodils and crocuses, skunk cabbage and other plants bursting into the sunshine. We hear the wondrous chorus of birds singing as their voices warm up for mating and establishing territories. At times we see and hear flocks of birds flying or stopping briefly on their journey to trees or fields.

On chilly spring days when the gentle warmth of the sun can be felt on my face, it is a perfect time to bring out the kayak to paddle in Pine

Acres Lake at Hampton’s Goodwin State Forest. The spring thaw and spring rains increase the water’s depth at the normally shallow lake -wherein I enjoy pleasantly paddling in the light breeze and gentle sunlight.

The Eastern painted Turtle is another creature who seeks the warm spring sunshine. After months of hibernating in the mud where there is little or no oxygen available, they make their way to the surface of the water for oxygen. Staying submerged too long without oxygen during colder and longer winters can be lethal. Having remarkable adaptive features allows them to survive without oxygen, but for a limited period of time. They absorb calcium from their shells to neutralize the acidity resulting from lack of oxygen. Surfacing to bask in the sun allows them not only to take in the warmth and oxygen but also to discontinue reducing the stores of calcium from their shells. The calcium allows them to survive by buffering the acidity in their tissues. They are cold blooded reptiles and can be seen basking in the sun at Pine Acres Lake on stumps, logs, and the edge of cattail tussocks.

The male Red-winged Blackbird regularly arrives at Goodwin in February. I have observed them beginning to arrive over the past five years between February 15th and the 24th. About seven weeks later, the females, after their migration from the south, begin to arrive and join the males. A preferred site for the nesting Red-winged Blackbirds is in cattails.

The “Kong-ka-ree – Kong-ka-ree” of the male Red-winged Blackbird is a very welcome sound to my ears after a long winter and one that I very much look forward to. Visitors to Goodwin Forest and Pine Acres Lake can see these pretty Blackbirds and colorful turtles among the cattails. As winter subsides and the wondrous transformation to spring’s new beginnings unfolds, walking on Goodwin’s many trails or paddling its waters allows you to observe your favorite personal harbingers of spring which adds energy and warmth to one’s life.

Bill Powers is a retired teacher and counselor residing in Windham. To complete requirements for his Master Naturalist program at the James L. Goodwin Conservation Center in Hampton, he studied Eastern Painted Turtles (sun turtles) in the field to determine an alternate method to estimate their population and when it is best to perform the count. He also observed a special relationship between Eastern Painted Turtles and Red-winged Black Birds. He invites readers of Neighbors to read about this in the Fall 2017, Vol. 82, No. 3, pages 14-15 of Connecticut Woodlands Magazine. It is available in the archives.



Epidemics and Shopping

By Angela Hawkins Fichter

It used to be that when you went to the grocery store, what you wanted was usually there. In mid-March I went to three different grocery stores, each from a different national chain. To my surprise and alarm, the shelves holding paper goods, like toilet paper, paper towels, and facial tissues, were empty. One of the stores had empty meat cases. I complained to friends about it. They had experienced the same thing. I complained to customers in the stores about it. They had experienced the same thing. I had a haircut appointment (fortunately that was just before the governor closed barbershops and hairdressers because of the epidemic), and my hairdresser said, try store X again, so I went right after the haircut. The shelves for paper goods were empty, but there was a store stock cart with paper goods on it and two stock clerks putting the goods on shelves. I soon discovered why it took two clerks. One to put the toilet paper on the shelf, and the other to snatch toilet paper packages out of customers’ hands. This came with a sharp scolding, “No, No, you are only allowed to take ONE toilet paper package and ONE paper towel package.” I wondered if the next time I tried to buy toilet paper in that store if the toilet paper stock clerks would be armed. Other customers put their prized packages of toilet paper and paper towels in their carts, but I had to tuck mine under my arms because all the other shopping carts were in use. That never happened to me before. When I went and stood in line at the check out cash register, I stood behind a young couple. I complained that it was impossible to buy toilet paper anymore. The woman said, “Oh, my house is FULL of toilet paper. Her husband turned to me and said, “Our children are young, but they will be teenagers before the toilet paper in our house is used up.” Well, I was born and raised in NY, not rural northeast CT, so I thought of all kinds of things to say to her. But I didn’t say them. I thought, this selfish woman is actually bragging about her piggyness. What we need right now is a statute that makes hoarding of food and paper products illegal. The punishment? Well, at first I thought that hoarders of toilet paper ought to be flushed down the toilet, but now I think we ought to bring back an old-fashioned punishment: wooden stocks on the town

green. If you are found guilty of hoarding big amounts of toilet paper, you would be put in the stocks, with your head, arms and legs through holes in the stocks. Then the police would hang a couple rolls of toilet paper on a rope around your neck. You’d only have to stay there for one day, but it would have to be a day that was raining or snowing. After all, a person like that is depriving elderly and disabled people (like me) from access to toilet paper, so the punishment should be one the guilty would remember.

I was pleased when all three of these stores from three different chains (Stop & Shop, Big Y, Walmart) decided to have certain shopping times limited to people age 60 and over. The first to do this was Stop & Shop, where only people age 60 and over could shop at the hours of 6AM to 7:30AM. I set my alarm clock for 5AM for the first such day at Stop & Shop. Boy was that hard on me. I am retired. I don’t remember every setting my alarm for 5AM before. 6AM yes, but 5? Only farmers and fishermen get up that early. I dressed and got in the car. It was pitch black outside and raining hard and was foggy. I took Rte. 6 into Willimantic going beneath the speed limit because I could barely see, thanks to the dark, heavy rain, and fog. Got to the store at 6:15 AM. A television crew was there with their cameras to take videos of oldies going into the store so early. I went right to the shelves with paper products. Except that there weren’t any paper products. I asked a customer who had toilet paper in his cart what time he arrived. Oh, way before 6AM, and I got on the line he said. And we all went to the paper products aisle as soon as they let us in. At that point I decided I must be asleep, but no, he was telling me the truth. He only had one package of toilet paper in his cart, although store clerks said they would let him buy two, but he felt others wanted toilet paper too. I hope that guy never runs out of toilet paper for the rest of his life.

A psychologist in the TV news was interviewed as to why some people were hoarding. She said: because in an epidemic it makes them feel like they have some power. Does that mean that hoarders didn’t pay any attention in science class in high school? Don’t the hoarders know that a house full of toilet paper won’t protect you from germs or from getting the corona virus?

Taking a Top Down Approach to Home Exterior Updates

(StatePoint) Whether you want to boost the beauty of your home for your own enjoyment or you’re looking to sell in the near future, experts recommend taking a top-down approach to evaluate the outside of your home.

“When making updates to your home exterior, it’s helpful to think of how all the parts of the whole work together to create a unified look,” says Kate Smith, chief color maven with Sensational Color.

With that in mind, here are a few remodeling ideas to get you started:

The Roof

A new roof not only adds aesthetic appeal, it can add value too. Indeed, Remodeling’s Cost vs. Value 2020 report shows that a roof replacement can have a return-on-investment of over 60 percent.

Composite roofing is particularly durable, long-lasting and low-maintenance, and an all-around smart investment. Not only does a high-quality roof help home-sellers get foot traffic, but the low-maintenance aspect really resonates with house-hunters. An attractive, more affordable alternative to the real thing, the composite slate and shake roofing options available from manufacturers like DaVinci Roofscapes, for example, reduce pesky maintenance concerns, offering impact-, fire- and wind-resistance, as well as the peace of mind that comes with a strong warranty.

This is also a good choice for both those with a clear color palette



in mind, and those who might need some direction, as free resources on the DaVinci Roofscapes site include a Color Visualizer offering users the ability to see how different colors may look on their home exteriors, as well as a variety of free e-books with project inspiration and advice. To learn more, visit www.davinciroofscapes.com.

“Using these free color tools can be both fun and empowering,” says Smith. “They take the guesswork out of crafting a pleasing exterior color palette for the home and help create increased curb appeal.”

Siding

If your home sports traditional siding, you may have noticed that the tiles contract and expand in fluctuating weather conditions and temperatures. What’s more, the color of these often-times thin and flimsy materials can fade quickly.

Rather than replacing siding with more of the same, consider composite siding built to resist impact, fire,

mold, algae, insects, salt air and high winds. The hand-split shake siding available from DaVinci Roofscapes is made of virgin resins, UV and thermal stabilizers, plus a highly-specialized fire retardant. Whether you add accent panels with composite siding or go for the whole house, this can add a hassle-free aesthetic benefit to your home and boost its value.

Walkways

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Sprucing up? Go for high-impact projects that boost curb appeal and add value to the home.

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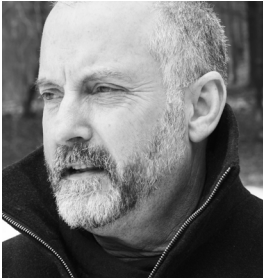
By C. Dennis Pierce

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”, began Dicken’s novel, A Tale of Two Cities. It tells a story of contrasts and comparisons during a dire time in England. I borrowed this quote because as I write this column, we might all say it is the worst of times as COVID – 19 keeps peaking, but I think we should also look at the positive side of this unprecedented event. I would imagine that like myself in the last few weeks, you took a mental inventory of your resources, maybe became closer to your neighbors, or reached out via the internet or phone to someone you have not contacted in a long time. Maybe you began that project at home that you have been putting off and I would suggest that you possibly even sat down with your family for a real meal made from scratch. Perhaps it is a time for reckoning. A time to realize maybe living simpler is a better way to go. This is a time when we have fewer distractions to hide from. A time when we will have to learn how to sit with ourselves and sort out our thoughts. No one knows how this will all turn out but together through sheltering and maintaining social distances we will get through all of this. In the end, the one thing we need to be reminded of, is that we all need to accept the idea that tomorrow was never promised, we just always took it for granted.

You may be reading this month’s paper on line for the first time and maybe you have never picked it up before at the many places where it is offered. I hope you take the time to read all of the articles written by all of us who every month contribute our thoughts without compensation. For me it is the opportunity that someone will change their purchasing habits and buy more local food and get back to enjoying those local commodities that Connecticut has to offer.

Today, as I write this, it is 59 degrees out and I am making lists on the back of an old envelope. I have not started any seeds yet but promised myself I would start more plants from scratch this year. The downside to this decision is that E.O. Smith’s FFA annual plant sale will not be getting the large purchase of grown plants that I make with them every year. For many of us, as we sheltered in place, we began to store food items which ultimately cause a shortage of several commodities. The bare shelves reminded me of the stories my folks told me about when there was a lack of certain food items during the war. At that time, they joined many others and started a victory garden in their back yard. During World War II the nation fell on hard times. With fresh fruits and vegetables in short supply, food needed to be rationed and the government ultimately turned to the citizens to do their part to keep the nation fed. Families on the home front were encouraged to “put their idle land to work” and to produce “victory” gardens to combat the food shortage. Today our supply chain is being stressed to its limits, and even if barren shelves are more a symptom of panic buying than an actual shortage, anything we can do to relieve stress on the supply chain will help. Spring is here so now is the perfect time to plan your own victory garden this year. This takes less space than you think. Some are repurposing their own personal spaces in their yards into a new generation of victory gardens — symbols of self-reliance, food production and community resilience not seen since wartime.

Now is the opportunity to grow your own food during these economically uncertain times. We can be social with the distancing, getting people out of isolation and into the sunshine, getting our hands in the soil. Even if food access doesn’t come to be, channeling our energy



into the dirt is a productive way to handle challenging emotions. We all need to be productive in a time when it’s easy to feel vulnerable and helpless. Much like the wartime gardens, these are not only about growing our own fresh food for your own consumption but really about building morale and reducing anxiety. Heck, even you grow a few tomatoes, it’s literally grounding.

I thought I would include a simple, inexpensive, tasty recipe this month with easily accessible ingredients, most of which you probably already have at home. This can be made for a quick lunch or with bread and salad into a dinner meal. If you do try it out please write and tell me your thoughts.

Potato and Bean Soup

Makes 6 servings

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup of olive oil
- 1 large onion, cut into ½ inch dice
- 2 large potatoes, peeled and cut into ½ inch dice
- 1 can (14 ½ ounce) Italian plum tomatoes with juice, seeded and chopped
- 3 cups of water (you can also use chicken broth instead)
- 3 cups of freshly cooked white beans such as cannellini or Great Northern or canned, rinsed and drained cannellini beans.
- ¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano cheese
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 3 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons, chopped parsley

Directions:

Heat olive oil in a large soup pot over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until it begins to turn golden, about 5 minutes



Add potatoes and cook until they are lightly browned about 10 minutes or more, stirring several times to prevent from sticking to the pot. Stir in the tomatoes with their juice and cook, uncovered, until tomatoes lose some of their liquid, about 15 minutes. Add the water (or chicken stock) and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a very slow but steady simmer and cook, covered, until the mixture thickens a bit 15 minutes. Add beans and thoroughly heat. If the soup is too thick, add a little more water, but this is supposed to be a thick soup. Add ¼ cup of the grated cheese and stir well. Taste and add salt and pepper as needed. Go heavy with the pepper. Serve soup in warmed bowls and drizzle each serving with about ½ teaspoon of olive oil and

to with a sprinkle of parsley Pass the remaining cheese.

