

May 2020

A little paper big on community

FREE

Neighbors



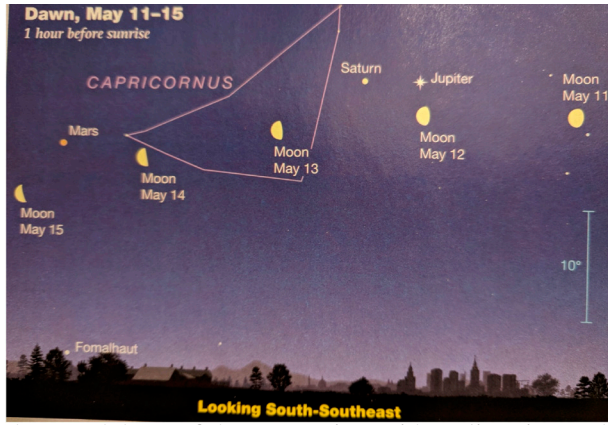
Looking Up:

At the Shores of the Sky

By Bob Grindle

When my wife and I first decided to marry, not terribly long after we'd been introduced by mutual friends, gone out on a blind date with those same friends--I think it was to a singles pick-up bar, the Zodiac in West Hartford rings a bell--there was very little extra money in our budget. Few things drive the making-do ethic like a lack of funds. A shoestring wedding, performed outside at the West Hartford Reservoir by a friend who was a JP, and attended by only parents, a couple of siblings and those same mutual friends as the "bests," was followed by purchasing a nearly finished converted garage in Chaplin as our dreamhouse. There is something about making-do, especially when you do it together, that tethers a person to that moment or time period. Whether it is a lack of money, or perhaps an abundance of personal bad luck, a local tragedy or national disaster, or even something Global, like a pandemic, there are moments that seem to rest squarely, and heavily, upon each of our shoulders. Those moments, when shared together, occasionally offer a crystal-ball-like preview of our species' likelihood of survival into the coming millennia.

What really constitutes good species survival behavior? Bet that conversation could go off track in a hurry. As much as I enjoy standing or sitting or lying beneath a darkening sky and singularly pondering such questions as the planets and stars and other things celestial flicker into view, one of the things I miss most because of current pressures to avoid contact is the lively discussions that can evolve when we allow our brains to engage with other brains and simply chase the waves on the beaches of our humanity. There are no skin colors, or religious absolutes, or territorial imperatives or blame or credit to be found on these shores, and like the allegorical story about the child



who saved the starfish one at a time without listening to the warnings that she couldn't save them all, we shouldn't get bogged down by the weight of our question. There is an old Chinese saying, "He who wants to move mountains, starts by carrying away little stones." That's a charming thought, not unlike the Scottish town planner who first coined, "Think globally, act locally" back in the early 1900's. But in this age of homo sapiens, when the annihilation of all civilization is a real threat, such sentiments, however true they might be, seem quaintly dated and maybe even naïve.

Thinking back to my high school days, when running along the sports courts and fields taking pictures for the school newspaper seemed like the very definition of doing something fun and useful, I recall the jolt onto another level of awareness when a friend introduced me to Rachel Carson's pioneering book, "Under the Sea Wind." Carson's comfortable grasp of her material and deep reverence for the Earth and its natural cycles, achieved after decades of research and study and wading about in tidal flats and helping to crew on oceanographic expeditions helped me to redefine my own ideas of what was useful. To this day,

I enjoy listening to interestingly crafted and genuinely held ideas, plans, opinions, hopes and dreams, even those I don't agree with. Somehow, the current global health crisis seems as much a challenge to our ability to discriminate between useful and useless information as it is a challenge to our health. It is not that I do or don't agree with what I hear; it's just that I can't believe I just heard it.

Stepping outside into the night, the sky is perfectly clear for a change, and I can believe what I hear. Owls and the whisper of the white spruce seem a comfortable backdrop to always brilliant Venus in the West-Northwest sky. Capella is twinkling slightly to the North of Venus. Capella, Latin for little goat or she-goat, is the third brightest star in the night sky and has been the subject of Bedouin and Chinese and Mayan astronomers for more than four thousand years. If you look up into the northwest sky and see Capella, pause for a minute to realize that the light you see left the star more than 40 years ago and has traveled more than 250 trillion miles to reach your eyes. There is something comforting about the steadiness of the night.

By mid-May the Sun will be up before 5:30 and if you're up before 4:30 you might get a chance to see the Moon waning as it passes Jupiter, Saturn and Mars. All three planets will be companions in the Southeast morning sky for the entire month, and with the promise of spring on the horizon and a very gradual return to the normal ebb and flow of life's familiar patterns, perhaps we will all find time and reason to pause and reflect on our immense good fortune at simply being here on the shore of the ocean of the sky.

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



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All Infrastructure Workers Everywhere

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Back cover photos: Clockwise from upper left- bluebird, bloodroot, turtle, dead tree, wood duck, beaver. Photos by Stan Malcolm. <https://performance-vision.com/airline2020>.

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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Our Earth is Healing, Are We?

By Loretta Wrobel



In the midst of all the terrifying updates delineating the destructive path of COVID-19, I hear uplifting good news! For the first time in over thirty years, the crests of the Himalayan peaks are now visible. For several decades, the majestic summits of these giant mountains were shrouded in pollution and could not be viewed. Now those snowy Himalayan peaks, highest on our beloved planet, can be seen by humans living in Punjab, India.

I read that satellite data is revealing a thirty percent drop in air pollution in the Northeast, where we reside. All over our country a reduction in air pollution is reported in our major cities. Los Angeles has the longest streak of good air quantity since 1995. In Kentucky where several coal plants have shut down, the asthma rates have fallen sharply. Because of the lack of coal pollution, people in the area are using fewer inhalers.

Meanwhile the wild animals in our National Parks are thriving. With the closing of many scenic destinations, the parks have less people, less traffic and less noise. As a result, the animals are taking back the land. There have been more bear sightings in Yosemite. As the air is free from exhaust, the bird populations have soared. The critically endangered turtles are experiencing a higher survival rate due to hatching on empty beaches.



Does any of this startle or surprise you? Haven't we been talking about climate change and what is happening on our small, precious planet for what seems like eons? Actually, we have just celebrated the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Now we have the data to prove to the doubters our impact on climate change. Our unsustainable lifestyle is destroying the vitality and diversity of our planet. Will we open our closed eyes and minds and begin to conjure new ways of living on our delicate globe in order to save not only our own species but all the living creatures?

As the only species that is trashing our earth at an alarming rate, we have the capacity to make cataclysmic shifts in how our excessive greed has brought us to the shores of complete annihilation of humans, and uncountable amounts of species of plants and animals.

Due to the severe reduction in traffic, the automobile collisions in California have been drastically cut in half. This translates into reduced death and injuries and a savings of millions of dollars per day. The grim side of this statistic is the growing list of deaths from COVID-19 in our country and the rest of the world. The number of people diagnosed with the virus continues to climb as our hospitals struggle to keep ahead of the pandemic.

The gift that coronavirus has granted us is the opportunity to drastically alter our lifestyles, the way we earn a living, and how we interact. With the rapid shutdown of our economic output, we are forced to stare at what our activities have done to our planet. We are witnessing the rapid improvement of the health of our mother earth with the nearly complete shutdown of our economy.

As we approach the restarting of our economy, will we pause to consider how we can live together on this small green sphere with greater compatibility with nature and each other? Obviously, the solution is not for us to stay at home forever. We need to employ our intelligence, creativity and skills to develop more beneficial economic systems. As we return to a vibrant society, is it possible to have a thriving economy without sacrificing our health, destroying our natural resources, polluting our waterways, and placing other living species in jeopardy?

The virus pandemic is screaming at us. We cannot ignore the traumatic changes it has caused in our lives. I read that for people living in toxic environments the death rate from the virus is higher. Are we going to continue to refuse to pay attention, and push to resume our cancerous economic activities without examining more enduring ways to live with each other?

Yes, our families have been reunited, and most of us have slowed down as the danger from the invisible virus threatens our lives. Has our vulnerability allowed us to contemplate our priorities and realize what is important? Have we discovered our past fast-paced lifestyle made us

neglect people and things we really love?

Listening to my inner voice, I miss connecting with friends, being hugged, and dancing. I miss my old life. I miss my routines. I long to go to the Willi Food Co-op and chat with my community. I love watching spring unfurl and hearing the birds send out their calls for a mate and seeking nesting sites. I want to visit my year-old grand-nephew, watch him laughing and learning new skills, and be able to kiss the top of his adorable head. I would like to pretend everything is fine, and I know it is not. I struggle to accept these new behaviors, such as wearing masks, keeping a distance, hand washing, and limiting contacts. I yearn for the time when I can walk with a friend without worrying about the space between us.

I wonder how we will manage to regain our lives and keep ourselves and our environment healthy.

As a species, we have a tremendous amount of healing to accomplish. I feel fortunate to be living during this transformational time. Can we, as a community, rediscover and adjust to living with the understanding that our planet is remarkably resilient while increasingly fragile. The answer is not to just return to where we left off. Our capacity to figure out how we continue to evolve as humans, while remembering our task to be courageous earth keepers, has never been so essential. We must be conscious of the long-term effects of our actions and act responsibly.

Many of us now have time to consider the lasting effect of how we move through our day. What kinds of businesses are we supporting, and are we aware of our local small businesses? What types of economic growth do we want to continue? Where do we spend our money? Do we pay attention to sustainable endeavors, and look at ways to encourage others to invest in companies that promote health, cooperation, and sharing the wealth? What about a bigger commitment to clean energy, more efficient housing, and better mass transportation systems? Can we shift our focus to developing strong communities that take care of and watch out for each other? Is it possible to be less obsessed with accruing, and more dedicated to sharing the abundances in our world? Are we mature enough to let go of the compelling drive to consume and acquire?

I am eager to roll up my sleeves and embrace the uncharted path of exploring how to live and work together without harming mother earth. The pandemic has given all of us the opportunity to change, begin anew, and to heal. Are you willing to do the same, to take the exhilarating and painful steps toward becoming a compassionate society where we cooperate rather than dominate? Truly, I hope so.

Our Community Calendar

Compiled By Dagmar Noll

May 3, Sunday
Meditation: Willimantic Mindfulness Sangha Meditation (Online), 6:30p.m. - 8:00p.m. Non-sectarian, Buddhist-style sitting meditation, teaching and sharing. Info: 860-450-1464 dmangum617@gmail.com

May 10, Sunday
Community Food: Ashford Farmer's Market, 10:00a.m. - 1:00p.m. Seasonal produce, fruits, cheese, meat, syrups, honey, baked goods. Please wear masks and practice social distancing. Pompey Hollow, Rt 44 across the street from Town Hall. Info: Loretta, birdeye123@charter.net
Meditation: Willimantic Mindfulness Sangha Meditation (Online), 6:30p.m. - 8:00p.m. (See 5/3)

May 13, Wednesday
Fibre Arts: Online Knitting Circle, 5:00p.m. - 6:00p.m. All ages and levels welcome. Also other fibre arts! Go to: meet.google.com/fkd-ubdk-mit:

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it's a great day for a subway!