As I wrap up this month’s column, we must remember that everyone can participate to make our community safe. There is something you can do – you can socially distance and that in itself is a significant contribution to keeping our community safe. If you have a suggestion for a farm or a local grower or even a recipe that would feature a local ingredient, please let me know. I will do my best to share your suggestions in a future column. Drop me a line at Codfish53@Yahoo.com. Peas be with you...

Prayer and the current pandemic

By Douglas Paul

The present threat of contagion must be taken seriously by everyone and responded to in every practical way possible. And while health and safety represent the first wave of concern resulting from the pandemic, we’re already seeing mounting threats to job security and long-term financial stability for individuals and the economy as a whole. The speed of impact can easily seem overwhelming.

Prayer confronts fear

Fear is the greatest enemy, and it needs to be fought every day. One might say that fear itself is contagious and needs to be treated with a powerful antidote. Prayer that acknowledges and feels the presence of an all-loving, all-powerful, universal God, good, is an effective treatment for fear. It quiets thought, enabling us to feel the protecting, comforting, and healing love that is God. It strengthens our courage to trust in a power that is unseen by our physical senses, but is nonetheless felt. It makes us receptive to hear important thoughts from God (angel messages) that direct us toward actions that are helpful to ourselves and others. But its impact doesn’t stop there. Feeling the presence of God, as divine Love overcoming fear, makes our bodies less susceptible to disease or even dissolves it’s symptoms.

Biblical reassurance

The Bible’s book of Psalms contains many reassuring statements of God’s all-embracing love for all creation, and of His universal presence and might. Many young men and women in the military have experienced life-saving protection and healing from the 91st Psalm. Here are some excerpts from the New Living Translation:

“Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;... For He will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. ...Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at mid-day...No evil will conquer you, no plague will come near your home. For He will order His angels to protect you wherever you go.”

We also have Jesus’ reassurance : “Fear not little flock. It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” And speaking of basic needs such as food and clothing (and maybe even toilet paper :-), Jesus said “Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of such things before you ask Him.” Repeatedly Jesus counseled:” fear not, only believe”, and “thy faith hath made thee whole.”

Inseparable from good

Fundamentally the source of fear is the mistaken assumption that we are separate from God and/or unworthy of God’s love, or worse yet, that God sends disease and death as punishment for our sins. We can free ourselves from such fears and their effects, when we see the deeper teachings of the Bible as confirming God’s unconditional love and grace, His desire to save, not condemn, to bless not curse, and to heal, not cause suffering.

We too can triumph over fear of contagion, isolation, unemployment, or financial loss, and have our needs met practically as we accept the assurances of God’s impartial and all-embracing love. A central theme of the Bible is “God with us.” When God is with us; that is in our minds and hearts, we can realize the presence of health, harmony, peace, and supply. Prayer transports us to a state of thought where we find safety in the face of danger, we experience health instead of disease, and we find unexpected sufficiency in place of lack.

Helping others

What’s more — through prayer we can each help others worldwide. Praying to realize that divine Love is already everywhere — protecting, comforting, healing and inspiring the thoughts of all of humanity, we are helping to counteract the feeling of inevitable suffering and loss. Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of Christian Science, wrote with conviction: “Soul (another name for divine Love or God) has infinite resources with which to bless mankind...” Those resources include hope, faith, compassion, harmony, health, joy, creativity, generosity — and they inspire and motivate the brotherly love that is being seen and felt by many worldwide.

Local resources

Specific to the question of contagious disease, periodicals published by The Christian Science Publishing Society have included verified testimonies from people who overcame fear and were healed of contagious disease and traumatic experiences through prayer-based treatment in Christian Science. To request copies of these articles, email cswillimantic@gmail.com or call 860-456-3230 and leave a message. Include your name and address, or email address, and we will respond promptly. Be safe and well. Open your thoughts to God’s all-embracing love and let go of fear. Remember the words of the familiar African American Spiritual: “He’s got the whole world in His hands.”

Unsung Heroes of Soul:

Betty Harris

By Dean Farrell

As host of “The Soul Express” on WECS, I play the biggest names in 1960s and ‘70s-era soul music. I also mix in the many great soul artists who did not make it big but were no less talented. This month’s column is about one such act: Betty Harris, whose mid-2000s career revival I helped to spearhead.

She was born Elizabeth Crews in Orlando, Florida, on September 9, 1939. About three years later, the family relocated to Alabama, where Betty’s parents founded the Pentecostal Deliverance Ministries in Dothan and Cottonwood.

By age twelve, Betty was fronting a choir that sang behind one of the biggest gospel stars of the day, Brother Joe May. She also crossed paths with Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Sam Cooke & The Soul Stirrers, the Dixie Hummingbirds, and the Five Blind Boys of Alabama (and Mississippi).

As a teen-ager, Betty moved to New York City to pursue a career in secular music. She landed a singing job at the Celebrity Club in Freeport, Long Island. This led to a meeting with Zell Sanders, the owner of J&S Records, who hired Betty to sing at a club she owned in Hempstead. Sanders also asked Betty to join the Hearts, a female doo-wop group who recorded for J&S. She sang lead on just one of their releases, 1958’s “Like Later Baby.”

Betty caught a performance at Harlem’s Apollo Theater by one of the major Rhythm & Blues stars of the day, Big Maybelle. After the show, Betty went backstage to meet her. Maybelle was impressed enough to hire the young singer for her tour. But contrary to music lore, Betty was never the woman’s maid.

During a 1962 visit to California, she cut her first solo outing, “Taking Care of Business” / “Yesterday’s Kisses,” for Douglas Records. With the label’s shoestring budget and limited distribution, Betty’s debut release did nothing.

Also in California, she met R&B star Solomon Burke and his manager, Marvin “Babe” Chivian, who recommended that Betty see writer/producer Bert Berns when she returned to New York. Upon doing so, Betty told Berns that she liked “Cry to Me,” the mid-tempo 1962 hit that he produced on Burke, but that she would have sung it slower and with even more “expression and soul.” Berns recorded the song on Betty in July 1963. The resulting single, on Jubilee Records, hit #10 R&B and #23 pop.

Betty’s next release, “His Kiss,” peaked at #15 R&B and #89 pop in early 1964. Despite some fine efforts,



including “Mo Jo Hannah” and “Now Is the Hour,” none of Betty’s subsequent Jubilee singles made the national charts. Eventually, Bert Berns lost interest in her.

In mid-1965, Betty met the New Orleans-based writer/producer, Allen Toussaint, who flew her to the Crescent City to record for his and Marshall Sehorn’s Sansu label. Despite an excellent body of work that included the trailblazing funk jam “There’s a Break In the Road,” only one of Betty’s efforts with Toussaint, “Nearer to You,” made the national charts.

In 1969, Jubilee reissued “Cry to Me.” It spent five weeks on the R&B chart, peaking at #44. That same year, the British label, Action, came out with “Soul Perfection,” an anthology of Betty’s Sansu material. The album was not released in the U.S.

Tired of the endless touring, Betty Harris left the music business at the end of the ‘60s. She focused on her family, limited her singing to the church, and worked various jobs, though not—again, contrary to popular lore—as an over-the-road trucker.

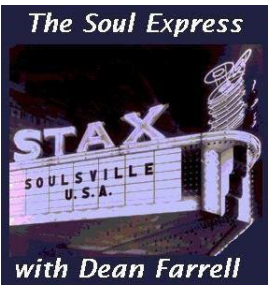
At this point, I go from being a chronicler of the Betty Harris story to an active participant.

In 2004, I was doing my college radio show, “The Soul Express,” on WHUS at the University of Connecticut. Betty’s son, Tony Crews, e-mailed me that his mother lived in Hartford and was interested in returning to music. He asked if she could be on my show. So on Saturday night, June 19, 2004, Betty Harris visited WHUS and spent ninety minutes on the air with me. We alternated between interview segments and sets of her music.

On Sunday, April 17, 2005, she made her first live appearance since 1969 (which I hosted)—at Weaver High School in Hartford. Later that year, Betty performed in Melbourne, Australia, and returned there in November 2006. The following year, she released her debut album, “Intuition.”

Along with Australia, Betty has played acclaimed gigs in Spain, Italy, France, New York’s Lincoln Center, and the Ponderosa Stomp in New Orleans (among other places). She now lives in Middletown, Connecticut, and sings locally with her own band, the Breaking News.

- Charted singles:
- “Cry to Me” (1963) #10 R&B, #23 Pop
 - “His Kiss” (1964) R&B #15, Pop #89
 - “Nearer to You” (1967) R&B #16, Pop #83
 - “Cry to Me” (Reissue, 1969) R&B #44



Epidemics, Now and Then

By Angela Hawkins Fichter

The epidemic of the Spanish flu really hit the world hard in 1918-1919. About one third of the world’s population got it, and about fifty million died. As military personnel came home from Europe and World War I, the virus came with them. Philadelphia had a big Liberty Loan Parade in September, 1918. Because so many people gathered together to see the parade, the virus spread quickly, and in six months from the parade there were more than half a million cases and sixteen thousand people had died in Philadelphia.

During the current epidemic of corona virus, I am thinking frequently of my grandmother. She

and my grandfather and their two small children lived in Philadelphia at the time of the Spanish flu. She died in 1986 at the age of 95, but she still remembered the Spanish flu. She told me they had a neighbor that felt fine on day one, felt so sick on day two he went to the hospital, and was dead on day three. One of the symptoms of the Spanish flu that is similar to the corona virus is that the lungs can get very congested. Back then they did not have ventilators or intravenous fluids. Now we do.

How many people in the US died of the Spanish flu? Over 675,000 Americans. Not since the Black Death over 500 years earlier had so many people died of an epidemic. That one was named bubonic plague.

What did we learn from the Spanish flu? Suppress gatherings of people, which is how a virus spreads quickly. That is why churches are closing for services, except on line, why schools are closing, except on line, why restaurants are closing, except take-out, and why libraries are closing.

So try to avoid crowds, and when you shop, try to stay several feet away from the nearest person, wash your hands frequently, and pray, not only for yourself and your family, but for your neighbors, your community, and the world, that we all survive this pandemic.

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The Decade of Biko - Part I

By Delia Berlin

When people hear that our parrots are 25 and 28 years-old, they usually ask us how long will they live. My response tends to be “I don’t know” for several reasons. First, normally one doesn’t know how long anyone will live, regardless of life expectancy, present condition and history. Second, not enough is known about most species of parrots to make valid predictions, and as husbandry improves, their average longevity becomes a moving target.

But another reason for me to answer that I don’t know is personal. In 1993, our family was joined by Biko, an extraordinary Red-bellied parrot. While most sources estimate the life expectancy of this species to be between 20 and 30 years, we unexpectedly lost Biko when he was just over ten years of age.

A decade is still a long time, so many of our friends got to know Biko and witnessed most of his antics. It helps to have witnesses, because much of what Biko did was quite unbelievable and since his life ended before the era of smart phones, we have only our memories and a few pictures to share his incredible talents and beauty. Before getting Biko, we had our Timneh parrot, Eureka, and a Guinea pig, Pepper. Although they didn’t interact, they could see each other all day. When our sweet Pepper died, we no longer felt right leaving Eureka home alone while we were all at work or school. We then decided that another parrot would be better company for her. Since Eureka was very demanding, we researched parrot personalities and traits, looking for a species that would be smaller and more independent. Red-bellied parrots seemed to fit the bill, and an aviary in Connecticut was raising them. As a bonus, they were also beautiful and sometimes talked, so we put a deposit on a baby.

Biko was ready to make the trip home at the tender age of two months. By then, he was fully feathered and ate independently. Most birds reach their full size by the time they fledge, but usually juveniles have some characteristics that distinguish them from adults. In the case of red-bellies, their eyes are dark, gradually becoming red as they near maturity. Also, they are among the minority of parrots that are sexually dimorphic. While all juveniles have a red belly, only males get to keep it for the rest of their lives. During their first molt, before age one, the females’ bellies change from red to green. While Biko was just a baby, his temperament and beak size strongly suggested that he was male and his belly would remain red-orange. After his molt, we confirmed our assumption. Soon after Biko came home, our parrot club had a membership meeting. That month’s program was a parrot talent show and members were invited to show off their parrots. We usually took Eureka to these meetings, but having a new baby home, we decided to take Biko. He won a few medals, mainly for sweetness and looks, since he was too young to do tricks. But as we returned home, we parked the car in the garage, took the carrier out and opened its top to get Biko out. My husband, daughter and I were bent down, surrounding the carrier. Biko sprung out like a Jack-in-the-box and in the same high-pitched “motherese” that I used to talk to him, exclaimed “Hi! How are you!” He was ten weeks-old.



I still remember the looks in my husband’s and daughter’s faces. We were checking each other out to be sure we were not dreaming. Without any special training, Biko was talking, clearly and in appropriate sentences. That was only the beginning of a decade of endless amusement, courtesy of our ten-ounced feathered bundle of joy.

Biko seemed to be thrilled by the fascination that he could cause. He seemed determined to show everyone what he knew, and then relish in their astonishment. He was observant to a fault and could learn patterns easily, predicting what would happen next and demonstrating it in advance. For example, if I was peeling potatoes by the sink and reached in to gather the peels, he would squeak



just like the door under the sink, but a split second before I opened it. He seemed to be telling me “I know the exact noise that you are going to make now and I’m going to show you!”