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Anita Johnson of Tobacco Road Farm at the Storrs Farmers Market recently held at the Mansfield Library. The Lebanon farm is owned and operated by Bryan O'Hara and Anita Johnson. C. Dennis Pierce photo.

From the Ground Up - Buying Local in Connecticut

Quarter Century Tobacco Road Farm

By C. Dennis Pierce

Mother Earth works hard to put food on the table for all 7.5 billion of us humans: Growing crops and sustaining livestock requires an enormous amount of land and water but it also requires the hard work of our farmers in Connecticut. Farmers have to constantly reinvent themselves based on the changing markets and the varied desires of consumers and all kinds of other factors. It's not enough to be a farmer. They have to be a businessperson. They have to be an innovator and someone who's good at promotion and public relations. It's a real challenge. When I write this I immediately think of Bryan O'Hara and Anita Johnson, owners of Tobacco Road Farm in Lebanon. Tobacco Road Farm has been the cornerstone in the Storrs Market since the market was conceived by Bill Hopkins, one of the first Market Masters at the Storrs Market. Brian O'Hara has been growing vegetables at his one-plus acre farm, Tobacco Road Farm, in Lebanon, Connecticut for 25+ years. In those years Brian has developed several processes that have changed his approach to the structure of his gardens. He wrote a great article for *The Natural Farmer*, The Newspaper for the Northeast Organic Farming Association, which can be found here: <https://thenaturalfarmer.org/article/no-till-vegetables-at-tobacco-road-farm/>. Tobacco Road Farm's wide variety of products can be found at the Storrs Farmer's Market and the Willimantic Co-op. I have been purchasing the farm's mixed bag of spicy greens at the Co-op for many years and I am proud to serve them for guests since they are so flavorful.

Farmer's markets in the Quiet Corner have long served as a way to increase food access, support local farmers and local businesses, and bolster a locally empowering economy that right now needs some help. With the agricultural food supply chain at risk and local businesses devastated by closures farmer's markets can fill a critical health and economic gap. Just like the local grocery stores that remain open, markets are mandating the six-foot rule and all of the precautions of social distancing. Keep an eye out for the Storrs Market's new schedule at <https://www.storrsfarmersmarket.org>

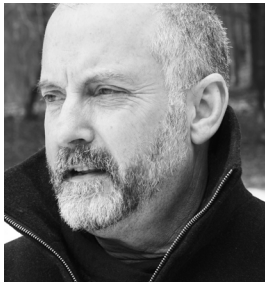
Spring is about rhubarb. It shows up in farmer's market, the grocery store and probably in your own backyard. I was brought up with the tradition of going out with a bowl of sugar and head to a neighbor's garden, breaking off stalks, dipping them into the sugar and munching away. So, rather than encourage you to do the same I offer to you the following recipe:

Rhubarb Coffee Cake

Ingredients:

Cake -

½ cup of butter
¾ cup sugar
1 egg
1/3 cup of milk
2 cups sifted flour



1 tablespoon of baking powder
½ teaspoon of salt
¼ cup sliced almonds

Filling-

2 cups sliced (1 inch) rhubarb
½ cup sugar
4 tablespoons of water, divided
1 ½ tablespoons of cornstarch

Topping:

¼ cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon flour
1 teaspoon of cinnamon
1 tablespoon of butter

Directions:

Prepare filling:

Combine rhubarb, sugar and 2 tablespoons of water and cook in a medium saucepan until rhubarb is softened but not mushy.
Combine remaining 2 tablespoons of water and cornstarch. Add to rhubarb and cook until thickened.
Reserve.

Cake:

Cream butter and sugar
Blend in egg and milk
Mix flour with baking powder and salt. Blend into creamed mixture
Spread half of batter in a greased, eight-inch square pan.
Cover with rhubarb filling and top with almonds
Top with remaining batter.
Combine topping ingredients and sprinkle over batter.
Bake at 375 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes.

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 practice social distancing and that in itself is a significant contribution to keeping our community safe. But this is also a time when we sorely need optimism. I suggest that at times like this we need to reflect on the life of Henry David Thoreau, who in 1854 truly knew the essence of social distancing while living at Walden Pond. Thoreau writes, "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude."

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...

Have You Been The Target Of An Unfair Debt Collection Practice?

By Attorney Kevin M. Tighe.

In normal times, sometimes people fall behind on one or more bills which may result in them being contacted by a debt collector. However, when there is an economic downturn, such a scenario may occur more frequently, to more people, and to people for whom such a scenario may be a completely new one.

It is important to know that debt collection is not without governing rules and laws. The most important of these are set out in the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (the "FDCPA"), a federal law that makes it illegal for debt collectors to use abusive, unfair, or deceptive practices when collecting debts. What types of debts are covered by the FDCPA? Your credit card debt, auto loans, medical bills, student loans, mortgage, and other household debts are covered. But business debts are not covered by the FDCPA.

Notices from debt collectors will almost certainly have language concerning the amount of the debt, the original creditor (sometimes, but not always, original creditors will assign or sell your debt to a professional debt collector), and the account number for the debt used by the original creditor. The initial notice will almost certainly inform you that you have thirty days to contact the debt collector if you desire to challenge the validity of the debt. If you timely contact the debt collector, they will provide you with written proof of the debt. However, if you do not timely contact the debt collector to challenge the debt, they will then assume that the debt is valid.

However, some debt collectors may include additional language in written notices and correspondence which may violate the FDCPA. For example, debt collectors cannot misrepresent the amount you owe, falsely claim to be attorneys or government representatives, falsely claim that you will be arrested or that legal action will be commenced against you, or try to collect interest, fees, or other charges on top of the amount you owe, unless the original contract or state law allows it.

Further, debt collectors do not usually limit themselves to mailing you notices or correspondence. You may also be subjected to one or more telephone calls, emails and/or texts. However, there are rules for such communications. For example, debt collectors cannot contact you at inconvenient times or places, such as before 8:00 a.m. or after 9:00 p.m. (unless you consent to them doing so), or contact you at work if they are told that you are not permitted to get calls there.

Debtors have remedies if a debt collector has violated the FDCPA by using of one or more unfair debt collection practices. First, a debtor can file a complaint with the federal Fair Trade Commission ("FTC"). Second, a debtor can also file a civil lawsuit against the debt collector in state or federal court. A civil lawsuit against a debt collector based upon one or more violations of the FDCPA must be filed within one year. That one-year period begins to run at the time when the alleged violations occur. Such a civil lawsuit can potentially result in the debtor being awarded money damages. Importantly, if a debtor files a civil lawsuit against a debt collector and wins, the debtor can be reimbursed for their attorney's fees and costs. This is especially important because, without this potential reimbursement, debtors might not be able to afford to pay an attorney to bring FDCPA actions against unscrupulous debt collectors.

Most debt collectors conduct themselves in accordance with the law since they are aware of the rules set forth in the FDCPA, that they can be penalized/fined by the FTC and/or potentially sued by a debtor. However, as is the case in any profession, there are some unscrupulous debt collectors who will not conduct themselves in accordance with the law. So, if you receive a notice from a debt collector and/or are the subject of non-written communications you should take the time to review the rules set forth in the FDCPA at the following web address: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/debt-collection-faqs>.

In addition to the federal FDCPA, consumer debtors in Connecticut are also protected by the state's fair debt collection practices act. The Connecticut Department of Banking administers the laws and regulations concerning the collection of consumer debts. The Department of Banking's website provides relevant information about what your rights are as a consumer debtor at <https://portal.ct.gov/DOB/Consumer/Consumer-Education/Consumer-Collection-Practices>.

This article and the information in it do not constitute legal advice and are not substitutes for legal or other professional advice. If you believe that you have been the target of an unfair debt collection practice, please call me at (860) 455-5207 or email me at AttorneyTighe@tighelawfirm.com, and we can discuss the specific facts of your situation.



Volunteers were happy to get a visit from WINY Radio's Gary Osbrey (fourth from left), during the March 14 community collection event at the Cargill Council 64 Knights of Columbus Hall on Providence Street in Putnam. Putnam's Scouts BSA Troop 21 and Cub Scout Pack 21 joined forces recently with Cargill Council, to collect donations of money and non-perishable food for the Putnam-based non-profit Daily Bread Food Pantry, which serves local, needy people. John D. Ryan photo

“Thank God for this food drive”

Putnam Knights, Scouts, collect much-needed cash and food for local needy

By John D. Ryan

PUTNAM, CONN. – In the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, a recently-completed food drive is helping the non-profit Daily Bread Food Pantry to get through the unusually large need for help they are experiencing. Scouts BSA Troop 21, Cub Scout Pack 21 and Cargill Council 64, Knights of Columbus, joined together to collect more than \$2,500 and well over a ton of food for local needy people. Knights and Scouts completed food collections shortly before Connecticut's “Stay Safe, Stay Home” advisories went into effect in mid-March. After getting a few late monetary donations, drive organizers just finished the count, with \$2,512 in cash and 2,407 pounds of non-perishable food collected.

Daily Bread Program Coordinator Ann Kathi Peterson said they are very grateful. “Thank God for this food drive,” she said. “Thank God for what the Scouts and the Knights of Columbus have done.”

The local, non-profit, non-denominational food pantry is operated by Interfaith Human Services of Putnam, providing local needy people with food and financial help to pay for necessities like electricity and heating oil. Peterson said that based solely on need, prior to the virus outbreak Daily Bread was helping an average of about 500 to 550 people every month, sometimes more, from Putnam, Pomfret, Woodstock and Eastford. Economic conditions over the last few weeks, however, have increased that number. “We're still operating, and now we've had recently-unemployed people here we wouldn't otherwise see,” she said. “The money will be put to good use to help our clients pay for basic needs, while the food from the Scouts and the Knights has helped to make the difference for us in a difficult time.”

The combined three-week collection included support from three local churches, Putnam town employees and the public. The drive began when Scouts and Knights passed out hundreds of distinctive bright yellow plastic “Scouting for Food” grocery bags at the masses being celebrated at St. Mary Church of the Visitation in Putnam and Most Holy Trinity Church in Pomfret. It was soon expanded to collections by the Congregational Church of Putnam and by Putnam town employees. As part of the effort, people were asked for monetary donations and to also fill the yellow bags with groceries and bring them back. Knights and Scouts followed up later and collected the donated money and food as the drive went on. For years the Knights of Columbus and Boy Scouts of America parent organizations have had national food-collection programs for the needy. In 2008, that led Cargill Council 64 and Troop 21 to start working together every year to assist local, needy people. New Cub Scout Pack 21 was added this year.

Of course, this time the whole effort was overshadowed by the oncoming Coronavirus, which made collecting food and money for the local needy more important than ever.

“We all know the economy has taken a big hit since the virus took off,” said Cargill Council 64 Grand Knight Douglas Bergstrom. Bergstrom is the elected leader of the Catholic fraternal benefit society, which is made up of more than 200 men from Putnam, Pomfret, Woodstock

and the immediately surrounding area. “We got lucky with the timing on this, just as things got tougher. We're very grateful that the donations came at the right time to do the most good.”

Along with the church and Putnam town employee collections, on Saturday morning, March 14, the drive included a community collection of food and money at the Cargill Council 64 Knights of Columbus Hall on Providence Street. During the outdoor event, motorists pulled into the parking lot with their cash and bags of groceries. Meanwhile, customers were giving their donations to volunteers stationed two blocks away, at Putnam Supermarket. Just after noon, Knights and Scouts trucked the food over to the pantry, located at the Living Faith United Methodist Church on Grove Street, where they helped to bring it inside.

Scout leaders were on hand to supervise their young volunteers.

“We have younger kids in the Cub Pack, so we wanted to teach them about serving others right from the beginning,” said Pack 21 Cubmaster Sean Weaver, who leads boys and girls age five through ten. The Putnam Cub Scout pack started last fall, so this was their first big project to help their community. “They did great, and they learned about helping people. I'm very proud of them.”

Meanwhile, Troop 21 Assistant Scoutmaster Patricia Gaffney agreed with the idea that this drive came at just the right time.

“I have two teenagers at home who know how to eat,” Gaffney said. “It's tough enough putting food on the table anyway, without having so many people out of work all of a sudden. I'm glad our Scouts could help out.”

The drive is over, but the area will continue to have many needy people for some time. Donation checks may be mailed to Interfaith Human Services of Putnam. P. O. Box 281, Putnam, CT 06260.

May 17, Sunday
Community Food: Ashford Farmer's Market, 10:00a.m. - 1:00p.m. (See 5/10)

Meditation: Willimantic Mindfulness Sangha Meditation (Online), 6:30p.m. - 8:00p.m. (See 5/3)

May 24, Sunday
Community Food: Ashford Farmer's Market, 10:00a.m. - 1:00p.m. (See 5/10)

Meditation: Willimantic Mindfulness Sangha Meditation (Online), 6:30p.m. - 8:00p.m. (See 5/3)

May 27, Wednesday
Fibre Arts: Online Knitting Circle, 5:00p.m. - 6:00p.m. (See 5/13)

May 28, Thursday
Forum: Community/Comunidad Leaders Forum, 6:30a.m. - 8:30p.m. Awards by Grow Windham, honoring local community leaders. Philip Lauter Park.

May 31, Sunday
Community Food: Ashford Farmer's Market, 10:00a.m. - 1:00p.m. (See 5/10)
Meditation: Willimantic Mindfulness Sangha Meditation (Online), 6:30p.m. - 8:00p.m. (See 5/3)

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They Like Tuna, Too!

By Bill Powers

I've always been a real big fan of tuna. My wife makes an unbelievably tasty tuna noodle casserole. It is something I look forward to. A tuna fish sandwich on rye with caraway seeds was my favorite for lunch when brown bagging it to school. In those days there were only two other choices. One was an egg salad sandwich; just the thought of it slightly nauseates me to this day. The other was PB&J on rye with seeds that I've always happily packed for long hikes and kayaking trips. Who knew that later in my life tuna would surface in very dramatic way!

Over a three year period in my life, I was fortunate to be able to participate in two fellowships for learning about oceans and the life within them. The first was an Eisenhower Fellowship which was designed for teachers. It was centered at Groton's Project Oceanology with UCONN. We learned about research techniques that were applied to Long Island Sound, the Thames and Connecticut Rivers. There was an extraordinary faculty which included Howard ("Mickey")

Weiss and Ralph Yulo (from Eastford) who were extremely knowledgeable about the sea and the teaching of science.

I was absolutely elated to be accepted to a second fellowship with two cooperating universities: UCONN and The Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC) in Mexico. Twenty fellows (10 from the U.S. and 10 from Mexico) would work together in research teams. We were all teachers and spent one summer working on the coast

of New England and the next summer in Mexico on the Pacific Ocean and on the Sea of Cortez. A great benefit was to be able to continue to work with Mickey and Ralph, in addition to outstanding professors from UABC.

I had never dreamed that one day I would set out in as member of a research team in five small boats. Our plan was to closely examine some of the aquaculture enterprises in the pristine Pacific waters of the bay at Ensenada. "Aquaculture is the breeding, rearing, and harvesting of

nation. It was one of several very noticeable large floating rings, each 130 feet in diameter. They were all at least 1,500 feet off shore. Each ring contained a large underwater net that was 60 feet deep. Each ring and net was a pen housing hundreds of Bluefin tuna. The fish, during their migration off Mexico, were caught in purse seines (special nets) pulled by large boats. The tuna were transferred into transport pens pulled by smaller boats. The voyage to Ensenada could take weeks, depending upon where the fish



were caught and the need to travel at very slow speeds in order not to stress the fish. In Ensenada the fish were put into the floating pens and well-fed with fresh sardines for months until harvesting. The fish were flown to Japan after processing.

Diving and swimming in a pen with hundreds of the large, four to five foot long, 120 pound tuna was a memorable experience especially since something else was going on. Immediately after emerging from the water after our dive, my dive partners, Matt (a teacher from Manchester, CT) and Gary Miller (my colleague from Windham High School) talked about the "very large fish" we had all seen swimming just outside of the net.

The very next morning on the front page of the Ensenada newspaper, was a story including a photo of the "very large fish" we had seen. It was a Great White Shark and it had gotten into the pen. It had to be killed and its very last meal was, of course tuna!

Bill Powers is a retired Windham High School Teacher. He resides in Windham.

Stock Buy-Backs Explained

By Adam Meikle

A stock buy-back is nothing more than a financial transaction that corrects an imbalance between the earning power of a company and the profit requirements of the owners (or investors or shareholders).

If you were to invest \$1,000,000 in a single lemonade stand, you would earn very little money, since a single lemonade stand does not require such a large amount of money to operate. A table, lemons, sugar, a pitcher and cups for an entire summer would cost far less than \$1,000,000 and most of the money would be sitting in the bank the entire time, earning far more in interest than the lemonade stand would produce in profits. If you owned a lemonade stand, and were given \$1,000,000 to invest, you would be smart to give most of it back to the investor, since you cannot use it all. In essence, you would be performing a stock buy-back.

The concept dates back to when most businesses required expensive and durable equipment and property to produce goods for sale. Factories and railroads are good examples. Sometimes a company had too much or too little equipment to meet customer demand. Equipment would be bought or sold to and from other companies with new investment or giving investment dollars back to the business owners.

Consider a retiree, who has saved \$50,000 and wishes to invest it to supplement a pension or social security. The retiree must choose a desired return with a risk the retiree is willing to take on. Suppose the retiree needs an additional \$1,000 per year in supplemental income and has a very

low tolerance for risk. The retiree invests the entire \$50,000 in a low risk business such as a grocery store, with an expected return of 2% per year (\$1,000). The grocery store uses the money to expand, buying additional fixtures and equipment and renting additional floor space.

After a year, the store manager shows a profit of only 1.8% on all invested money, rather than 2% and has only \$900 to give the retiree (as a dividend). The manager says there is not enough customer demand to use all the extra space and fixtures efficiently. The manager would like to sell equipment and reduce space and buy back \$5,000 of the retiree's investment. If the same \$900 is earned on the investment next year, it will be a 2% return on the remaining \$45,000 invested. The retiree must find another place to invest the \$5,000 to earn the additional \$100 required per year. The retiree could refuse the buy back and hope for better returns in the future.

In this context, the business cannot use the investment capital efficiently, and it is proper to offer to buy back ownership, or stock so that the investor can invest the money more efficiently elsewhere.

The concept applies to all companies, large and small. Every type of corporation has a typical expected return. A grocery store is competitive and might have low returns of 2% with corresponding low risk. A software company might have higher returns, say, 7%, with corresponding higher risk.

Consider a corporation whose shares are traded publicly in the stock market. Suppose the expected return on invest-

ment is 2% annually. The corporation has two factories. Factory A has returned 2.5% on the investment in the factory and factory B has returned 1.5%. If the factories are about equal in size one could say the return was 2% on average and give the money to investors as a dividend.

A more sophisticated view would be that factory A is doing well and should be expanded, while factory B is not doing as well and should be shrunk. Company management would serve the shareholders better by taking a different set of actions, such as:

1. Pay 2% of the 2.5% return from factory A to shareholders, as expected.
2. Invest 0.5% of the 2.5% return from factory A into expanding factory A.
3. Pay the 1.5% return from factory B to investors in the form of a dividend.
4. Shrink factory B and return money to investors as a share buy back to shrink the amount invested and make the 1.5% return equal to a 2% return on the new and smaller amount invested.

Since the company is publicly traded it may have thousands or millions of investors. How does the company get these investors to agree to a buy back of a portion of their stock? It would be almost impossible. Instead, the company sends a letter (announces) it will be buying back a certain dollar amount of stock, and on a future date the company purchases its own stock directly from a broker in the stock market. Any investor who wished to take advantage of the buy back would sell their stock on that same future date.

Since the buy-back is not performed between the company and individual

investors it is not as efficient as the buy-back in the earlier example. However, any time a corporation has excess money that cannot be put to work, it ought to give that money back to investors to be used more efficiently.

As of May, 2020, we are seeing news about companies affected by the pandemic that had cash which could have been used to support the company during the pandemic, but was used to buy back the company's stock. Assuming the companies were not attempting to do anything other than return unused cash to investors, in hindsight, one might say the companies should have provided lower returns to investors and saved more cash for a future disaster.

Hindsight is 2020.

Adam is a native of Windham, CT. He is a software engineering consultant and freelance equity research analyst. He studied mathematics at ECSU and the University of New Hampshire and asset management at Yale University.

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Unsung Heroes of Soul:

Dyke & The Blazers

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: Dyke & The Blazers, who did the original “Funky Broadway” and were precursors to the 1970s funk explosion.