One of the most endearing examples of this proclivity of his was his learning of all my habits. And so, he taught me things about myself that I didn’t even know. One day, someone walked into the kitchen with snowy shoes, leaving big blobs of melting snow everywhere. I took a paper towel and knelt down to wipe them. Before the towel hit the floor, Biko “tiskd” literally taking the “tsk” out of my mouth. Apparently, I had the habit of tisking when annoyed, but wasn’t aware of it. He surely was!

I could write pages of similar anticipatory utterances, from the beeps of our alarm system, to saying “Bye bye!” as guests reached for their coats. He also had varied appropriate responses to many things. If there was a loud noise, he could yell “What happened?” or “Holy cow!” or “Oh my God!” Once, as we lunched with family on our patio, while Biko enjoyed his outdoor cage, a Great-blue Heron flew right over us on its way to our pond. We all gasped, and a second later Biko exclaimed “Big bird!” While we talked to Biko all the time, as we would talk to a young child, we didn’t make special efforts to teach him particular vocabulary. He naturally learned all our family names, including our cleaning lady’s, who only came every other week. She actually looked forward to cleaning our house, where she was instantly greeted by a polite little voice, “Hi Bea, how are you?”

Biko also appeared to have a sense of humor. Once, when we were enjoying a meal with company, he would repeatedly mumble something until one of our guests turned around to look at him, at which time he would ask her “Did you hear that?” This went on several times, to the disbelief of our guests.

In addition to learning the meaning of words, Biko could extend their use to new situations. I remember a time when we took him to a parrot club picnic at a park. He was having a good time, tasting picnic foods, when someone walked by a little too fast and too close, pushing a stroller. He got very startled and started flying around yelling “The cat! The cat! The cat!” He knew what “the cat” meant and usually warned us when one was near, but he also used those words to refer to other scary things or predators. Biko also learned to ask questions. I typically worked late on Wednesdays, but arrived home before my husband, who played tennis on those evenings. After greeting me, he would ask “Where is David?” or sometimes “Where is your daddy?” Since I called David “your daddy” as I talked to Biko, he referred to David either by name or by “your daddy” – he probably heard these two words as one and considered them a synonym of his name.

When my daughter started college, she would say her goodbyes to the parrots every time she left home to return to campus after a break. I thought it would be cute if Biko learned to say “Ana went to Princeton!” But apparently, he didn’t think so. It was the only phrase I did try to teach him, to no avail. He was in complete control of what he said.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that Biko wasn’t all sweetness. For two-and-a-half years, indeed, he was. But once he started to mature, he became very aggressive with everyone, except with David. At that point, I had to “stick train” him. In other words, I had to train him to step on and off a stick, to be able to move him around to clean and service his cage without losing blood in the process.

Aggressive behavior in parrots after sexual maturity is not unusual, although not all individuals exhibit it, except in a defensive way. Parrots are prey animals and their only defense is biting. Even gentle parrots bite occasionally, if threatened or confused. But Biko was deliberately aggressive with everyone but David. I speculated that perhaps members of this species must undergo some breakup with their original flock, to establish new territories and reproduce with non-related individuals. I never did anything to deserve Biko’s reversal of affection towards me, but I didn’t take it against him either. I was happy that at least he had David to bond to, and I was able to enjoy him without much contact, except for an occasional head tickle.

I should explain, for those not acquainted with parrot bites, that these are not little pecks. Almost all parrots, are cavity nesters. Their powerful beaks must be able to carve cavities in trees and to shell hard nuts. The sides of their bills have a notch or protrusion called “tomial tooth” that adds power to their bite. This “tooth” is also present in raptors and it is believed to be used to kill prey and to break spines at the neck. There is limited knowledge about the habits of Red-bellied parrots in the wild, but their arid natural range suggests that they may be omnivorous, and the featherless patches around their beak and eyes may indicate scavenging tendencies. I can say from experience that the tomial tooth packs a punch and that when these birds decide to use it, they can be lightning fast and bite to the bone.

What happened to Biko? How did we lose him unexpectedly, presumably still in his youth? The answers to those questions will unfold in the next part of this story.

Benefits of the Plague

By Grace Preli

Instability, confusion, difficulty, uncertainty... it’s a crazy world out there right now. But in the chaos lies the calm, in the problem lies the solution. Though things are uncertain, now is the perfect time to dig down and look at what is working and what is not. How do you build a house? One board at a time. And right now, it’s time to get building!

So. What do you want? Not sure of how to know what you want? Let me help you out. Have you heard of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs? It’s the theory that human needs can be broken into five categories. Picture a pyramid, with the base of the pyramid being physiological needs such as food, water and shelter. The middle of the pyramid contains our needs of safety,

connection and esteem. Self actualization sits atop the needs pyramid and is characterized by our desire to become the most we can be. It is our self-fulfillment, or potential and the desire to accomplish anything and everything that we can.

If we are struggling to meet our needs at the base of the pyramid, our needs in the middle or at the top of the pyramid become harder and harder to meet. If you spend the majority of your time and energy acquiring food, shelter, employment, resources and property, it’s likely you’ll have less time and energy to meet your needs of friendship, connection, freedom, self-esteem and recognition. So how do you start to meet all of your needs?

First it’s important to recognize what your needs and wants and priorities are and then to make an honest and com-

plete assessment of your life and where you are on your way to meeting those needs. What is working for you and what is not? What parts of your life can you upgrade to help you feel more free to pursue those middle pyramid needs? We at Manning Enterprizes have been asking ourselves the same questions.

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The Elements of Writing - The Hook

By Felix F. Giordano

“The Hook” refers to a certain element of attraction to whatever medium is presented. A newspaper or website headline can read, “Man Will Survive Fall” but upon reading the full article we learn that it’s a human-interest story about a farmer’s special technique for canning vegetables after the summer harvest. It might be a bit deceiving, but it did its job enticing people to continue reading.

Often, people say, the best parts of a movie were the previews. Scenes of car chases, explosions, natural disasters, excite the public and coax them to turn over their hard-earned money to see movies when in fact, quite a few of these hyped movies consist of either boring dialogue, uninteresting characters, or undeveloped plots.

That’s not to say that most products have an enticing hook and then substandard content. On the contrary, a product, whether it be a news article, movie, or book can consist of an extraordinary story but if it has a substandard hook, then it will suffer the fate of limited exposure. There have been so many movies that for one reason or another have been duds at the box-office but once they made it to TV have become classics. Perhaps they didn’t have that “Hook” during their initial promotion. Think of these classic movies: It’s a Wonderful Life, Shawshank Redemption, The Wizard of Oz, The Big Lebowski, or even Blade Runner. Each are examples of excellent movies that were box office bombs and did not receive critical acclaim upon release. Now they have become even more popular as time has evolved, they have spawned countless similar movies, and are now considered standards of their genres.

Now that we know what “The Hook” is and how it relates to the content of a news story or a movie, I’m going to discuss “The Hook” as it relates to literature. I’m sure most of you know “The Hook” for Charles Dickens’ novel, A Tale of Two Cities. It goes, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, ...”. That hook is so simple in its elemental form, but it says so much and piques our interest to keep reading. We want to learn more about what can be so good but also so bad about that society.

If you’ve recently been to a bookstore or library, you’ve encountered people in the aisles with their heads figuratively buried inside a book. Usually, they’ll turn to the first page of the book, read a few lines, perhaps read the back cover and then either put the book back on the shelf and move on to another book or take the book and bring it to the cashier or librarian and then bring it home with them. What they have done is to evaluate “The Hook” of the book which either piqued their interest or not. The book’s hook, for better or worse, made them decide to purchase or rent the book or in fact, reject it altogether.

Writers introduce readers to their stories by the use of an effective hook. On a website titled, WriteItSideways.com, it identifies four things to avoid in the first sentence or paragraph of your story: 1) Dialogue, 2) Excessive Description, 3) Irrelevant Information, and 4) Introducing Too Many Characters. It goes on to explain the six essential aspects of hooking the reader:

Make Your Readers Wonder - Put a question in your readers’ minds.

Begin at a pivotal moment - By starting at an important moment in the story, your reader is more likely to want to continue so he or she can discover what will happen next.

Create an interesting picture - Description is good when it encourages people to paint a picture in their minds.

Introduce an intriguing character - The promise of reading more about a character you find intriguing will, no doubt, draw you into a story’s narrative.

Start with an unusual situation - Show us characters in unusual circumstances, and we’ll definitely be sticking around to see what it’s all about.

Begin with a compelling narrative voice - Open your story with the voice of a narrator we can instantly identify with, or one that relates things in a fresh way.

The best way that I can describe “The Hook” is to use my own examples. My first novel, Montana Harvest began with the following paragraph: “The thunderstorm continued to bully its way onto the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of the Oglála Lakota Nation in western South Dakota. In an old three-room unheated cabin, illuminated by a solitary kerosene lamp, the extended Robinson family huddled in the living room.”

From this paragraph we know there is a Native American family living in squalor and relying upon one

another for comfort and protection. The thunderstorm provides a foreboding element to the story and the reader senses that something bad is about to happen. Does it make the reader want to continue?

In my second novel, Mystery at Little Bitterroot I used the following paragraph to introduce the story: “Driving his Cedar County Sheriff’s Department issued SUV upland toward the Little Bitterroot River, Sheriff Jim Buchanan felt the darkness seep inside. He turned to his passenger, Elijah Sizemore. “Show me exactly where you found it.”

I broke one of the WriteItSideways.com rules by including dialogue in the first paragraph, but it is such a short and direct piece of dialogue that it works in moving the hook forward. We know the sheriff in the story senses that an encounter with something malevolent is about to happen. We also learn that his passenger already knows something about this, and we feel that as a reader, we are also about to find out what is going on.

In my last novel, Missing in Montana I began the story with this sentence, “Peta Ross was trapped between a past that failed her dreams and a future that would deceive her faith.”

“The Hook” in Missing in Montana is a bit different than the hooks in Montana Harvest and Mystery at Little Bitterroot but in Missing in Montana we immediately sympathize with Peta Ross. How can someone be so unfortunate to not only lose their hopes and dreams but then discover that everything they ever believed in would literally be torn from them? I also used the technique of reversing the first letters of the words in these two phrases, failed her dreams and deceive her faith. Subliminally, the juxtaposition connects with the reader’s mind.

In my newest novel, Miracle of the Talking Stick the opening sentence reads, “In Mallory Montana, a town of more than four-thousand people, a series of unsolved disappearances going back nearly ten years created a sense of dark desperation that hovered over the entire community.”

This hook provides the reader with a sense that for a long period of time something is just not right with Mallory Montana. Because it involves unsolved disappearances that community most likely lives in terror. The reader wants to know what the connection is between the disappearances and the fear that resides in the hearts of the people and why the disappearances are still unsolved after so many years.

I hope that these examples provided you with a clear idea of what “The Hook” is, how it is used, and what style and approach you can apply. For your own writing, choose a hook that will give the reader a glimpse into what your story is about and a compelling descriptive situation that will want your reader to continue with the story. You don’t have to reveal the plot. Just tease the reader into wanting more.

We defined “The Hook” as part of The Elements of Writing, and I hope I’ve piqued your interest in writing. Storytelling is inherent in us all. It is who we are as social human beings and we all have stories to tell.

Felix F. Giordano is a local author with books sales in excess of 6,000 and has had more than 3 million pages of his books read by Amazon Kindle Unlimited subscribers. Felix is also an organizer of the Eastern Connecticut Writers (ECW) at the Willington Public Library. To find out more about ECW, go to this link:

<https://easternconnecticutwriters.blogspot.com/>

Next Month’s Topic: Creating Believable and Enduring Characters

The Neighbors paper
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Dear Reader-
Please consider contributing to Neighbors- Write an article about a person you admire or a local program you believe is important. Take a photo of a friend, loved one or pet. Write a poem or a piece of flash fiction. These pages would be full of press releases without submissions from local residents who care about each other and their community.

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An April to Remember

By EC-CHAP

April
“It was a bright cold day in April,
and the clocks were striking thirteen.”

George Orwell, 1984

In these uncertain times, we can only be certain of our will to move forward. And we will move forward...

EC-CHAP has cancelled all on-site performances and events until further notice. Our mission, “To engage the senses, ignite the creative spirit, and preserve local history” must be preserved. So... we will explore our ability to provide remote offerings of interest to those we serve.

Speaking of the Blues... we have Bluesman Eric Sommer, joining EC-CHAP and providing a free live on-line performance on **Earth Day 2020, Wednesday, April 22nd, 7:00pm**. You can get your free concert pass at www.thepackinghouse.us/upcoming. You can also expect to see a unique set of creative workshops hosted by EC-CHAP in the near future.

As these are extraordinary times, EC-CHAP would like to honor and promote those extraordinary folks who continue to support and believe in our mission.

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Eric Sommer Free Livestream Concert

EC-CHAP ACOUSTIC ARTIST SERIES

“An Evening with Eric Sommer” (Blues/Americana): A Live Virtual Earth Day Concert, Wednesday, April 22nd, 7:00pm. FREE.

Singer/songwriter ERIC SOMMER returns to The Packing House in virtual mode. An unbelievable intersection of improbable influences and experiences channeled into an amazingly diverse catalog and a résumé that reads more like a musical adventure novel than a series of career bullet points.