Arlester Christian (nicknamed “Dyke” for unknown reasons) was born in Buffalo, New York, on June 13, 1943. In the early ‘60s, he played bass with a local band, Carl LaRue & His Crew. In 1964, the band was invited by Eddie O’Jay, a disc jockey in Phoenix, to work in Arizona providing back-up for the O’Jays, the vocal group he managed. By 1965, Eddie O’Jay and his group had moved on, after which Carl LaRue & His Crew dissolved. Dyke and two other band members were too broke to return to Buffalo and so remained in Phoenix. They merged with another band and rechristened themselves Dyke & The Blazers.

The group developed a riff-based number that became their debut single, “Funky Broadway.” In the summer of 1966, they obtained a manager, Art Barrett, who had them record it. Barrett released the two-part single on his Artco label. The song became a local hit in Phoenix, prompting Art Laboe of Los Angeles to distribute it nationally on his Original Sound Records.

In early 1967, “Funky Broadway” entered the Billboard charts, peaking at #17 on its R&B survey in a remarkable 24-week run. On the pop chart, it reached #65. Wilson Pickett remade “Funky Broadway” for Atlantic Records later that year, taking it to #1 R&B and #8 pop.

That summer, Dyke & The Blazers played a series of gigs at Harlem’s Apollo Theater, but the stress of doing so caused the band to break up. Dyke returned to Buffalo and put together a new touring band, which gradually dissolved by 1969. From then on, he recorded in Los Angeles as Dyke & The Blazers with various studio musicians (including future members of Earth, Wind & Fire).

In 1969, Dyke & The Blazers had two top forty pop hits: “We Got More Soul” and “Let a Woman Be a Woman—Let a Man Be a Man.” The latter proved especially influential, having been sampled on three separate recordings: Tupac’s “If My Homie Calls,” Stetsasonic’s “Sally,” and The Heavy’s “How You Like Me Now?” Prince referenced it in his 1991 recording, “Gett Off.” The song also turned up in the 2011 movie, “Friends With Benefits.”



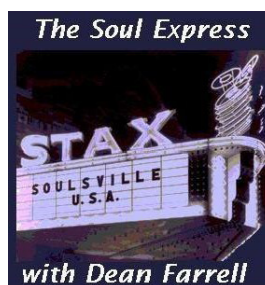
Arlester “Dyke” Christian, 27, was shot to death on Buckeye Road in Phoenix on March 13, 1971. It was reported that the murder was tied to drug dealing, but this was never proven. At the time of his death, Dyke was preparing for a British concert tour and a recording date with Barry White.

Dyke & The Blazers were later inducted into the Arizona Music & Entertainment Hall of Fame.

Charted singles:

- “Funky Broadway, Part 1” (1967) R&B #17, Pop #65
- “So Sharp” (1967) R&B #41
- “Funky Walk, Part 1” (1968) R&B #22, Pop #68
- “We Got More Soul” (1969) R&B #7, Pop #35
- “Let a Woman Be a Woman—Let a Man Be a Man” (1969) R&B #4, Pop #36
- “Uhh” (1970) R&B #20
- “You Are My Sunshine” (1970) R&B #30
- “Runaway People” (1970) R&B #32

Dean Farrell hosts “The Soul Express” on WECS, 90.1-FM, from 9:00 p.m. - midnight on Fridays. He plays vintage soul music of the 1960s and ‘70s—everything from #1 hits to long-lost obscurities. Dean archives his shows at <https://www.mixcloud.com/dean-fioral>. His e-mail address is soulexpress@gmail.com.



Common Sense Car Care

By Rick Ostien

This month we are going to talk about purchasing a replacement vehicle. May is a great month to start looking for a car or truck. The 2020 season of new vehicles is here. A large selection of 2019 vehicles are still available at sale prices. Which means people will be trading in used or pre-owned cars or trucks. Dealers will be offering sale prices for the Memorial Day and Fourth of July holidays as well.

One of the most important things to remember is whatever you decide to buy make sure it’s what you want. The purchase of a vehicle is a large investment. The wrong choice can mean many unhappy driving miles.

There are a few questions we should ask ourselves before purchasing a vehicle. **Number one**, can you afford the vehicle you choose? I don’t mean just monthly payments, registration, and insurance. I mean the maintenance costs as your vehicle becomes older. With the trying times we have currently and many people out of work this is a big thing to think about. **Number two**, what kind of warranty is offered when you purchase your car or truck? If the warranty has a deductible be sure you understand what the amount is and what is covered by the warranty. A purchase without a guarantee is

a poor idea unless you really know what you’re buying. **Number three**, what is the vehicle history on a pre-owned vehicle? This information will give you an idea of how the vehicle was maintained, what kind of repairs will be needed later, and if the vehicle was in an accident. **Number four**, what type of driving do you do? The mileage per gallon could play an important role in your choice. **Number five**, what kind of consumer history does your choice of vehicle have? *Consumer Reports* usually tests certain vehicles and then evaluates the good and bad points of their test results. This can be misleading because over the years some of their picks have turned out to be poor choices. **Number six**, what kind of reputation does the dealer have? The Better Business Bureau or AAA automobile club would be the best sources of information about this.

When I purchase a replacement vehicle I always try to get exactly what I want. People who seem to do this always take better care of their car or truck.

For the person who just needs good transportation there are \$3,000-\$6,000 vehicles still out there. These vehicles are a little hard to find, but with effort can be found. Ask yourself the same questions listed above. The price tag will not be as large as a late model or new vehicle, but it is still an investment.

The person who chooses to try a car auction should have some mechanical repair background. These vehicles usually are sold with no guarantee, so the buyer must beware.

Lastly, purchasing a vehicle via your computer on the internet is another suggestion. This shop at home scenario is becoming very common. The information you can get will make you a better shopper when going to your local dealer. For example many dealers’ list vehicles that are available on their lot. If you see something that you are interested in you’ll be able to check into suggested sale prices and consumer background before you actually look at the vehicle. The internet also saves time and gasoline going from dealer to dealer. Again, beware of vehicle purchases by pictures on the internet. I personally have seen some tragic outcomes of this kind of buying.

I think we have covered the main areas of car and truck shopping. Whatever you decide to do if you need a new vehicle just remember that your local repair shop can answer your questions if you have any. They often work on many different brands and can be a valuable resource for you. Many in the area are open. They are small businesses and need your support to stay in business in this most unusual time.

I close this by hoping that you and your family continue to stay healthy and safe. Happy motoring!!!

Rick Ostien is the owner of Franc Motors in Willington.

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The Decade of Biko - Part II

By Delia Berlin

In the first part of this story, I introduced our late, legendary, Red-bellied parrot. Long ago, Biko's intelligence, humor, parlance and antics filled our home with joy for a decade. Biko was sweet and affectionate for the first two or three years of his life, but once he started maturing, he turned quite aggressive.



David was the only member of our family who didn't experience Biko's aggression. On the contrary, Biko would greet him every morning with effusive regurgitation. To "non-parrot people" this may sound gross, but once you understand the meaning of the gesture, you tend to make allowances. Parrots in the wild often greet their dearest flock members with a small regurgitation of food, an offering, to show affection. In this same way, they feed their chicks and brooding mates. David took the gesture as intended and spent a few minutes alone with Biko every morning, somewhat worried about eliciting jealousy in the rest of the family for being so chosen. But frankly, since Eureka always demanded more cuddling than I had time to give her, I was happy to enjoy Biko's antics at arm's length, and successful "stick training" allowed me to clean cages daily while avoiding conflict.

Something I could do with Biko that David couldn't, involved singing and dancing. As I cleaned Biko's cage every evening, I usually sang very melodious Spanish war songs. He loved that type of music and reacted emotionally, with his entire body, to the rhythm and lyrics. He had a highly developed musical sense and clearly preferred those dramatic songs to anything else I could sing. Once we were done with this routine, it was time for him to go in for the night. He always said "good night" (or "good morning") only at the right times.

We didn't need to prompt Biko's talking and he wasn't shy in front of strangers. He would spontaneously comment on the environment and whatever he could see from his window. He would tell us when he saw a plane, with a high-pitched "A plane! A plane!" reminiscent of Gilligan's Island. He would announce when wild turkeys were coming. He also talked to Eureka, scolding her if she got rambunctious with her toys: "No! Eureka, be careful!"

Biko could also whisper, whistle tunes, laugh, make kisses and talk in different voices. He said "David" with a girly voice (similar to mine) but "Delia" with a manly one (more like David's). That made sense, since that's how he mostly heard those names. He also knew how to point, intently, with his eyes. One episode illustrating this is worth telling.

On a particular morning, when I was home alone with the parrots, I came downstairs and immediately had an eerie feeling. Eureka looked petrified. Biko was at the bottom of his cage, whispering "It's OK... it's OK... it's OK..." As he said this, he alternately looked at me, then outside, through the window. I understood that he was deliberately pointing at something and that he was very scared. Whenever Biko looked afraid, I used to get close to him to calm him down, with exactly the words he was now using.

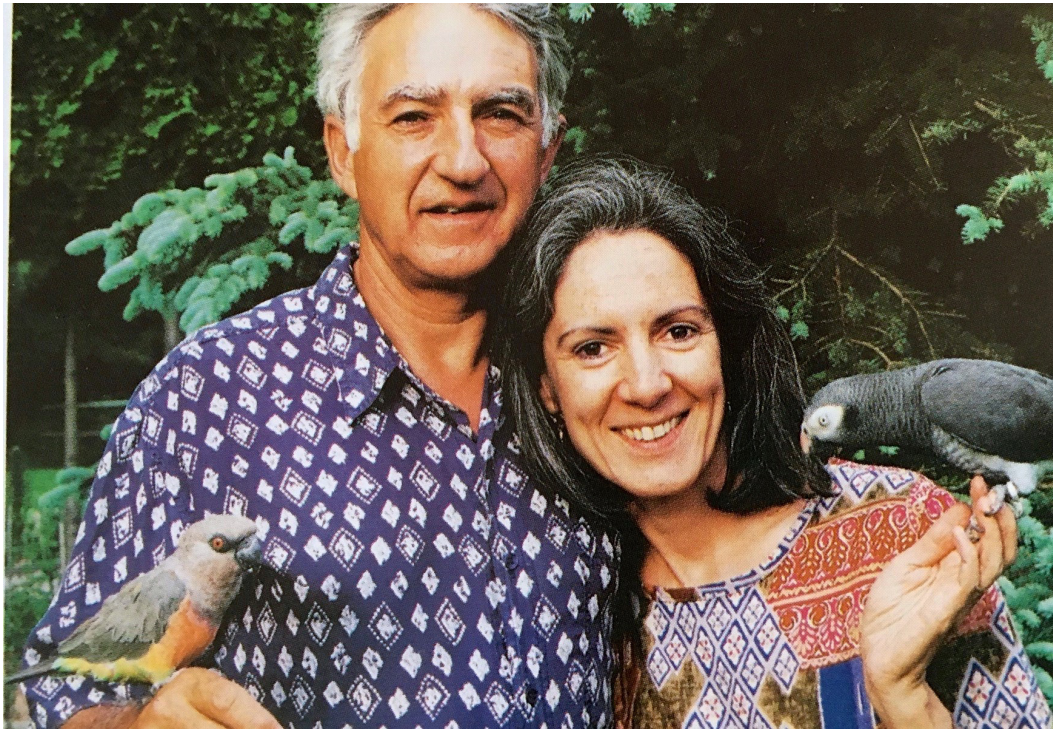
When I looked through the window, I saw one of our two geese running around in a panic. The other goose was nowhere to be seen. I went outside and found her in the driveway, alive, but held down by her head by a raccoon. That's a whole other story, but (spoiler alert) for now I will just say that I personally fought off that raccoon with a shovel and that, after surgery, our dear goose lived for many more years. Although she lost one eye in that ordeal, her mood was as good as ever, and her more nervous sister appreciated her recovery and return. The fate of the raccoon, after he ran for his life, remains unknown.