Sommer emerged from the Boston music scene in the '80s with a vengeance, a Folk guitarist with a percussive, open-tuning style adapted from the likes of David Bromberg, Steve Howe, Townes Van Zandt and Brit Folk legend Davy Graham. But Boston was also a hotbed of

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“Three” - Lynn Lacoss, Lily O’Brien & Randall Nelson

“View” - Vilnis Atrens, Diane Diederich, Penny Guerin, Arpita Kurdekar & Steve Schumacher

“Works of the Mill” - Jack Broderick, Tyler Hall & Carol Mackiewicz

“2020 Vision” - Tammy Glaeser, Chris Gunderson & Anthony Miles Napoletano

“E.O. Smith meets EC-CHAP” (Current Show) - Louise Best, Tammy Glaeser, Beth Andrews, Heather Bunnell, Trin George, Sara LaFlamme, Daniella Johnson, Caroline Thorn, Grace Carver, Hayden Richardson

Stay safe and remain positive,
EC-CHAP Board



New Wave, Power Pop and Punk at that point, and Sommer absorbed those influences as well, creating a Byrdsian jangle sound that earned him opening slots for national touring acts and regular bookings at the renowned Paradise Theatre.

Whether in band or one-man form (which nakedly showcases his amazing acoustic Blues guitar styling), Sommer is a living history of contemporary music and a musical force of nature. Free Virtual Concert Pass at: www.thepackinghouse.us/upcoming.



EC-CHAP Artists who are also members





Seeking New Board Members

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EC-CHAP is interested in expanding its Board of Directors to ensure we have the capacity and skills to oversee the next phase of our work. We embrace diversity, and invite a broad range of creative and analytical talent to apply for three Board positions.

Please visit www.ec-chap.org/board2020 to learn more and to apply online. Questions may be addressed by email to: info@ec-chap.org; or by calling: 518.791.9474.

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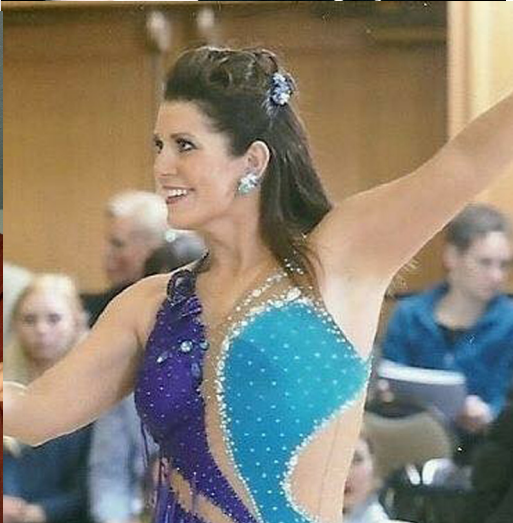
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s and Performers Members



Top row (l-r): Greg Abate (International Jazz Musician); Twice Around (Acoustic Duo); Frank Vasi (Founder, Thimble Island Saxophone Quartet)
At far left: Seat Of Our Pants (Acoustic Folk Bluegrass Band)
At left: Rebecca Zablocki (Visual Artist & EC-CHAP

Artist-In-Residence)
Lower left: Bluesgrass (Acoustic Duo)
Bottom left: Peter & Monique Hill (Horizon Blue, Acoustic Americana Band)
Below: Curtis Brand (Singer / Songwriter)
Below middle (l-r): Sally Rogers (Singer/Songwriter & Textile Artist); June Bisantz (Performing Musician & Graphicl Artist)
Below bottom (l-r): Richard White (Artist-Illustrator-Photographer); Kelly Madenjian (Award Winning Dancer, & Social Ballroom Dance, Fitness and Yoga Instructor)
At right: Nina Romanenko (Singer/Songwriter & Founder Ninasings Productions)
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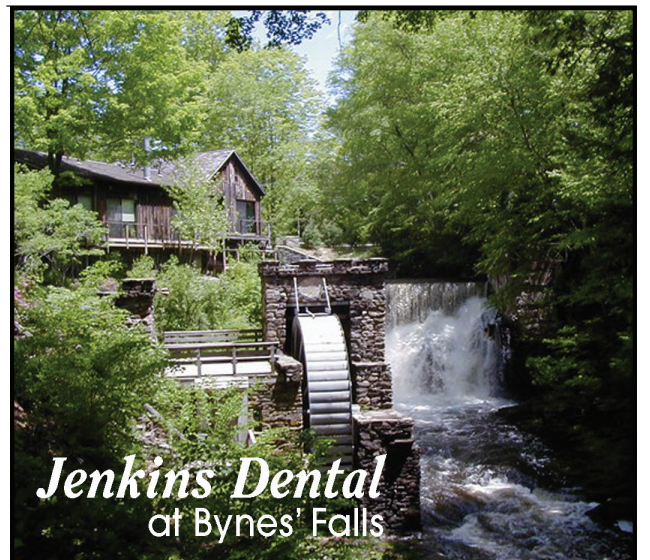
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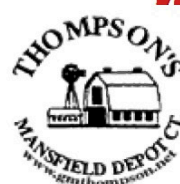
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A geological gem in the “land between the rivers”

Diana’s Pool in woodsy Natchaug valley

By Brian Karlsson-Barnes, Master gardener / designer

In the heart of the Last Green Valley -- 77% forest and farmland among 35 towns in our quiet corner of eastern Connecticut -- is the Natchaug State Forest, the rocky Natchaug River and its storied Diana’s Pool.

Writing the end of February reminded me of last month’s Valentines issue when I was smitten with Mama-coke Island. Well, I also LOVE the cascading waters of Diana’s Pool... the haunted lovelorn story, not so much.

A man loved another woman and distraught Diana leapt to her death under a full moon, and when the moon is full, you can still hear her weeping softly over the water...

DIANA’S POOL Not at all haunted, Diana’s Pool is lovely in moonlight. The river cascades over small falls into the 15-foot deep pool, almost a pond. Although rock ledges line the popular daytime spot, swimming is prohibited.

Nonetheless, jumping from the ledge is a rite of passage for some Storrs students. Also kayaking and trophy trout fishing (creel limit of two).

The rocky pool is a geological gem. When awe subsides, I notice Cardinal Flower along the river’s edge in summer, showing the value of a bright red accent.

Cardinal Flower / Lobelia cardinalis is one of our best-known native wildflowers in full sun to part shade, up to 4 feet tall in wet places. Vibrant red flowers on a spikey raceme mid-summer to fall. Attracts humming-birds, butterflies and attention.



CULTURE Adapts well to a moist garden. Mulch to protect roots against soil heaving of freeze/thaw cycles in winter, and to retain moisture in summer. Not long-lived, but self-seeds where happy.

WALKING THE WOODS of the Natchaug valley, we can sense “the forest primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlock” of a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem we need not know. Sensing the forest, not thinking all the time, is the therapy of trees.

But it’s interesting to note the ruins of early mills as you walk upriver. Farther upriver into the state forest are remains of stone houses, dams and cisterns along the Natchaug Trail. Also reported along the banks of the Natchaug are large boulders on ledges -- “thunder rocks” legend claims. Logs lifted and dropped the stones with loud booms to alert others.

The Quinebaug (69 miles) and Willimantic (25) are the two longest rivers in the Thames watershed. But the Natchaug valley, the “land between the rivers”, is the heart of the Last Green Valley.

NATCHAUG is a Nipmuck (American Indian) word meaning “land between the rivers.” Not a native tribe, the name is a physical landform found throughout many-rivered eastern Connecticut.

The Natchaug River is a tributary of the Thames River with headwaters near the Massachusetts border flowing south from Bigelow Brook in Union, and Still River in Woodstock to join the 18-mile Natchaug. Below the Highway 198 bridge (built 1926), the Natchaug feeds into Mansfield Hollow then joins the Willimantic, becoming the Shetucket River to the Thames and Long Island Sound.

The Natchaug Trail is a “blue-blazed” sign system meandering 20 miles of the Natchaug State Forest. A CCC loop trail was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s Great Depression. Across unpaved Moon Road, the northern third of the trail roughly parallels tributary Bigelow Brook before it becomes the Natchaug River. The trail joins the Nipmuck Trail in Ashford in northern Natchaug State Forest, trails that have been tread for centuries.

EVERGREEN BALANCE is very visible in winter. Bare branches are like a black and white movie the director chooses not to shoot in color because the medium seems better suited... a nightmarish quality for the haunted lovelorn? (Psycho was B&W.)

Winter shows where you can balance with all-season color, or to screen a view after leaves fall. Walking



trails show native evergreens to plant in woods and gardens. Watching where you step reveals:

Wintergreen / Gaultheria procumbens (aka checkerberry, teaberry) is a showy evergreen groundcover with large red berries. Wild in Connecticut. Woody, it survives bitter winters with tough leaves and a low stature sheltered by the forest duff. Native to Canadian woodlands from Newfoundland west to Manitoba, and south to USDA cold zone 3 Minnesota, to the mountains of Georgia and Alabama.

FLOWER Waxy, nodding, bell-shaped, white flowers are at your feet in early summer (June-July). Flowers give way to bright red edible berries that persist all winter, and with wintergreen flavor for salad and pastries, if squirrels don’t beat you to ‘em.

EVERGREEN The glossy, dark evergreen leaves -- purple in fall -- rise six inches from spreading rhizomes, spreading a foot over time. Leaves and fruit have the wintergreen flavor used for gum, candy and toothpaste. Also an oil with astringent, stimulant and diuretic properties. The leathery leaves were used for arthritis and sore muscle poultices; the dried leaves for tea.

CULTURE Best grown in rich organic acidic soil. Moist, yet well-drained. Part to full shade. Established plants tolerate heavy shade and dry soil. Use with other acid-loving shrubs, as Azalea/Rhododendron, Kalmia and Vaccinium (Blueberry).

Christmas Fern / Polystichum acrostichroides is a hardy evergreen fern found in moist, shady woodlands and stream banks. Native east of the Rockies from USDA cold zone 3 Minnesota to Nova Scotia. Grows in a fountain-like 2-ft clump. Long lance-shaped fronds, glossy in December, decorated colonial Christmas tables, hence the name.

Mountain Laurel / Kalmia latifolia is a broadleaf evergreen shrub native from southern Maine (USDA cold zone 4) west only to Indiana, south to Florida. First gardening in Minnesota, I could only dream about mountain laurel’s exotic bloom that is now my state flower!

A gnarly shrub growing 15 feet high in New England, 30-ft trees cover forest floors farther south. Many compact cultivars. Dense Kalmia thickets, difficult to walk through in the southern Appalachians, are called “laurel hells”.

FLOWERS Mountain laurel has clusters of exquisite white-to-pink blossoms like tiny hanging rice bowls that burst open in early summer from deeper pink buds. The bell-like flowers have a unique way of dispersing pollen -- by catapult! As the flower grows, the filaments of its stamens are bent into tension, arched with the tips held by the rim of the bell. A bee lands, releasing the stamen and pollen is flung six inches!

Cultivars are darker pink, near red and maroon, some with freckles or stripes, lasting for several weeks May to June. Deep rose-red ‘Sarah’ is planted by my patio, one of many cultivars bred by Dr. Richard Jaynes of Hamden CT, world authority on Kalmia.

EVERGREEN The five-inch long, leathery leaves are glossy dark evergreen, lighter beneath like Rhododendron leaves. Kalmia was exported to Europe in the 1700s for its ornamental value. Does NOT attract deer and bunnies as Rhodies do.

CULTURE Grow in cool, moist yet well-drained, humusy rich and acidic soil, preferring a pH of 4.5 to 5.5, not for heavy clay soils. Mulch to keep roots cool and retain moisture, but not too much moisture, similar to Rhododendron care. A slope, mound or raised bed gives better drainage.

Kalmia tolerates more sunlight once established, but grows best in morning sun with afternoon shade. It is naturally found on rocky slopes, in mountain woods and edges, and cool meadows.

TALL CONIFERS are usually **White Pine / Pinus** if long-neededled; short-neededled in shade are likely hemlock. Hemlock is a denser conifer found in moist, shady pockets throughout the LGV, as in Hemlock Glen, Hampton.

Eastern Hemlock / Tsuga canadensis is native to moist woods and slopes, rocky wooded hills, ridges and ravines from Canada west to Wisconsin, and south through Connecticut to the Appalachian Mountains and Georgia.

It grows densely to 50 feet tall (75 in the wild), an effective screen in shade. Except white pine, hemlocks are often the biggest trees due shade tolerance and the ability of seeds to germinate in the duff of pine woods. The best choice for a hedge in shade.

EVERGREEN Eastern hemlock has small half-inch dark green needles, similar to the density of yews (Taxus), but much faster growing. Tiny cones.

CULTURE Easily grown in moist well-drained soil in part to full shade. Appreciates winter mulch. Tolerates full sun but best in part shade sheltered from drying winds and hot afternoon sun. A healthy hemlock in the right place has few problems, but a prolonged drought can kill.

Worst threat is Woolly Adelgid, a tiny sap-sucking insect that threatens native hemlocks throughout the eastern U.S. Beware a fuzzy white residue under the needles of any hemlock in your area; it spreads easily. Treatment is dormant oil or a toxic soil drench.

Nonetheless, I am going to screen a view to another house in my leafless backyard with this fastest growing evergreen available in local commerce. And it’s native.

POSTSCRIPT The Pool was possibly named after a Diana family owning the ledge and a concession stand in the 1800s. Wonder if they had a good sandwich?

Longfellow’s poem was Evangeline.

Photos by the author.

Strategies for Managing Finances During Market Volatility Caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19)

By James A. Zahansky, AWMA®
Principal/Managing Partner
& Chief Goal Strategist



At Weiss, Hale & Zahansky Strategic Wealth Advisors, we are dedicated to empowering our community to Live Well. As part of that goal, Laurence, Leisl, and I will be providing strategies for our readers to Plan Well. Invest Well. Live Well. as we all navigate the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19). During times like these, it’s important we come together as a community to support one another. Whether its weekly updates related to financial market, strategies for aligning your investments, tips for efficient ways to stay productive while working from home, practicing social distancing, or helping your children with eLearning, we are here as your partner in navigating the effects on our daily lives due to COVID-19. This week will focus on maintaining confidence in your portfolio and outlining strategies to help you Invest Well. Information and the financial markets are all very fluid each day as we monitor the effects of COVID-19, so please note that all information in this column is most current at time of press submission.

Planning Well in COVID-19 Influenced Financial Markets

Ranging from government intervention and assistance, consumer spending, and changes to the ways we are working and living, we are all experiencing adjustments and sudden stops to daily life behaviors, but the financial markets do not like this uncertainty. Hence, a bear market is upon us, meaning we have now seen the end of the longest ever running bull market, with the Dow Jones, S&P 500, and NASDAQ indices all dropping 20 percent or more from highs this year. There are a few reasons for this rapid decline over the past four weeks and they are centered on the global spread of COVID-19. On March 12, 2020 the U.S. cut off travel to Europe for the next 30 days with some European countries and Canada closing borders. New COVID-19 cases are increasing daily in the US with daily levels we have not yet seen in this crisis, with estimates that the numbers are going to continue to increase. The World Health Organization officially classed the coronavirus as a pandemic. Sports league suspended seasons, toilet paper is in high demand, and everyone is learning what social distancing means and how to work remotely.

So, where do we go from here? Are things going to keep getting worse? If so, how much worse? Is there any reason to believe markets are close to a bottom?

- Here are some facts that help us understand:
1. The spread of the virus is stabilizing in China according to the John Hopkins Coronavirus Tracker, while those outside of China continue to rise. We expect the US cases of the virus to increase over the next several weeks and there are fast moving social changes that aim to minimize human interaction and the spread of the virus.
 2. As of Monday, March 23, 2020, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont ordered all non-essential businesses to close as part of his “Stay Safe, Stay Home” program.
 3. Headline market risk will continue to increase, meaning that all of these changes and government inter-

ventions will continue to affect the performance of the markets.

4. Constantly changing news headlines means we have not passed maximum public fear or maximum public health effects, so things will continue to look worse for the next few weeks.

However, there is light at end of tunnel and that light likely parallels when US COVID-19 cases peak, ultimately begin to stabilize, and then decrease. As crisis-era responses from the Federal Reserve and its global partners, as well as other federal stimulus programs, kick in and aim to offset the economic impacts of COVID-19, we may see a correction in the market. However, this could take some time, so be patient.

Strategies to Help You Invest Well During Times of Uncertainty

Our team at Weiss, Hale & Zahansky Strategic Wealth Advisors has spent a significant amount of time being proactive in our outreach to clients over the past few weeks and daily Investment Committee meetings are held to monitor market and economic changes. Our major focus is to bring calm to these client conversations, as their portfolios have been developed using our unique and strategic Plan Well. Invest Well. Live Well. process. Having a strategic long-term financial plan in place is the first step in ensuring that despite the fluidity and market volatility, resiliency and confidence are the key factors in withstanding significant changes. These are great discussions as the markets have historically been resilient despite events like the world wars, Great Depression, Great Recession, and 9/11. When you apply this type of long-term investment thinking to a strategic financial plan, our clients and readers should try to avoid emotional decision making when it comes to their retirement accounts or investment portfolios. Try to limit decisions or changes to your financial plan in light of volatile market changes. While we know first-hand that the events mentioned and the current COVID-19 pandemic can cause us all to be uncomfortable and worried, try to remain objective and seek advice from your financial advisor to be sure you make the right moves for you and your family. After all, everyone has financial goals – for example, many people want to have a pleasant retirement someday, or send their children to college – so be sure you Invest Well and consider the impacts on adjustments to your portfolio before you make any immediate decisions.

Repositioning your portfolio is a common question we are getting from our clients. The short answer for our clients is this: now is not a good time to adjust your portfolio while markets are low. Our unique and strategic Plan Well. Invest Well. Live Well. process connects our clients’ financial life goals to their long-term plans. Doing this aligns their goals to their individual risk levels and time horizon. As clients typically have different levels of risk tolerance, they have all had different degrees of loss over the past few weeks since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal is not to over-correct losses for clients, but rather solidify long-term, risk-adjusted returns. To do this, our team thinks in terms of 5- and 10-years increments where we expect downturns and corrections. Selling out of a portfolio in a downturn can cost you significant dollars if you fail to time reentry into the markets correctly. We advise our clients to stay put with the possibility of gaining a rebound. As far as when markets may achieve this rebound,

no one can be sure, as we may not yet have hit the bottom. Using China as a proxy, its markets started to rebound after the virus peaked in their country. So, if we can control the spread of the coronavirus in a meaningful way, we may be looking at a shorter recovery period. However, if we are not able to control the spread of the virus as effectively, then we may be looking at a more extended period until a rebound occurs. The Federal Reserve and US Congress are seeking to help facilitate a rebound and keep the US and global economies strong. We will be monitoring whether this government intervention and the control of the spread of the virus can minimize the potential economic fallout that is occurring from measures designed to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Empowering Our Community to Live Well.

This is a time when people are worried because of the potential economic fallout that may occur after COVID-19 pandemic. However, the best thing to do is to listen to our government agencies, try to minimize face to face interactions and social gatherings, wash hands, and stay informed by visiting reliable web sites like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Everyone is concerned for their neighbors, loved ones, and our societal well-being; our advice to help you Live Well. is to be sure to take care of yourselves, your families, and your neighbors during this stressful time. We will make it through and the light at the end of the tunnel will come!

Weiss, Hale & Zahansky Strategic Wealth Advisors Principal/Managing Partner Laurence Hale, Vice President, Associate Financial Advisor Leisl Cording, and I plan to hold You & Your Money radio segments weekly for the next 4 weeks to keep clients and listeners well-informed of the rapid changes occurring in the financial markets. So tune in next Wednesday at 8 am to WINY Radio, 1350AM and 97.1FM to hear about new developments and strategies to help you Plan Well. Invest Well. Live Well. These shows will be posted on our website as our podcast, as well as on streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Just search You & Your Money. Also, we have a resource guide on our website, www.whzwealth.com/covid19-resources for all information regarding COVID-19. Our goal is to empower everyone in our community to Live Well. which right now means staying healthy and staying smart.

Authored by Principal/Managing Partner Laurence N. Hale, AAMS, CRPS®, Vice President, Associate Financial Advisor Leisl L. Cording, CFP®, and Principal/Managing Partner James A. Zahansky, AWMA®. Securities and advisory services offered through Commonwealth Financial Network®, Member FINRA/SIPC, a Registered Investment Adviser. 697 Pomfret Street, Pomfret Center, CT 06259, 860.928.2341. <http://www.whzwealth.com>

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Looking Up:

Sap Rises

By Bob Grindle

There it was, in broad daylight, a full-size, healthy bobcat—Lynx Rufus—stalking our daughter-in-law’s rescue Canada goose. Yikes! No need to panic, just a quick dash outside to change the equation. It worked. Amylynn arrived on the scene to the annoyed honking of the goose, braying of the miniature donkeys, and likely altered the outcome. The cat dashed off into the brush at the edge of the wooded hillside and, this past weekend, the four of us—our son, daughter-in-law, my wife and I—spent time altering pens and fences, reconfiguring electric fencing to outsmart the predatory genius of one of North America’s most successful hunters.

Two years ago, a lone fuzzy gosling a couple of weeks old wandered up Amylynn and Kevin’s long driveway. We had been noticing a fairly large family of wild geese getting steadily smaller as they travelled back and forth on this country road that borders Goodwin Forest in Hampton. Normally we prefer to leave Mother Nature to her stoic survival of the fittest — often meaning the luckiest—storyline. The kids, however, decided they had little choice but to adopt this foundling baby goose that had, ironically enough, found them. The kids’ donkeys, themselves rescues, very slowly accepted this wild adoptee and the now full-size adult goose has adopted our hillside tribe and its decidedly un-migratory ways. As flocks of this newcomer’s brethren pass noisily overhead on their seasonal journeys, a few conversational ‘honks’ and perhaps a short flight from garden to barnyard and back again is the only acknowledgement of the vestigial connection between what might have been and the new life this no-longer-a-fuzzy-gosling lives. Don’t get me wrong, the goose is free to fly off and join its travelling birds of a feather whenever the urge calls, but in a Charlotte’s Web sort of way, Tabitha, as the non-gendered immigrant has come to be named, seems completely comfortable flying down to the garden or riding in the wheelbarrow to supervise potato planting or raspberry harvest, and then hurrying back to the barnyard to help wrangle the ever-spirited donkeys into the barn for the evening.

And, as evening passes through twilight into darkness, Venus, April’s evening star, sparkles in the



Lynx Rufus, a fully alert bobcat, 2020 in Hampton, one of our less sociable neighbors, but neighbor nevertheless.
Photo by Marilyn Higgins.

western sky. Early in the month, Venus will be slightly to the north (right) of Taurus and will appear to be almost a part of the Pleiades star cluster. As the month draws on, our sister planet will edge gradually closer to Taurus and the near whisper of a crescent Moon will pass up and through the horns of Taurus, passing very near Aldebaran—the red eye of the bull—and then, gradually waxing, on April 26th hang briefly right next to a Venus that rarely gets brighter.

April begins with sun-rises about 6:30 and ends with sunrises of nearly 5:45, so an hour before sunrise is actually rather early, and getting out at 4:30 or so in the pre-dawn to notice the charming alignment of Mars, Saturn and Jupiter, left to right in the southeast sky could be a stretch. But if social distancing, or sheltering in place, or a hard to define sense of loss of connection find you outside in the wee hours, perhaps for a moment’s serenity or meditation, whether for an Easter season sunrise service or simple personal reflection, do look up to sort of wave, with a smile, or simple nod or maybe even an outstretched hand.

There is no rush, our three planetary neighbors will be around all month in the early pre-dawn sky, and it seems to me there is real philosophical value in extending the hand of neighborliness not only to one another, but to the Earth beneath us, the flora and fauna around us as well as to the crowded Cosmos through which we all travel. And while you’re out there, being neighborly, wave goodbye to Orion, who is about to slip out of view in the western sky till late next fall. The regular comings and goings of things celestial offer almost as much comfort in this modern age as they did in earlier millennia. We may understand the science behind it better, but the visuals are the same and no matter how many times and in what epoch of human existence the seasons of life unfold, there is real pleasure to be had in breathing deeply of the moment.

A couple of months ago, Loretta Wrobel wrote about The Overstory, a compelling book by Richard Powers that speaks to the fascinating community of the forest and how we homo sapiens have been less than esteemed neighbors. I might also recommend The Hidden Life of Trees, by Peter Wohlleben, continuing in the vein of how life on Earth communicates in ways we humans have been too vain to pay attention to until recently. We have done a better job of mapping the Moon than of mapping the ocean floor. Is there something more ego-satisfying about soaring through space than probing through the murky depths right off the continental shelf? We know more about the chemistry of stars than of how the fungi beneath the forest floor assist in the sub-cellular communication with trees. Is one lofty and the other too easy to take for granted? Has our species grown too numerous and our focus too inward to notice the interconnectivity of all life on Earth? And I do mean all life, not just our fellow kind.

Quite often, while closing up the animals in the twilight before night, if the sky is clear and it’s possible to watch as the planets and stars flicker into view, I’ll pause, even in the cold, and maybe sit on a rock or stump or bench if I’m near one, breathe deeply, and allow myself the same childlike sense of unalloyed wonder at the immensity and beauty of just being here. No need to understand it; not the chemistry or physics or biology or any part of why... just the smell, and sound and sight and feel of being alive. Spring is like that. Sap rises! Be well.

Bob Grindle is a Windham Hospital Retiree and 2017 ECSU graduate who concentrated in Astronomy.

Mirror Mirror on the Wall...

By Grace Preli



Dear reader, this is a little bit of a departure from my regular article. This is for you and it’s also for me. It’s for anyone who needs to read it. If it resonates with you, great. If you need to change it up a bit, please do so. It came to me in a flash and I really just want to share it. Take some time to appreciate yourself. Take some time to look in the mirror and acknowledge all that you are. I see you. I see you. From me to you, I’m so happy you’re here.

You need a mirror. Find one. Go to it now. Sit, stand and look into your eyes. Look. Look away if you need to. Look again. At your face. At your body. Look at the air around you. Look at all of you. Look into your eyes. Hold your gaze. Hold it. Hold it. Hold it.