Over the years, Biko came with us on several vacations, including to Plymouth and the Cape. He adapted well to our move from Bolton to Windham Center, and to family routine changes imposed by sabbaticals, graduations, surgeries and retirements. His relationship with Eureka was always standoffish. We never trusted that they could be together safely, but they were always within full view of each other. Biko had few words for Eureka that were not reprimands, and his body language around her seemed aggressive. But we always felt that, in spite of their

apparent mutual disdain, they provided entertainment and comfort to each other.

In late November of 2003 we had a beautiful Indian summer during a weekend. We took the opportunity to have the birds outside, while we raked and cleaned up the gardens. They had a great time, and I commented late on Sunday that Biko had been particularly sweet, throwing kisses all day. That evening, when I went to give him his goodnight tickles, he was still kissing.

But next morning, I realized that his "kisses" were becoming more frequent and regular. Were they normal voluntary kisses or something else? Since most prey animals hide signs of illness until problems are advanced, I made an appointment with our avian vet. The appointment was for the next day, Tuesday of the week of Thanksgiving. When I returned from work on Monday, Biko was still making kissy noises, but acting normally and eating well. There had been no changes in the appearance or quantity of his droppings, and there were signs that he had been playing with his toys. But I was worried.



Our vet was the renowned Dr. Giddings, now retired from Kensington Bird and Animal Hospital. He was incredibly skilled and knowledgeable. So, on Tuesday after work, we made the long ride to his clinic, full of hope. But it didn't take long for Dr. Giddings to confirm what I feared: the "kisses" were clicks made by a partial obstruction of Biko's airway. An x-ray confirmed that there was a mass occupying part of his trachea. He took a tracheal swab for cultures and drew blood for lab work. Although full results would not be available for a few days, he recommended starting treatment for what he suspected was a fungal infection. Biko had to stay at the hospital on oxygen and nebulization treatments.

The next evening, already the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, Biko's condition had not improved. We returned to the hospital in heavy traffic after work, to visit him ahead of the holiday and to bring him his outdoor cage, so he could be in a familiar environment during his hospitalization. As expected, the clinic was going to be closed the next day, but staff would be administering treatments. For Biko to have a fighting chance, he had to stay. I begged to be called early the next morning for a status report, since the clinic would not be answering phones on Thanksgiving Day.

As we were leaving Biko, Dr. Giddings asked my opinion. When I said that things didn't look good, he agreed, but he didn't have the courage to be more dire. He knew that we still had hope, and based on our limited experience and the speed at which everything had developed, it couldn't have been any other way. Our little boy was fine on Sunday and now, on Wednesday, looked very ill, but he was still receiving treatment. We headed home in a dark mood, to get ready for the big family meal. We were hosting and people would start arriving at noon the next day.

Early the next morning, the phone rang and I anxiously raced to answer. My worst fears were confirmed. Biko had died overnight. I asked some very stupid questions about how he was found ("Was he at the bottom of the cage?" "Duh... where else?"). I was searching for signs that he hadn't suffered, but none were available.

We were inconsolable. It seemed impossible that we could pull ourselves together to host a holiday party. But we couldn't ruin Thanksgiving for everyone else in the family, who would have been left without an alternate plan or any of the meal. We had to create a pause for the worst

of our grief.

We called everyone by phone to share our sad news ahead of their arrival and we asked them not to talk about it any further for that day. We went through all the motions with a heavy heart, but fed everyone and did what we could to isolate our mourning. When everyone left, we could start the long process of grieving our family loss. Our home would never be the same without Biko, and even now, recalling his final days is very painful.

A few days later, we returned to the vet hospital to pick up Biko's cage, to learn about the results of the tests and necropsy, and to settle our bill. Biko didn't have Aspergillus, the fungus that had been suspected, but the culture found Cladosporium, another fungus. This fungus is everywhere and will rarely cause disease. Perhaps it was just a contaminant on the swab. But it could also have been an opportunistic infection, secondary to another ailment. Biko's bloodwork showed several borderline abnormalities. Clear conclusions were elusive.

Meanwhile, the silence in our home was deafening. Eureka went quiet for a long time. We couldn't tell if that was in response to Biko's absence or to our grief, but she was clearly feeling down. Sympathy cards from family and friends poured in. Everyone in our lives recognized Biko's unusual gifts, as well as our love for him.

During the next few months, slides of Biko's tracheal lesion were sent to UCONN and flew to California, searching for answers. Some feather fragments were found in the tracheal obstruction. They were not considered a primary problem, but more likely, aspirated as his breathing became labored. We never knew, for sure, what caused Biko's death, in spite of my persistent search for answers. My curiosity arose, in part, to protect Eureka from related risks. But more than anything, it was part of my grieving process.

As soon as the ground was soft in spring, we buried Biko's favorite swings and toys in my garden. For the remaining years of our life in Windham Center, we planted orange and red flowers there every season, in his memory.

I recently found a stash of materials related to Biko. It included birth (hatch, to be precise) records, a baby diary of things he did and said, and many documents related to his final ordeal. It struck me that, except for feathers instead of hair locks, it was not unlike what a mother would keep after losing a young child.

For years now, I have regretted my failure to recognize quickly that Biko was hopelessly dying and that his form of death would be asphyxia. Had I been able to draw that conclusion, that in hindsight seems so obvious, I would have facilitated a more peaceful end for him. But we never get to know the path that we didn't walk and death is so final... Had I asked for euthanasia on that Wednesday, I may be still regretting not giving the treatment more time to work. While Biko's death could have been easier, I know how much he was loved and cherished every day of his life. Both David and I consider ourselves privileged to have walked a decade of our lives with him.

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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.

T. King, Publisher

Unemployed? Here's How to Keep Your Head Above Water

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



COVID-19 has presented many challenges since we have all begun to social-distance, work from home, and limit our travel outside of the house. But one of the most leveling aspects has been the dramatic increase in unemployment. More than 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits as businesses are forced to close because of public health orders or cut costs through layoffs and furloughs. This may leave people wondering what resources are available to put food on the table, keep the roof over their head, and manage other financial obligations. Here's everything you need to know if you have lost your job or been furloughed because of the spread of COVID-19.

What should I do if I've been laid off or furloughed?

The first thing you should do is apply for unemployment benefits. The goal of unemployment benefits is to replace a percentage of the income you were making at your previous job – in Connecticut, the max you can receive is \$649 per week. The next thing you should do is assess your budget and your finances. Is your income enough to cover your bills and other monthly expenses? Do you have enough saved up to get you through this until you can go back to work? Are there monthly expenses or subscriptions where you can cut back?

Finally, consider applying for another job if you or someone in your home is not severely at risk for COVID-19. Even though businesses in your field may not be hiring, others are hiring lots of essential employees to help with the recent demand for certain products. Consider the time frame from when you apply, interview, and ultimately start, as it may be prolonged. For employment placement resources in Connecticut, visit www.CThires.com.

Am I eligible for unemployment assistance?

There are three provisions under the CARES Act that expand benefits and eligibility for those affected by COVID-19: the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC).

The FPUC provides an additional \$600 to your state's weekly unemployment benefit. This a flat supplement that comes solely from federal funding. For Connecticut residents, the additional \$600 will begin the week of April 27, 2020 and end July 25, 2020.

The PUA expands eligibility for unemployment to those who typically do not qualify: independent contractors, part-time workers, and those who do not have sufficient work history. Individuals must first be denied eligibility or exhaust entitlement to regular unemployment benefits or any state or federal extended benefits before they can be found eligible for PUA benefits. Eligible individuals will receive the \$600 FPUC benefits, though this income is taxable. In Connecticut, this program is available until December 26, 2020.

The PEUC adds 13 weeks to the standard 26 weeks of unemployment benefits, so you can ultimately receive 39 weeks of assistance should it be needed.

The filing process may take longer than normal as more than 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment in the past month. You can make an unemployment claim online, over the phone, or in-person – though we don't recommend going in person if you can avoid it. For more information, visit www.dol.gov or if you are a CT resident, go to <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/>

Is there more help coming?

As many people know, the CARES Act provides a one-time relief payment, which starts at \$1,200. Depending on your income and the make-up of your household, you may receive more or less. Some people may have already received their check through direct deposit, but if you do not have your banking information filed with the IRS, a check will be mailed to your house.

If you are in need of food assistance, the federal government boosted the amount of money for recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. Many school districts are also providing meals for children and families that parents can pick up and take home. Our website has local assistance programs listed for those who may need them. www.whzwealth.com/covid19-resources

What happens to my health insurance?

If you have been laid off, you may qualify for COBRA, where you can keep your employer's plan for up to 3 years. To be eligible for COBRA coverage, you must have been enrolled in your employer's health plan when you worked, and the health plan must continue to be in effect for active employees. There is a 60-day application window from the time you lost your job, so it is better to act sooner rather than later.

If you are furloughed, you may be able to keep your employer-sponsored plan. To pay for your employer-sponsored plan during a furlough, some employers take larger deductions before and after the time off, while others request payment on a pre-set schedule – ask your employer how to handle this situation. Depending on the status of your health coverage from your employer, you may qualify for a Special Enrollment Period. You may also be eligible for a premium tax credit to help pay for Marketplace coverage.

Your state's health insurance exchange provides access to private insurance if you don't already have access through your employer. There may be a special enrollment period if you have lost your employer-sponsored plan due to COVID-19, though typically, there is a 60-day enrollment period after losing your job. For more information about insurance for Connecticut residents, go to www.accesshealthct.com

As a reminder, COVID-19 tests are free, even if you are uninsured. If you have symptoms, you should be tested. To receive a test, first, call your doctor to explain your symptoms. If necessary, your doctor will recommend a testing center nearby, then you must call that site and register for a date and time (some places allow you to schedule a test up to 2 days prior). Results can take 2-7 days, though there is a new rapid testing center in New Haven. For more information and testing requirements, visit ct.gov/coronavirus.

How should I pay my bills if I don't have a job?

Be proactive and ask the companies you have bills with for help, stating specifically that you are financially impacted by the coronavirus. Ask if they have a program or service set up for those affected by job loss due to COVID-19. Many financial institutions are deferring payments on auto loans, home loans, student loans, credit card payments, and electricity, internet, and cell phone bills. If you have a mortgage, federal officials have imposed a nationwide halt to foreclosures and evictions for more than 30 million Americans with home loans backed by the Federal Housing Administration or two government-controlled companies, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Some states, including California and New York, have paused foreclosure and eviction that would also apply to those borrowers. In other states, homeowners may have to negotiate arrangements with their mortgage provider. Regulators are encouraging banks and other mortgage providers to simply extend the life of the mortgage to make up for any missed payments brought on by joblessness. For renters, the CARES Act in most cases forbids landlords from evicting tenants for 120 days on properties secured by government-backed mortgages (though renters' credit scores could get dinged if their landlord reports them for non-payment).

Helping you stay afloat

At Weiss, Hale & Zahansky Strategic Wealth Advisors, we understand that these can be very difficult times. We are here as a partner in the community to provide resources and information to help make things a little easier right now. Consider these strategies and tips if you are currently unemployed or might be in the coming weeks. For more resources, such as Northeastern Connecticut assistance programs, articles, podcasts, and more, go to our website, www.whzwealth.com/covid19-resources. If you need financial advising, email us at info@whzwealth.com or call us at 860-928-2341 for more information. Our Investment Committee meets daily and the advisors are working diligently in order to provide the best wealth management experience for every client, every time.

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To all our contributors- Thank You!

Without your submissions of writing, poetry, artwork and photographs, this paper would not exist. T. King, Publisher

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A Tale of Two Benjamins and Walking in the Woods

Here and There in the Therapy of the Trees

By Brian Karlsson-Barnes

As spring and the pandemic awakened eastern Connecticut on the Ides of March, I was writing this column. My April words did not mention the crisis, but C. Dennis Pierce proclaimed “Gardening Grounds Us” which nonetheless offered hope. And walking in the woods is always therapeutic for mind, body and spirit, anywhere in New England.

Stopping the pandemic is like cleaning our waterways, stopping pollution at the source. Every person should act as if one had it and not spread this virus to others... still in May... wearing a mask, staying apart (6 feet, 30 feet if someone sneezes), washing hands.

“Hands... Washing hands... Don’t touch me... I won’t touch youuu...”

- Sweet Caroline, Boston Red Sox anthem for Fenway Park, revised by Neil Diamond

ARNOLD ARBORETUM in Boston was my spiritual solace before moving to Chaplin. Some think the Arboretum is simply Harvard’s elite “museum of trees” but it is also a city park with therapy for all. And there are many off-road paths offering social distance.

Walking in the woods has always been curative. More than a century ago, Robert Lewis Stevenson observed “*that emanation from old trees that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.*” Now we know that volatile wood oils (phytoncides) cause changes in stress hormones and immune markers. Science says.

“Forest Bathing” began in Japan in the 1980s and is now a cornerstone of its preventive healthcare. The healing way of Shinrin-yoku -- “taking in the forest atmosphere” -- is the medicine of simply being in the trees. And unlike preventive equipment and vaccination, tree therapy is free. It is also a prescription for our tree-rich Last Green Valley.

The Arboretum is a botanical time machine back into history... a narrative of land and an ice age, of 15,000 woody plants and the roots of the spiritual refuge that is this precious urban forest. Many walk for health, enlightenment and horticultural delight.

BACK IN TIME Arnold Arboretum’s woodsy hills six miles southwest of Boston Common formed 10 to 20 thousand years ago during the last glacial event in New England. Fast Forward to 1630 AD when Boston was founded. The Arboretum’s arboreal hills and valleys -- and Connecticut -- were part of the diverse Eastern Deciduous Forest, wild woods west to the Mississippi.

We are all interconnected. “Connecticut” doesn’t imply this; the name is actually translated from an Algonquin Indian word “Quinnehtukqut” meaning “beside the long tidal river”, and water is a common need. The global pandemic confirms our interconnection.

First inhabited by Native Americans, the Last Green Valley was largely settled by colonists after 1650. Coastal New London is technically not in the Valley, but was the earliest town to incorporate in 1646. Nearby Norwich was founded in 1662, and Preston in 1687, both on the Shetucket River. Bordering Massachusetts, Woodstock was established in 1686. Windham on the Willimantic River dates to 1692 and Plainfield on the Quinebaug River to 1699.

Ten LGV towns were settled in the early 1700s, often farming villages (I live in a 1750 farmhouse originally in Mansfield) or near river water power before the Revolutionary War: Lebanon, 1700; Mansfield, 1702; Canterbury, 1703; Killingly, 1708; Coventry, 1712; Pomfret, 1713; Ashford, 1714; Lisbon, 1719; Voluntown, 1721; and Union on the Massachusetts border in 1734.

REVOLUTIONS After 1765, relations strained between Great Britain and its American colonies. Patriot protests escalated against Taxation without Representation and the Sons of Liberty threw a cargo of tea into the harbor in 1773, the Boston Tea Party. The Revolutionary War began in 1775.

New London was a deepwater port for West Indies trade and a base for privateers and pirates during the war until their harassment of British ships caused the retaliatory burning of the town in 1781. War ended in 1783 and another revolution -- industrial not political -- fueled population growth from about 1750 to 1850, the first phase

of our Industrial Revolution (the second was 1850 to World War I).

Five LGV towns were established after the war ended when the New England economy exploded with ocean trade: Thompson in the northeast corner, 1785; Brooklyn, Franklin and Hampton in 1786, and Sterling in 1794.

In Massachusetts, Benjamin Bussey had joined the Revolutionary War in 1775 at the age of 18, rising to Quartermaster rank. War expanded his boundaries and vision, and although given less credit, he was the first visionary of Arnold Arboretum.

Arboretum land was mostly treeless by 1800. As most settlement, woods were cleared for farming, building and fueling Boston and the hamlet of eight small farms that had settled the land. “Scientific farmer” Bussey had prospered in the shipping trade and bought a farm in 1806, then several more neighboring properties, amassing acreage.

Seven LGV towns were founded in the 1800s: Griswold in 1815, and in 1822, my town of Chaplin was named for another Benjamin, the Deacon Reverend Chaplin. Eastford was founded in 1847; Putnam, 1855; Scotland, 1857; and Sprague in 1861. (The Civil War ravaged points south 1861-5.)

Some villages split from earlier towns. Reverend Chaplin lived in Mansfield, but his 1795 Will provided for his Congregational Church and its community became his namesake town. Small mills and factories made hats, shoes and shingles until railroad centers usurped industrial activity. As many rural towns, Chaplin reverted to agriculture after 1850. The Storrs Agricultural School was founded in Mansfield in 1881, named after two brothers who donated the land, now the University of Connecticut’s flagship campus.

In Massachusetts, Renaissance Man Bussey envisioned an agricultural school in 1835, a quarter-century before the 1862 Morrill Act land-grant colleges that teach agriculture nationwide. Bussey Institute doors opened in 1871, a year before the Arboretum was a scientific arboretum.

In 1842, Bussey’s Will gave 200 acres but insufficient money to Harvard, and the Arboretum wasn’t funded -- thus founded and named -- until 1872 with James Arnold’s estate, also when the Boston Park Department was established. Only 120 acres were actually set aside for the park. The political mating of a tree museum with a city park was novel and necessary with Director Charles Sprague Sargent’s limited budget for design.

America’s first landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, was working with Boston Parks but it was a long process placing plants in their scientific order of evolution. He believed that public parks should be sanctuaries from urban stress and after many drafts, his spiritually scientific design finally began being planted in 1886.

By 1900, the Arborway Gate opened to a two-mile winding walk into a young museum of trees. Arnold Arboretum has matured in 2020, now 281 acres, an international treasure for botanical science and a spiritual sanctuary for Boston. Planted a century ago, “Centenarian” trees now offer the healing quality that Olmsted imagined. Walking Meadow Road from the main gate, you approach ponds.

GARDEN ROMANCE The Rose Garden near Dawson Pond has a sentimental history. It was the Arboretum’s first nursery for baby plants, a dense collection of small shrubs in ordered rows. Redesigned and popular for weddings, it now features many roses -- 1,302 roses in 165 varieties at last count -- and other Rosaceous plants, crabapples and cherries, in large beds near the Forest Hills Gate.

Rose / Rosa Species (naturally occurring) roses have evolved over 60 million years to survive all climates and soils. Many foreign species have been introduced at Arnold Arboretum, planted not in rows but thickets and colonies as in nature. Roses are showy shrubs, and some climb high or ramble low. Summer bloomers until hard frost. Flower and culture vary widely, needing special care to minimize disease and insects. Roses are heavy feeders; fertilize twice a year (I use compost and granulars on a Rosa rugosa hybrid ‘Hansa’). Less work are the ‘Knock Out’ roses that set a new standard in disease resistance with little maintenance. In humid summers, prune all shrubs and trees for good air circulation.

FLOWER ET AL Red, pink, orange, yellow, white, and



bluish lavender varieties abound in the Arboretum’s rose garden all summer long. Study catalogs and buy anywhere (I found another favorite, ‘Angel Face’, at Home Depot). Flowers become red or orange fruits called rose hips for fall color.

CULTURE Roses need at least 5 hours of sunlight, ample water and fertile well-drained soil away from the root competition of large trees and shrubs. Slightly acid soil with a pH of 5.6 to 6.6.

Crabapple / Malus There are over 500 types of crabapples, many susceptible to apple scab, rust, fire blight, leaf spot and powdery mildew, so choose carefully. Crabs bloom brightly in spring. Medium to small trees, some dwarf.

FLOWER ET AL Pictured is ‘Strawberry Parfait’ (Malus hupehensis x M. x atrosanguinea, #316-95-B at the Rose Garden), among the best for flower, fruit and disease resistance. Profuse red buds open to large pink flowers with red margins. Deep-red half-inch fruits in fall. Highly disease resistant, trace of scab; resistant to Japanese beetle. Small tree 20 x 25 feet wide.

CULTURE Crabapples are adaptable to soils but best in a heavy loam that is moist, well-drained and slightly acid (5.0 – 6.5 pH). Full sun (5 hours+) for best flower and fruit.