What comes up? What’s the first thought? What’s the feeling? Okay. Okay. Feeling or thought. Hold it. Sit with it. See what it is. Feel what it is. What is it? Don’t let me tell you what to feel. Don’t let me tell you what to think. Don’t let me tell you what to see. Whatever it is, it’s okay. Whatever comes up. It’s a-okay. I’m right here with you. No, I’m not in any rush. I’ve got all day. I’m right here.

Do you need permission? I give you permission. I give you complete permission. To be and see and feel whatever it is you need to be. Whatever you need to see and feel, I give you complete permission. You don’t need it though. Do you know that? You don’t need my permission. You’ve never needed it. You can absolutely be anything you need to be right now.

Let’s just sit for a minute. Tell me about yourself. What are you feeling? What are you thinking? Yeah! Right now! What’s that thought? What’s going through your mind right now? It’s okay if you attach to the thought. It’s okay if you don’t attach to it. Whatever it is, it’s okay. Do you want to tell me about it? It’s okay if you don’t want to. It’s okay if you do. If you do, I’m here for you, I’ll listen. Sure, tell me all about it.

How was your day today? How was your day yesterday? Do you want to tell me about it? Sure, I’ll listen, absolutely! Tell me whatever you need to. I’m here for you. I’ve got time. Sure, tell me about it! What worked for you? I’d love to hear all about it.

Sure, tell me about what’s working. Heck yeah! Tell me more! How does that make you feel? What’s going good for you right now? Yeah? I would love to hear more about that. Wow. That sounds great, what else can you tell me about that? Whoah! Tell me more. What else is working out for you? What’s making you feel great? What’s lighting you up? What are you really excited about? Sure! Tell me all about it. I’d love to hear more. Yeah, absolutely, keep going, I’m all ears.

Is there something else you really need to say? Oh, okay. Of course. I’m here for you. I’ll listen. It’s okay. Whatever you need to say I can listen to you.

What’s on your mind? What else are you thinking about? Don’t worry. I’m not going anywhere. Sure, tell me about that too. What are those thoughts that you’re having? Sure, get it all out. I’m here to listen. Whatever you need, I’m right here for you. Nope. Still not going anywhere. I’m not in a rush. Are you? If you are that’s okay. We can pause for now and come back to this but I’ll be here for you. I always am.

What’s challenging you right now? Are you worried about something. It’s okay if you are. Do you want to talk about it? I can listen. You can tell me all about it. Sure, tell me what’s going on. Are you anxious? Are you having some heavy thoughts? Are you afraid?

It’s okay if you are. I can help you hold it. I know sometimes things can feel really tough. Sometimes they can feel really heavy. Like you can’t get away from them or out from under them. Sometimes when you start to think about them and look at them and turn over those rocks, well sometimes it feels like too much. Too much to hold. Too much to look at. Too much of a burden to bear. Yeah.

continued on next page

I hear you. I see you. I'm right here. I can help you carry it. Let's talk about it if you want. Let's feel about it if you want. Sure. I'll listen to whatever you want to say. Or don't want to say. I can just sit with you. Wherever you are, I'll always be.

Let's pause for a sec. Let's breathe for a minute. Yeah it's okay. Just look right here. Look at me. In my eyes if you can. It's okay if you can't. Breathe. It never hurts to breathe. In and out. In and out. In and out.

What do you notice. What do you notice when you look at yourself? What comes to mind? Whatever comes to mind is okay. No, I won't judge you. You can tell me. You can tell me anything. It's okay. Please. Please tell me. Really. It's okay. I've heard it all before. All of it. Nothing you say will surprise me. What else? I'm still here. No, don't worry. I'm not going anywhere. We have plenty of time.

I've got you. I'm so happy you are here. I'm so happy that you are what you are. I'm so happy for all that you are. You know that don't you? I'm right here for you.

I know that sometimes things can be tough. Sometimes things can be hard. I know you've been at the end. I know you've been in the dark. I know you've been where you feel like you can't get out again. I know you've suffered. And struggled. And burned. And crumpled. I know you've hurt. I know you've been on the floor. I know you've sobbed. I know you've screamed. I know sometimes that it feels like you can't get your head above water. I know sometimes that it can all feel like too much. Too much to face. Too much to hold onto. I know. I know. It's okay. I hear you. I hear you. It's okay.

I am so proud of you. I am so proud of you. I see you. I see you showing up every day. I see you trying new things. I see you learning. I see you moving forward whatever it is. Whatever the difficulty. Whatever the struggle. Whatever the problem. I see you showing up. Everyday. For yourself and everyone else. I see all that you give. I see all that you do. Look at you! You are growing! And learning! And realizing so many things. And I know sometimes it might not feel like it. I know sometimes you might feel unsure. But that's okay too. I know sometimes you might doubt yourself. And you know what? That's okay too! You're doing great. Really you are. You're here. You're right here and that's what matters.

You are here. And even in the middle of whatever it was, whatever it is, you are here. You are here and god, I'm so glad you're here. Look at you. Look at YOU. Look at all that you are. Look into your eyes. Look all around you. You are HERE. Right here. Right now. Whatever you have gone through. Whatever you have grown through. Whatever you have lived through, thrived through, suffered through, danced through, survived through, you are here. Right here. Right now. Look at me. I'm so glad you're here. You did it. You made it.

It makes me so happy that you are here. I love listening to you. Whatever you have to share, whatever you want to say, I'm here for you. Thank you for sharing. I'm so happy that I was able to listen to you. I'm so happy that I was able to let you voice what you needed to. I'm so happy that you trust me to listen to you. Of course! It's my honor to be here with you. I love you so much. I care about you so much. I will support you with whatever you need. I will love you no matter what. I'm always here for you. Don't forget okay? It's okay if you do. I know sometimes you forget, but really, I'm right here for you. I'm always here. Sure! You can come to me when you're upset or happy or sad, or whatever! I'm right here for you, makeup smudged, puffy eyes, angry voice, I've seen it all. I've heard it all. Don't worry, I'm here for you. I see you fully, and I love everything I see. You've got this. You really do. I'm so proud of you. I am so proud of you. I am SO proud of you.

Read issues of Neighbors from January 2015 to present in COLOR via a link on our website: neighborspaper.com You will also find advertising and circulation information.

The Morgan Cunningham Show Alternative Talk

Submitted by Morgan Cunningham

Hello, friends! I hope everyone has been staying healthy during recent uncertain times. Many activities have been put on hold in the last few weeks—with no obvious end in sight, and if you're looking for something new to do or check out, my weekly alternative talk show continues.



Important listening note: the MorganTalks.com livestream of The Morgan Cunningham Show will be move to Monday nights from 7- 9 p.m. (E), starting this month. Up until this point, my talk show streamed over the internet LIVE on Saturday nights. But, many of my current listeners and potential listeners asked for it to be moved to a more civil time. My new timeslot should allow for more listeners. Of course, all shows are archived for on-demand listening at MorganTalks.com.

On Monday, April 6th, we welcome Alexander Kreich from South Dakota to discuss his work in intuition and numerology.

Regular guest Maura Geist will offer FREE medium readings to callers on Monday, April 13th. She has also been a guest at the Packing House in Willington. P.S.: I highly recommend seeing her when she is in town!

We'll head to the Midwest on Monday, April 20th for a chat with Angie Jones of the Nebraska Ghost Hunters team.

To round out the month, our friend Johnny Cassity will be on the show to discuss and interpret various "what if" scenarios.

Again, stay safe during the COVID-19 outbreak. Check out The Morgan Cunningham Show for alternative talk both live and on-demand at MorganTalks.com. Thanks for your support!

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Pandemics are Optional: Choose Wisely

In a sense, the Earth is mounting an immune response against the human species. It is beginning to react to the human parasite, the flooding infection of people... Perhaps the biosphere does not 'like' the idea of five [now 7] billion humans. Richard Preston, author

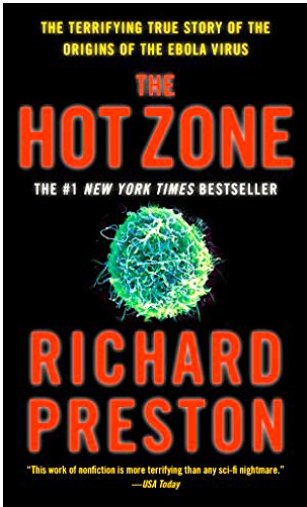
By Phoebe C. Godfrey

Many years ago I read Richard Preston’s *The Hot Zone: The Terrifying True Story of the Origins of the Ebola Virus* (1994) and although I have long forgotten most of the details, one point that he made has remained. As quoted above, his idea that Ebola about which he was writing, somehow represented a reaction on the part of the Earth to us humans, an expression of Her immune response, was intensely intriguing. In fact, at the time it also gave me a haunted, and yet humbling feeling, which has recently returned. This feeling was evoked in that it was the first time I had been invited to not only think of the Earth as a living force, much like James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, but also as one that might turn against humans as our numbers and levels of global destruction increase. However, I was also disturbed by Preston’s idea as it seemed that such viruses always pray on the global poor-oppressed and such a proposal could easily be used to support the racism of eugenic, as in the idea that the Earth is cleansing Herself of the undesirable humans, as opposed to the more desirable, hence so called civilized ones. And so, I put his idea into the back of my mind and left it there as one that was intriguing but also highly problematic, given how often the global poor-oppressed are blamed for everything from population growth (as opposed to consumption and inequality), to pollution (as opposed to those whom make the products) and viruses (as in Ebola, HIV-AIDS and more recently the Corona virus). Yet it is time to revisit Preston’s idea and to link it to



our current global pandemic. The reason for this not only because the Cornoia virus has gone global and reduces the temptation to make it about a specific human group (although of course many, including our so called President, insist on making it about the Chinese as the latest racist scapegoat), but because although officially these viruses are blamed on animals – there is only one animal we should blame and that is us.

Writing in *The Nation*, science writer Sonia Shah adds to Preston’s point by not just talking about the growth in human population but by bringing to light what members of said human population have been doing and how they have been going about doing it. As she states, “The problem is the way that cutting down forests and expanding towns, cities, and industrial activities creates pathways for animal microbes to adapt to the human body...transforming benign animal microbes into deadly human pathogens.” Hence, once again we see that the first cause is capitalism and its endless drive for more natural resources – not because they are needed to feed and clothe the feared teaming masses, but rather to further increase the wealth of the few. As I tell my students over and over again, there is plenty of food and plenty of resources but under this existing ‘winner takes all system’, social inequality on the one hand and planetary destruction on the other are inevitable. And so it should not be surprising that in our country, the heart and soul of what authors Larry Gonick and Tim Kasser term ‘Hyper-Capitalism’ (2018), the virus, like the Portrait of Dorian Gray, is revealing our true social dysfunction, corruption and inability to put ‘the people’ before ‘the profit’ of those in power. To give just one example, capitalists / conservatives backed



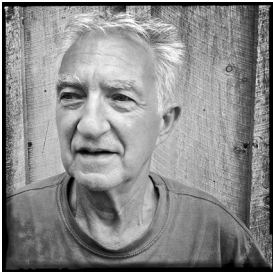
by Trump are pushing for a return to business as usual. In fact, according to The Guardian a rightwing Federalist magazine has “... run stories urging Trump to get the economy going again and attacked Democrats – not the US president – for their reactions to the crisis” and one article has “... peddled the idea that ‘a handful of Democratic activists created alarming, but bogus data sets to scare local and state officials into making rash, economy-killing mandates’” . In other words, let us learn nothing from these global deaths in our on-going cultural denial that we can destroy the Earth and live on Her too! With leaders like these who needs enemies!

Contrastingly, many of us are learning, are re-thinking our priorities and are investing more in our local communities. Deeply moving and inspiring examples abound from around the world of people supporting each other, singing to each other from balconies, taking stands against anti-Chinese racism and other forms of bigotry, making meals for others (including the actions of CLiCK in our own community) and most of all the actions of those taking who are ceaselessly and bravely taking care of the sick. Additionally, stories of changes in animal and bird behaviors as a result of humans being less ubiquitous, as well as other global shifts in how other life forms are responding, reaffirm that everything we do impacts everything else and helps to remind us that we do not own this planet, regardless of what our culture tells us. And so in returning to Preston’s point that, “the Earth is mounting an immune response against the human species”, I add, with the support of Shah, that it is not humans per say but rather an issue of our values and behaviors. These can and MUST change if we wish to survive and find new equitable and sustainable ways to thrive, for as the epidemiologist Larry Brilliant, who led the fight against smallpox, once said: “outbreaks are inevitable, but pandemics are optional”. This option is for all of us to choose based on who we choose as our leaders, inseparable from the values with which we choose to live our lives, assuming we are lucky and / or privileged enough to still have them... May you be well and make wise choices...

Mischievous Mice

By David Corsini

I would like to know how many mice live on our property. But then again, perhaps it is better that I don’t know. Just yesterday, in mid-October, when cleaning out a birdhouse that had been used this year, first by chickadees and then by house wrens, I came across a mouse nest. I poked at the nest and immediately a little pointed nose appeared. In the background, I could see a few small fuzzy bodies. With winter approaching I didn’t have the heart to evict this family, so I simply pushed things back in place and closed the box.