Cherry / Prunus Over 400 species of trees and numerous hybrids, the genus also includes almonds, apricots, nectarines, peaches and plums. Small to medium-sized trees, some dwarf, and shrubs. Some are not long-lived (only 5-10 years), but the best cherries live 30-50 years as:

FLOWER ET AL Sargent Cherry (Prunus sargentii) has rich pink flowers before the leaves, a frothy mass in early spring. Delicate flowers fade quickly but the bark is glossy reddish brown all year long and fall leaf color is yellow-bronze-red. Medium tree 30 x 30 feet.

CULTURE Adaptable as crabapples in soil and sun exposure, but not as durable. Trees always perform better in mulched tree rings to minimize competition. As all trees, roots extend beyond the drip-line.

“I want to do to you what spring does with the cherry trees,” Chilean poet/diplomat Pablo Neruda wrote with a love of spring when Prunus blooms and sweethearts swarm the Arboretum. Now Spring 2020, romance takes a back seat to social distance.

But we are a social species. Some think disasters reveal the worst in us, selfish pandemonium portrayed in the 2011 film “Contagion” is fictional; “*Think of our species from an evolutionary perspective. We are slow and weak. We’re also intelligent, which is helpful, but the ability to do trigonometry isn’t much good when a lion attacks. Our species needed something more to survive and thrive. We needed cooperation.*”

Cooperation and hope. Gardening grounds us in hope. Planting is therapy for now and hope for the future when seeds grow into plants, flower and fruit, and trees that tower above. Praise nature.

Brian Karlsson-Barnes, Master gardener / designer
Chaplin, Connecticut Photo by the author.



A Snowy April Morning

Article and photo by Arlene Avery

Woke early, Saturday, April 18th to a lovely spring snowstorm. Had my coffee and breakfast, laced up my boots, grabbed my camera, and bounded out the door for a snowy walk into Nipmuck State Forest. We are so blessed to live in Connecticut's Quiet Corner where a forest is never far away. For me, it's just a short walk from my home. I love walking in the forest, especially when it's snowing. We had far too little snow this year for what I call a true New England winter. Feeling so snow-deprived made this rare, spring snow an even greater treat. My dad, an old-time farmer, calls spring snow, "the poor man's fertilizer". It has more nitrogen in it to nourish the soil than the usual snow we get over the winter months.

Walking past Arnold Pond on an old cart path, I hear the familiar spring songs of Red-winged Blackbirds coming from the back swamp. The steadily falling snow doesn't deter them from their pursuit of finding mates. Crossing over the bridge spanning Roaring Brook, I accidentally startle four American Black Ducks who noisily fly away. They remind me that this is their home where they feed, make their nests and breed. I am just a casual visitor who must be mindful to travel quietly and not disturb the forest dwellers.

I enter my favorite part of the forest. It feels sacred here. I can feel the presence of ancestors. The land gives way to soft, undulating slopes. The trees are mostly conifers: Eastern Hemlocks and White Pines. Though this isn't an old growth forest, the trees seem ancient, having

endured hundreds of storms. Hemlock branches bow low, laden with heavy, wet snow.

I travel on to where the trail comes to a fork. I take the left-handed path. The trail eases downward. I notice remnants of an old stone wall meandering between trees. Soon I come to a brook. I believe it's called Stoughton Brook. It fills the air with a soft, sweet, bubbling song. I continue on, noticing stone foundations on my left and what looks like a former field or pasture to my right. The forest is slowly re-claiming the land. Soon I reach Roaring Brook once again. I get why they named it "Roaring" Brook. It's loud! And it looks like it's roaring through, in a huge hurry to join the Willimantic River further south. I cross the bridge, scale the slight hill and leave the forest behind.

My walk in Nipmuck Forest was delightful, a welcome reprieve from our current plight with COVID-19. Back in October, I attended the Connecticut Forest Forum. I was disappointed to learn that Connecticut is ranked last among the northeastern states in protected forest land. Our more rural Quiet Corner with its many state and private forests and land trusts is unlike much of the rest of Connecticut. Our forests and wetlands are vital for biodiversity and our future survival. As a tree grows and matures, it takes in more and more carbon dioxide, storing it in its wood, down into its roots and even deeper into the ground.

I encourage everyone to treasure and protect our trees and forest lands. And if you are able, take a walk into a nearby forest. Explore and savor its natural beauty.



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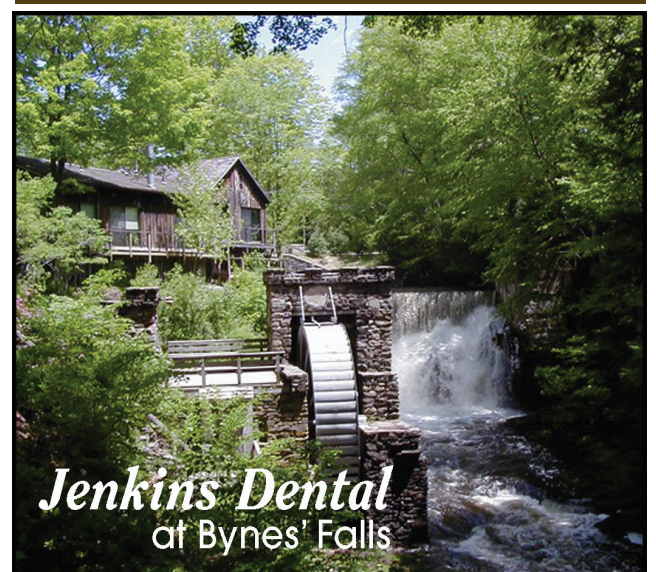
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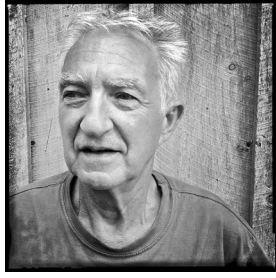
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Jennifer L. Capstick, OD

Stumbling Through the Pandemic

By David Corsini



As I write this article in the second week of April, it is impossible to know how this pandemic thing is going to turn out for me, my family, my community, my country and the world. But, so far I don't like it much and can't wait to get back to something near normal—or at least to have one of the two pools I swim in open again. When, in response to the spreading pandemic, local schools, Eastern and UCONN suspended classes, one pool and then the other closed, I was not yet too worried. But every day, from reading and viewing the news, it was clear that things with the virus were going from bad to worse and Delia and I got increasingly worried about our family and ourselves.

Our primary concern was for Ana, who is a surgeon and palliative care physician in a New York City hospital, our 9-year-old granddaughter, and our son-in-law. They were smack dab in the epicenter of the pandemic. Although they were our most immediate worry, there were plenty of other things to also worry about.

My next highest worry was for my 17-year-old grandson Dylan, who is in his final year at EO Smith. He has to finish things to graduate and has no specific plan for what to do upon graduation. I had been playing ping pong with him once a week at the Mansfield Community Center. When this was no longer possible, I thought that to maintain contact with him, I would take him to lunch every once in a while. Then, all the restaurants closed. While Dylan is happy that he doesn't have to go to school, he is having difficulty becoming engaged with online learning and finds it difficult to refrain from socializing.

I was less concerned about my oldest granddaughter, a sophomore at University of Maryland, because I was confident she would adapt to a new way of learning. Others in my awareness were my son and daughter, who will have to adjust to changing conditions, but were not in immediate difficulty. Another person to worry about was Delia's mother, who resides in a home for the elderly in Willimantic.

In the short-term Delia and I felt relatively safe from the virus and without immediate financial worry. But as time went on and the news got worse and worse, we worried about ourselves and, if something happened to us, our two parrots. It is difficult to avoid the information deluge on the pandemic and then not to worry about the possibility of a family member or oneself becoming infected.

Then, in late March, Ana began to report she was experiencing symptoms suggesting she was infected with the virus. She worked two days from home but then felt well enough to go to the hospital for three days. She reported that because of the scarcity of protective gear at the hospital, for protection while attending patients, she resorted to wearing a 5-quart Ziploc bag over her head and a trash bag to shield her body. Over the next weekend, she reported headache, mild fever, severe aches and pains and then loss of taste and smell. While she continued to work from home, it took her 13 days to get tested and to have her infection confirmed. As I write this piece, she reports feeling better but is in no way fully recovered. This is not only a period of stress for Ana and her family, but also for us.

In ordinary times, Delia and I walk to downtown restaurants three times a week both as part of our exercise program and to support the local community. First, the Ori-

ental Café closed and did not attempt to provide take-out. At first, Mainstreet Café/Willibrew started to provide take out from their regular menu with some added daily specials. We got food and a growler of beer from them a few times, but then they closed. One day we purchased take-out from China East, near Big Y, but when we next called, no one answered. Cafemantic, another of our regular haunts, has attempted to weather the storm by offering a restricted menu several days a week and we have patronized them. We know the owners and wait staff in the three Willimantic restaurants and are very concerned about their plight both for now and the future.

At first, when restaurants closed and only a few businesses remained open, there was not much discussion about wearing masks. Early on I went to Stop & Shop to get a few basics. Even though we had a reasonable supply of toilet paper, having heard about shortages, Delia put toilet paper and hand sanitizer on the list. Although no toilet paper or sanitizer was available, I was able to get "essentials" like: vegetables for the parrots, bread, peanut butter, bananas, and ice cream. I did not wear a mask but did wipe down the carriage and washed my hands well when I got home.

For the next week, every time I went out, whether it was to the pharmacy, liquor store, hardware store, or my studio, Delia would say: "See if they have toilet paper and sanitizer." I went to Stop & Shop by myself one other time and found most items except toilet paper and sanitizer. Then, Delia and I went to Stop&Shop with masks and gloves. As we rounded the corner to one aisle, "there to our wondrous eyes appeared", Hand Sanitizer. There were about 30 items and it said a limit of two. Even though the item was quart size, we got two. On reflection, I thought this was a lot of sanitizer and I began to fantasize about what I might do with it. Since Easter was approaching, one thought was that I could rent an Easter Bunny costume and stand outside Stop&Shop offering squirts of sanitizer to those entering and leaving the store. I could have a bucket at my feet with a sign saying that contributions to the Covenant Soup Kitchen and WAIM were gratefully accepted. We did share the sanitizer with friends who could not find any.

When everyone started talking about wearing masks, I looked in my studio and cellar and came up with 3, semi-clean options. Delia got inspired to make us a couple of masks from material left over from things used to make parrot toys and pieces of elastic that she had brought from Argentina many moons ago. The masks came out well. Because I have hearing aids that go behind my ear and wear glasses, I have had some difficulty with my mask.

One day I decided to get a prescription delivered from the pharmacy. I saw the van stop in front of the house and went to get on a mask before opening the door. I was in a rush to open the door and by the time I got it opened, one hearing aid was hanging out and the mask was covering one eye. At least I had the money ready and, since the guy had on a mask, I couldn't see whether or not he laughed.