I have several birdhouses on the property, both on wooden and metal posts and some with baffles. Somehow mice get into them all. Especially when babies are involved, I rarely remove the mice from the houses. I have even constructed, over a birdhouse containing mice that had fallen down in early winter, a cover to protect the occupants from snow. Sometimes I think it is foolish to let the mice occupy the birdhouses. But then I think: “Owls eat mice, and the mice in the birdhouses can be a convenient food supply for the screech owl that often roosts in the wood duck box mounted on the silver maple by the pond.” This makes me feel a bit less foolish. But as spring approaches, I typically do a census of birdhouses and, when I find mice, I leave the house open so the mice will leave on their own. I return a few days later and commence with the cleaning.

My barn is full of mice. I have several old bureaus in the barn with drawers filled with infrequently used tools, directions to power tools, and miscellaneous

items. Often when I open the drawers of these bureaus, I find a mouse’s nest. Then, I either extract the item I was looking for and close the drawer or, more often than not, close the drawer and continue my search. I have never tried to evict mice from the barn.

The barn is a reconstructed tobacco barn with a concrete floor. Because it had been used to dry tobacco, the sides of the barn do not form a closed barrier to the roof. The roof extends past the walls, but there is an opening all around the top to allow air to circulate. There are also small openings at the bottom of the barn. Because of the many openings, it is impossible to keep animals out.

The barn is shared space. There is always an open space for Delia’s car in case of threats of hail, tornados, or snow. Other than that, there is a very large assortment of tools and treasures that are mainly under my jurisdiction. But in the many in-between spaces there is room for red squirrels, gray squirrels, chipmunks, mice, and, in the summer, bats. No particular effort is made to evict anyone. One summer there was even an adolescent opossum that found a way to get into the barn to sleep the day away in an old fish tank. The only mammal that was ever evicted was a raccoon that became a nuisance by repeatedly getting into the bird food cans. A live trap was used to capture the culprit, but it was nearly destroyed. Raccoons are tough customers.

While I make no effort to evict barn critters, I do not feed them on purpose. However, more or less on purpose, I do spill a little bird seed when I fill the barrels, and again when I fill the bird feeders from the barrels. And I do put the empty peanut butter jar on the floor for the mice and squirrels to clean before I add it to the recycle bin. The lids to the seed barrels fit very tightly, but upon occasion mice find a way to get inside. Sometimes as I reach into the seed can in early morning darkness to scoop out



seed, a furry object will hit my hand. My state of alertness quickly increases. I then turn on the barn light and catch the mouse in a can and release it on the floor. On a few occasions I have found a dead mouse in the barrel. This is a lucky day for the crows that are happy to find mouse on their breakfast menu.

A true nightmare is when a mouse sets up house in one of our cars. One indicator of a possible mouse in the car is sunflower seed shells. When I respond quickly to this sign of mice, I have succeeded in catching them in a live trap. Other times, I have not responded soon enough and the mouse has died. The last time this happened the weather was warm enough so the sun heated the car to high temperatures during the day to aid in the decomposition. The smell became more or less bearable within a week and then the flies started to appear. It’s rather unusual to thank flies for their help, but I did and then opened the window to release them.

I probably should not be as casual in my treatment of mice, especially when dealing with their nests and droppings. One reason is that mice can host Hantavirus that can be passed to humans from bites or through inhaling the virus present in mice feces and urine. It is very serious when humans become infected by Hantavirus. While I read that Hantavirus is uncommon in Connecticut, one should be more careful than I have been when cleaning out bird-

houses and cleaning up after mice. Rubber gloves and face masks are a good idea for this task. I will try to remember that.

A second reason to be less casual is that mice are an important vector for Lyme disease. Deer ticks have four life stages: egg, larva, nymph, and adult. When ticks hatch from eggs, the larva does not carry Lyme disease. The larva needs a blood meal to become a nymph and the nymph needs a blood meal to become an adult. It is during those blood meals that a tick can become infected with the Lyme bacterium. The most likely place for a tick to acquire the Lyme bacterium is from an infected white-footed mouse. While a human cannot catch Lyme disease directly from an infected mouse, a human might pick up an infected tick nymph from a mouse or a mouse’s nest. The point is that mice play an important role in the transmission of Lyme disease and it is probably not a good idea to harbor mice. But I like mice.

I can trace the nonchalance in my treatment of mice to my younger years when my sister and I kept white mice as pets. We were thrilled to find little clusters of pink babies and freely handled all the mice. By the time we learned about what happens when male and female mice are housed together, we had a major colony. The smell became intense. In retrospect, I am amazed at the tolerance of our mother. These mice were housed down cellar in the clothes washing area, and at some point my mother insisted they be moved outside under the porch. After we were no longer able to convince neighbor kids of the joy of owning a mouse, I am not sure what happened to those that remained.

Rules for mice in the house are different than the rules in the barn and are a bit complex. Mice do get into the cellar. When we moved into the house 15 years ago, we had an aluminum paper barrier stapled to

continued on page 19

Community Media and Regional Arts

By John Murphy

I am not being delusional when I say *Happy Spring*, even during these overwhelming days of the Coronavirus. The coming waves of color at this time of year, especially *this* year, are a comforting reminder to me of why I moved to the Quiet Corner from New York many years ago—to celebrate and be closer to the immutable power of Nature and remain connected with it in the everyday. With all due respect, no electricity is needed for this!

This column is about our regional arts community and our locally-based media channels and web-based platforms. Relevant and valuable content is out there in a myriad of forms, looking for audiences of common interest and value. When you are home with extra time on your hands, think about local media and explore it.



LOCAL RADIO IN THE DAYS OF CORONA

Whatever you watch or listen to, on any device, I ask you to consider how little of it comes to you directly from local sources. The global or national services and the larger commercial and public stations have broad missions and coverage—and usually focus their lenses on larger geographic areas. The Quiet Corner is not on their maps.

Local media is about what is left out, what is missing and underreported. Local radio can talk to you in a way that no satellite service or web jukebox can! This is especially true when you are looking for more than another endless stream of music.

During these times local media provide a vital information lifeline for people and families to learn and stay connected, and for officials and organizations to reach out with current news and happenings. We know this already from storms and weather-related emergencies, but this special local media relationship exists 24/7 every day all year long. After Life returns to normal, whatever that will be, keep up your awareness and support for the local media that is part of the foundation of our community stability.

Below is a listing of local radio that is doing a great job to share local information and perhaps a little sunshine and fresh air sometimes:



When you think about local radio in our region, Wayne Norman at WILI in Willimantic pops up immediately as an icon and reminder of the value and ethics of localism. I'm gonna send a little love his way because you need to know how special he is: chosen in 1982 as the first Cupid of Romantic Willimantic, Wayne was inducted into the Connecticut Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 2018, and in January of this year he was named Connecticut Sportscaster of the Year by the National Sports Media Association. He has been with WILI since 1971!

In addition to his rainbow of sports coverage, Wayne's daily morning show is an oasis of news and local conversation about everything local under the sun from 6 to 10 am, with multiple guests each day.

WILI also features a daily series of talk shows from 5—6 pm:

- Monday—Food for Thought
- Tuesday—Biz Outlook and Neighborhood with Ernie Eldridge
- Wednesday—looking for new show but for now Best of Wayne Norman Interviews
- Thursday—Republic Forum, news and commentary with Thomas White and Jeff Viens
- Friday—Let's Talk About It, news and commentary with Susan Johnson and Dennis O'Brien



A report from co-owners Gary and Karen Osbrey in Putnam:

The front door at WINY has been locked to guests and visitors since March 18th. All morning show and talk show guests are on the phone - sometimes four at a time with calls from listeners thanks to our Comrex phone system.

Morning Show host Gary O, (6:00 to 9:00 am daily) has been checking in weekly with school Superintendents and Principals from Putnam, Thompson, Plainfield and Killingly Public Schools as well as the Woodstock Academy and Ellis Tech, Day Kimball Healthcare, Generations Family Health Center and the Northeast District Department of Health have also been featured.

The WINY Talk Show, weekdays from 9:00 to 11:00 am with Dave Ward, has had weekly interviews with Governor Ned Lamont and has also featured Attorney General William Tong, Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz and Commissioner of Agriculture Bryan Hurlburt.

The staff is working long, stressful hours and are managing to maintain a cheerful disposition. Gary cleans the entire station from the front door to the studios, microphones, keyboards, kitchen, etc. every night and microphones and consoles get cleaned between shifts. Karen is also the President of Interfaith Human Services of Putnam (Daily Bread) and is basically working a second job making sure that the food pantry stays open and serves their clients. We are doing COMMUNITY RADIO here at WINY in Putnam!



With colleges closed across the state, the student and community staff at WECS at Eastern Connecticut State University is unable to access the studios in the Communication Building. A total bummer for the staff, just when local radio can do the most! But there is good news to share:

General Manager John Zatowski is designing and testing remote broadcast equipment packages so some producers can do their shows from home studios. A successful test on March 29 with the Sunday afternoon jazz show, The Jazz Ride with AJ, opened the door for many more local shows in the days and weeks ahead.

I will be doing the same on Tuesdays from 12 to 3 pm with my program The Pan American Express. It is a music and variety program with multiple guests each week. I will be featuring regular interviews with local officials and people from all kinds of local organizations with news to share about how they are making it through these tough times. Interviews will be recorded and posted on local Facebook groups and websites, for those who missed the live conversations. I am getting out the news every way possible. If anyone has news to share feel free to send me an email and we can plan a day and time—the address is john@humanartsmedia.com

There are many longstanding excellent shows at WECS that may be included in the future, as equipment and resources become available. Check the website at www.wecsfm.com for more information about:

- Chatterbox Old Time Radio with Christine on Saturdays from 6 pm to midnight
- The Latin Mix program with DJ Chuck on Sundays 12 to 5 pm and Mondays 7 to 9 pm
- Resistance Radio with Michael and Chris on Thursdays from 7 to 8 pm

More shows possible, check the website!

So that's it for April! Thanks for reading *Neighbors* and for letting others know about the work of this special collective of writers who are dedicated to serving our community. Keep the faith for a peaceful and healthy spring, best wishes for better days ahead, listen to local radio!

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Breathe Easy - The Number One Health Tip for Cannabis Smokers is Also the Easiest

By Mark Mathew Braunstein

All drugs pose risks. Drugs that we use and often cherish provide us with desirable benefits, else we would not use them. But cloaked as “side effects,” those rewards also come with unwanted risks. Whether medicinal or recreational, whether herbal or pharmaceutical, whether legal or illicit, all drugs pose risks.

And all smoke poses risks. Smoke up a drug, and you’ve stirred up some double trouble. While cannabis is a natural herb, intentionally inhaling its smoke is a grossly unnatural act. Even as an herbal remedy that can benefit a long list of ailments, its smoke can compromise your health. Smoke in any quantity and from any source irritates the respiratory tract. Smoke is its own smoking gun without the need for any gun. Smoking is bad news, which is not even news. You might ignore the facts or fool yourself about smoking, but no smoke and no mirrors can fool your lungs. Even incense, which fools the nose, fouls the lungs.

Like tough love or square circles, healthful smoking is an oxymoron. But we can address how to make smoking less harmful.

To reduce any health risk of smoking cannabis, the number-one safeguard is also the easiest. You have no need to reach into your first-aid kit for this. Nor need you do anything more than what you already are doing. Actually, you need to do something less. So, if you read no further than the next paragraph, then read only this:

After you inhale the smoke or the vape, do not hold it in! It’s that simple. When you hold your breath, you put your health on hold. This will be on the quiz, so pay attention. Don’t hold your breath!

Don’t Waste Your Breath

Holding in your breath longer than you usually do when not smoking does not make you any higher. Scientific studies (that’s right, the doctors in the white coats have analyzed this) have proven that holding your breath is a waste of your time and quite literally a waste of your breath. So don’t waste your breathe and don’t hold that hit!

It’s no coincidence that, if you cough, it’s usually on that hold. So breathe naturally and normally, almost as though you were not smoking. Inhale and exhale casually, without fanfare or deliberation. Even tobacco smokers, who may sometimes inhale long and deep drags, seldom hold it in. If they always held their breath the way that most cannabis smokers do, tobacco smokers would all be dead. So take it easy and breathe easy!

When your shaman or mentor or older sibling turned you on as an initiate to the rite of smoking cannabis, your cannabis coach probably instructed you to inhale deeply and to hold that toke. Such an unfamiliar and unnatural way of breathing may have contributed to your failure to get high on that first try or two. In 1992, while campaigning for the presidency, Bill Clinton admitted that during his college years, “I experimented with marijuana a time or two, and didn’t like it, and didn’t inhale.” We all know that the blowhard was lying when he notoriously claimed that he didn’t inhale. Instead, he more honestly should have claimed that he couldn’t inhale. Clinton quite possibly might have failed because the forced technique of intentionally inhaling smoke and then holding it in was so unnatural and new to him. And unnatural and contrary to normal human physiology for all of us, too.

Cough It Up!

Here comes an anatomy lesson with some physiology thrown in. So, if the mere thought of peeking into your innards makes you feel queasy, consider skipping this section. Or just close your eyes, and I’ll let you know when it’s over. Because this won’t be on the quiz.

Once you fill your lungs with smoke-filled air, holding your breath will promote no further absorption of the cannabinoids. Thus, no further enhanced psychoactive or medicinal effect. Cannabinoids are fat-soluble and so are quickly absorbed within the lungs. “Tars” is a diffuse term for the hydrocarbons produced by the combustion of plant matter. Tars are not fat-soluble, so are absorbed more slowly. More than any contaminants or debris in smoke, tars muck up the works. Holding your breath only promotes more intake of tars and therefore more irritation to your lungs.

The literary scion Aldous Huxley rhapsodized



Smoke-Kiss photo illustration by the author.

about the psychedelic drug experience in his 1954 classic, *The Doors of Perception*. The rock band, The Doors, embraced their name in an homage to that book’s title. For the cannabis drug experience, cannabinoids enter through the doors of the lungs. Think of your lungs as two huge playing fields with several main players, all on the same team. Your team. For our discussion, the star athletes are the alveoli cells, the goblet cells, and the cilia cells.

Alveoli cells are tiny air sacs lining the interior membranes of the lungs. They absorb oxygen to assimilate it into the bloodstream. Absorption of oxygen is by design, of other miscellaneous substances is by accident. Cannabinoids just happen to be among the miscellanea that catch a ride with the oxygen.

While the alveoli are the doorways, goblet cells and cilia cells are the doormats. You wipe your feet on a doormat so you won’t track dirt into your home.

Goblet cells secrete mucus to trap tars, ash, and other gunk in order to prevent them from being tracked into your bloodstream. Cilia cells are delicate hair-like hooks that scrap away that schmutz-clogged mucus to move the schmutz back up the hatch. Cilia cells can become overburdened by an overload of smoke or foul air, regardless of the origin. If too gummed up to do any further heavy lifting, the cilia slacken at their job. Mucus then accumulates in your lungs. Pathogens lurking about and hanging out in the primordial soup in your lungs then flourish and multiply. And whammo! You come down with a cold, the flu, an acute case of bronchitis, or a not so cute case of pneumonia. Thus, heavy cannabis smokers compared to nonsmokers have garnered a well-deserved reputation for succumbing to more episodes of respiratory illnesses. So try your best to cough it up and get it out.

A Breathtaking Experience

Several medical studies conducted and published during the early 1990’s have proven that trying to enhance the effects of cannabis smoke by holding your breath is ultimately a wasteful effort. Mitch Earleywine, Ph.D., is a professor of psychology and the author and editor of several scholarly books about cannabis published by the very prestigious Oxford University Press. He has publicized the futility of this mistaken notion of holding in your smoke. When he has warned about this in public lectures, some unreceptive members of his audiences have displayed not just healthy skepticism but downright hostility. They have hurled things at him, and the projectiles were not mere spitballs or rotten tomatoes. As a lecturer does not provide much cover, his must have been a breathtaking experience.

As an ethnobotanical drug researcher turned holistic health guru turned bestselling author, Andrew Weil, M.D., too, has advocated that cannabis smokers not hold their breath. Soon after the medical studies were published, Weil spread the word. I heeded his early clarion call and I promptly put an end to the error of my ways.

The Smoke-Kiss

But wait! There have been special occasions when I did indeed hold that hit. The only logical reason for holding your breath is to use those extra moments to get into position for sharing your breath. Call it the Smoke-Kiss. (Expressed in the vernacular, the Smoke-Kiss is known as a “shotgun kiss,” but that misbegotten moniker had long been overdue for updating.) If you are impoverished, frugal-minded, or just plain cheap, you can save on the high

cost of cannabis by recycling your second-hand smoke. Share it with your significant other(s). Exhale while kissing them, while they likewise inhale while kissing you.

As a bonus, your recipients will benefit by having the burning hot smoke cooled down to body temperature. And if they happen to be inexperienced newbies, harsh smoke will not be as hard on their tenderfoot lungs.

Acting with altruism and purely in the name of science, conduct a practice session. You likely will find that not only does sharing your second-hand smoke get both of you equally high or medicated, it will even add a touch of romance to an otherwise mundane activity, if not also instill intimacy into your otherwise humdrum relationship.

Hypoxia and Hyperventilation and Huffing and Puffing

Some diehard smokers swear by the practice of holding their breaths because they consider lightheadedness to be part of their high. Holding your breath, with or without smoke, causes a reduction of oxygen reaching your brain. The havoc wreaked upon your braincells is called hypoxia. Even without smoking, if you hold your breath long enough, the oxygen deprivation will make you feel giddy or dizzy. You might experience the same sensation from choking on a chunk of meat or from drowning in a pool of water.

It is our human nature to seek altered states of consciousness. Even as children, many of us made ourselves giddy by performing multiple somersaults down a hillside. Or we made our heads spin by standing and whirling our bodies around in circles. We enjoyed as a form of play the dizziness and loopiness that the whirling produced. As adults, some Sufi Dervishes do this as a form of prayer, chanting, and meditation, all rolled into one.

Hyperventilation, too, will make you feel light-headed. As an adult, you might try huffing and puffing like the Big Bad Wolf blowing down the house of one of the Three Little Pigs. “I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down!”

The Breath of Life

Some smokers firmly believe that, until they cough, they will not have inhaled enough smoke to make them high. They anticipate the coughing as their signal that they have smoked enough. Actually, coughing signals that they have smoked too much. While coughing expands the lungs, that is only because it has irritated them. Taking long and deep tokes and holding it in, too, expands the lungs. But because smoke is in the mix, the size of the lungs is a measure of quantity, not quality.

For a more healthful way of expanding lung capacity, try improved techniques of breathing. Yogis, freedivers, singers, and wind instrumentalists practice it. You can read entire books that are devoted just to teach you how to breathe. Or get off your butt and find joy in your body. Engage in some physical exercise, especially aerobics such as walking, swimming, rowing, biking, or running. Or even dancing. Just about any activity except for staring into cellphones or reading books or sitting around smoking a joint.

Mark Mathew Braunstein is the author of five books, including Microgreen Garden and Sprout Garden, and a contributor to many holistic health magazines, as well as ten times previously to Neighbors. This article is an excerpt from his forthcoming book, Mindful Smoking: Health Tips for Cannabis Smokers. For an Annotated Bibliography with active links to and excerpts from the scientific studies alluded to here, see: www.MarkBraunstein.Org/cannabis

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David Corsini continued from page 16
the floor joists on the cellar ceiling to hide the insulation that had been placed between the joists. This created an environmental niche that mice seem to love. When I am in the cellar working on my art projects, I occasionally hear mice running across the aluminum foil and can see where they are running. As sport, and to give the mice a heads-up, I use a ruler to hit at where their little feet are running. I am sure it doesn't bother the mice.

There seems to be a route from this cellar area to the pantry. We keep a small baited Havahart trap in the pantry and every once in a while, we catch a mouse. The first time this happened, I released the mouse at the end of our driveway which is 300 yards from the house. The trap was reset and the next morning there was another mouse. I thought it was the same one, so a new release procedure was developed.

The procedure is as follows: First, in a plastic sandwich bag I put a good helping of seed and pellet leftovers from our parrots. I then put this and the trap containing the mouse in a plastic grocery bag, put the bag in the car and then take off for the two- and-a-half mile trip to the Windham Center cemetery. Then, to the accompaniment of bagpipes playing from the CD player, I take the mouse and care package to a specific place by a stone wall. The mouse usually does not linger or say thank you. This procedure in all likelihood does not assure the mouse's survival, but my conscience, at least for this mouse, is clear.

This procedure has been followed for several years. During this time, I noted a pattern of catching mice in the pantry. Mice were frequently caught on sequential days and followed by a several month period of no mice. Perhaps the first mouse I had released at the end of our driveway was not the one that showed up in the trap on the next day. Maybe mice go around in pairs. I could have marked the mice in some way to test out this hypothesis, but I have not.

Sometimes the cellar mice romp around in my work area. While I tolerate some mouse droppings on my work bench, every once in a while, the signs of mice are just too much to bear and I set out several snap traps. I feel rather bad about killing these mice but rationalize the practice as follows:

First, mice in the house can do damage and have the potential to spread disease. Second, if I set a live trap down cellar, where I do not go every day, I might end up causing a mouse a cruel death from starvation or lack of water. Third, I do not actually believe that the catch-and-release really works for the mice and they probably die within a day or two after release. And fourth, crows are very fond of dead mice. So, in a sense, I am not killing mice in the cellar, I am catching food for the crows. Isn't it amazing how the mind works when it needs a rationalization?

Windham Center, 2012
(Previously published in *Neighbors* and *Long-Term Bonds*, https://www.amazon.com/Long-Term-Bonds-Selected-Stories-Couple/dp/1530137101/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=)



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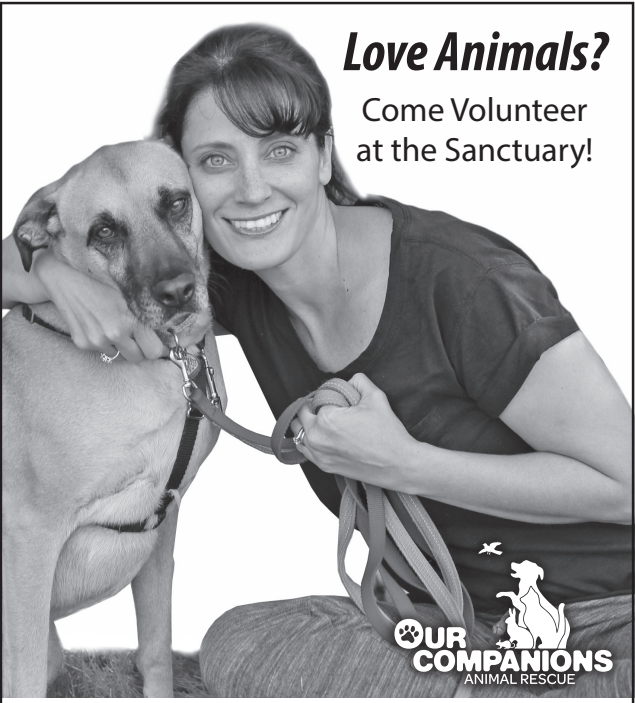
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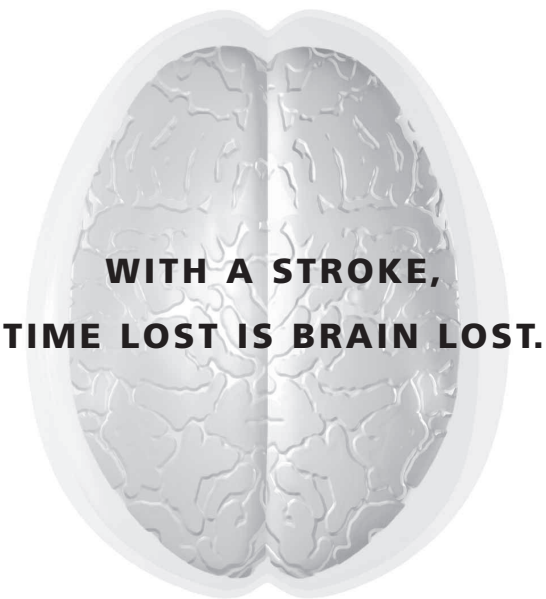
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Our Neighbors’ Art

Above: Enjoying Solitude, Acrylic paint on wooden panel, 12” x 16” by Scott E. Rhoades of Mansfield.
Fish and fishing artwork by Charles Mccaughtry of Ashford.



Viruses – Protect Yourself

By Nicole T. Smith, L.Ac.

The world is currently in a crisis situation over the outbreak of the new virus COVID-19. I wish I could say that once we get through this, it won’t happen again, but it’s very likely that future similar threats are imminent. Now more than ever it is important to take the strength of our health seriously.

The average lifestyle of most Americans has resulted in weakened immune systems. Overuse of antibiotics, sanitizers, and bleach, diets with too much meat, dairy, and sugar, and personal care products loaded with chemicals, have all contributed to this state of demise.

Here is a list of some of the best practices to begin implementing now:

Fill your plate with fresh fruits and vegetables at every meal and for snacks

Drink filtered water, at least half your body weight in ounces, everyday

Ensure adequate sleep each night

Lose weight if necessary and maintain a proper weight – being overweight comes with higher risk of degenerative diseases such as diabetes, cancer, heart trouble, etc.

Clean, clean, clean – wash hands with warm water and chemical-free soap,

keep the house neat and uncluttered, and replace toxic cleaners and personal care products with fragrance-free and nontoxic ones

Exercise

And, very importantly, get acupuncture. Regular acupuncture treatments have been scientifically proven to increase the number of T cells – our natural defense that destroy harmful bacteria and viruses. CNN reported that of the more than 50,000 COVID-19 patients in China, those that used both Chinese medicine with traditional had improvement of symptoms faster, and shorter hospital stays.

Prevention before the onset of a disease is always ideal. Most of my patients that follow regular care no longer come down with the sicknesses, flus, and sinus infections that they used to.

It is a horrible thing that is happening across the world right now, with all of this suffering. Let’s make good use of this time at home, in a position to slow down from our regular lives, to create a wellness plan, listing out solid steps that you resolve to take for your health.

Nicole T. Smith, L.Ac. is a Board-certified and licensed acupuncturist located in Scotland, CT. Visit her site at: www.ThePamperedPorcupine.com. 860-450-6512.



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