Although we were not yet running out of toilet paper, we had not found it during four visits to Stop&Shop. So, before desperation set in, I decided to take advantage of the early shopping hours offered at Big Y. The senior citizen hours at Big Y begin at 7:00 AM. I arrived at 6:50 and was 9th in line. All had their shopping carts and most wore masks. I was after only one item so only had my shopping bag. While standing there, I thought: things could be worse. At least this was not a line of people waiting to sign up for unemployment. Then one hearing aid sent a message that the battery was about to fail. I also worried

that the elastic was about to dislodge one hearing aid. Then the store opened.

Once inside the store I headed for the toilet paper section. Partway down the aisle, my heart leapt. Although the shelves were sparse, there was some toilet paper. I grabbed a 12-pack. Mission accomplished! So, I headed to the cashier, checking several times to make sure it really was toilet paper and not a six-pack of paper towels and looking over my shoulder to make sure I wasn't going to be mugged. I was the first one to check out. At home I entered like a hunter returning to the family after a successful hunt. There wasn't the peal of trumpets but there was at least a big smile.

It is difficult not to think about what coming down with the virus might mean. Delia worries about what would happen with our two parrots. She has had discussions with her sister, who has taken care of the parrots in the past, and with a young veterinarian we know. As I am 80 years old male, have a history of asthma, and get chest involvement with most colds, I feel vulnerable. Getting the virus could easily be a death sentence. I know that the death rate is only 3-5% of those infected by the virus, but what is the death rate for 80 year old males with a history of asthma? Several nights after exposing myself to hours of corona virus news, my chest tightened and breathing was labored. Before going to bed I took an expectorant and a couple hits from my asthma inhaler.

While I know that death is certainly in my future, the prospect of contracting the virus makes it appear that it may be sooner than anticipated. What should I do? Should I go through my files and throw away things that are no longer relevant? Should I begin gathering information for my obituary or prepare a draft?

First I organized files related to financial information. Then I started to go through files related to my art. In going through some of the older files, the dust or mold was such that my sinuses swelled up. I could no longer think straight and so I stopped. Maybe I will return to the task with one of my rescued dust masks. Certainly there are many things I could do to get more organized, but I find it difficult to maintain focus on those tasks.

A very upsetting aspect of this pandemic is that there is no clear end in sight and great uncertainty about what will happen next. While Ana seems to be recovering from the virus, and her family seems ok, it's not yet over for them. There are many stories of people who appeared to recover from the virus only to relapse. Eva and Ray both had minor symptoms for a few days. Did they have mild cases? We will not know until antibody testing becomes more available.

As I write this, it is certain that everything is shut down for at least six more weeks, but it could go on for a lot longer. And what will the recovery be like? What and who will survive, not only with respect to family and friends but with respect to restaurants, exercise facilities, work options, the theater, the festivals and all the things that make a community. Delia and I are fortunate that our incomes have not yet been affected. We are ready to help our community now and in the recovery.

I have not even alluded to the extent to which the political situation contributes to my stress. However, we should be thankful for the positive contributions of our national congressional delegation and our state and local representatives. Also, it is important to remember that local newspapers are critically important to democracy, so please support yours.

David.Corsini@sbcglobal.net

Swimming Lessons

By Donna Dufresne

When I was growing up in the early 1960's, every kid that I went to school with took swimming lessons at Stevie's Pond in North Andover. Poor kids who lived across the tracks close to the mills, the scattered children of care-takers like myself who lived on the large estates and the farm kids on the east side of town all dipped their toes into that melting pot that did not judge or segregate. We held our breath and counted to twenty, and kicked fiercely while holding onto the buoy lines over which you would never dare to cross. To this very day, my grand nieces and nephews swim in that amber pee hole we held so dear, and it

baffles me that generations of children going as far back as my father, who is ninety-four years old, have wet their whistle in the coming of age at Stevie's Pond.

In 1963, when I was barely eight years old, mothers would drop their fledglings off in the gravel parking lot. We would pour, un-tethered by seatbelts which were not yet conceived of, from the Buick station wagons, Falcons, and Ford Fairlanes which our mothers had only recently learned how to drive. Shivering in the cold morning June, we would claim our turf on the sandy beach with its coarse pebbles that were round and hard like ball bearings beneath our toes. Clad in striped towels, too small to be of use, and rubber tongs (flip flops) that

came apart in the roughness of the sand, we waited for the god-like life-guard and the red-cross swimming instructor to anoint us in our right of passage.

From a 21st-century perspective, it's a bit appalling that my mother would simply abandon me in such a way – gently nudging me out of the car in my little sear-sucker cotton bathing suit, and pathetic towel, along with other children my age who stood shivering in the misty morning light like tiny birds waiting to be pushed out of the nest. Who knew where our mothers went after they left us in a cloud of blue smoke from mufflers that propelled them into momentary freedom that seemed like an eternity to us. Did they convene in coffee shops? beauty parlors? Doctor Offices? A lover's arms? Where did they go, while we dipped our toes into that amber colored water, with its dubious source?

We would stake out our claim with our shiny quarters folded secretly in our towels so that we could buy a Creamsicle at the concession stand, and wait for the glorious moment when the whistle would blow and we would be allowed to wade into that murky water that had baptized our mothers and fathers and older brothers and sisters. We practiced the dog paddle, the frog kick, and the crawl until we were able to propel ourselves out to the altar, a rickety and slanted raft that seemed like it had been placed on the horizon of the Atlantic for us to prove our stealth.

Nine, ten, eleven, twelve – the years went by quickly, but the summer ritual remained the same. Each year a new adventure, a new hurdle, a new swimsuit. Childhood challenged. Adolescence advanced. One year, the weeds choked me

continued on page 14

A Character Dossier

My Mother

By Edly Bussolotta

Ed. note: This pandemic has afforded me a great deal of spare time. I used some recently to go through a pile of papers stashed away for years. I came across an envelope postmarked from August 2005. In it was this article. Somehow I misplaced the envelope and Edly's article was never published. I wish I could apologize to Edly, but she passed away in February of 2012 at 81 years of age. I am grateful I found this article just in time to print it for Mother's Day. As it turns out, Edly's son, Paul, has been my neighbor for about twenty years.

Her name was Emma. My grandmother gave her daughter a most suitable name. To me, the name has, and always will have, a synonymous ring to it as Emma and mamma was one and the same person to me. There was no other Emma. I loved her.

Physically, she was a tiny lady, barely reaching up to my father's shoulders. Her hair was jet-black and waist-long, always braided and piled high up on her head. Her face was in sharp contrast to her hair, for her complexion was porcelain pale, her features beautiful, her eyes expressive and calm.

She was a gentle person; however, she also had other characteristics and attributes which one doesn't normally associate with tiny and gentle. Although a delicate-looking lady, my mamma was strong, both physically and intellectually. Her house and family were sizable, but throughout most of her married life she alone did most of the household chores and never complained, at least not while her children were around. Much later, around the time she turned sixty, she allowed herself the luxury of having a maid move into her territory. That was when cancer started invading her body.

The disease ravished her body during the next twenty years. Her doctors were astonished about the longevity of the illness. She became their longest living cancer patient. We, her family, and also her many friends, wondered about the inner strength and courage she possessed. Following each operation, it became more and more difficult for her to swallow, and her speech was affected. She was annoyed and agitated when we couldn't understand. But it usually ended up with laughter between all of us as she grabbed pen and paper and shook her head while she jotted down what was on her mind.

She had three children. My two brothers were older than me. As time went by, and her illness progressed, she seemed to prefer having her daughter around. I learned to understand her speech better, and I encouraged her to finish the jar of baby food that was now part of her diet. It was easier to swallow. Following doctor's suggestion, I started to give her bock beer whipped up with a raw egg and sugar. Being a teetotaler, she wouldn't even as much as look at the glass I offered her. "What are you trying to do to me, turning me into an alcoholic?" But I told her it was doctor's orders, very nourishing. She did get to enjoy a glass every day and, with a teasing twinkle in her eye, let everybody know she had turned into a beer drinker.

It was very hard for us to watch her slowly dwindle away. She had always been strong and good-humored, so much a mamma. I was young when she died, barely twenty, and I felt I needed her more than ever. But what I dwell on and cherish now, are the memories I have of her long before illness struck, the time and efforts she lavished on us, the things she taught my two brothers and me, her ineffable ability to mold us into a tight-knit, loving family.

She preferred to be a homemaker and mother only. It was comforting to come home, knowing she was there with a smile, a cup of hot cocoa and cookies on a cold winter day. And whenever we needed an answer to a question relating to our homework assignments, for example, she would exclaim in a teasing kind of way, "But, my dear child, you are in school, and you do not know the location of the Ganges river! Well, I declare - - -," she sighed as she pointed out the trouble spot on the round world globe with the greatest of ease.

My younger brother, Paul, tried to cover up his embarrassment and sluggish memory, shot back with a sheepish remark like, "Well, mothers are supposed to know everything and do everything for their children, right?"

"No, Paul, I'm afraid mothers don't know every-

thing, and mothers cannot do everything for their children. The homework is your responsibility. We can only try to steer you in the right directions," she smiled.

On that ninth of April morning, 1940, I heard whispering voices coming from the kitchen next to my bedroom. I was very young, but I knew immediately something was terribly wrong in our strictly structured household. Mamma very quietly opened the door and tip-toed into my room. She did not want to startle me, so she bent down and whispered, "Good morning, sweetie. I must tell you something very sad."

I felt her velvety cheek toward mine, and I inhaled that wonderful fragrance of her 4711 dusting powder - a heavenly scent that was so much a part of my mother.

"Hitler's soldiers have invaded our country. Our King Haakon and his family have fled to England. We are at war." My mother gave me a brief history lesson about the German strongman who wanted to rule the whole world. I had heard the name Hitler mentioned both in school and-at home. Often, my parents and my eighteen year old brother, Fritz, would discuss this ruthless ruler.

"What a bully," I cried. "Why doesn't he pick on a country his own size? My country is so small, and his country is so big. Is he coming here? Do we hide in the cellar?" I was only nine years old and wild fantasies and fears flooded my innocent mind. Wars happened in other lands or in history books, but not in Norway.

"No, we need not hide in the cellar, at least not today." My mother consoled me and stroked my head.

But during the next five war years, we ran to the cellar, sometimes every day of the week. The siren's knife-sharp sound would shake us up with its high-pitched "eee-ah, eee-ah," my parents would gather us and we would hurry like scared big and little rabbits down the road to our neighbor's splinter safe place. There we would huddle together with all the others from the neighborhood and wait and listen to the roar of the planes overhead. The unfamiliar thunder came nearer and nearer. We thought one of the big, grey monster birds would come plowing right through the house and mow us all down. Sometimes the children screamed out in fear, and I was one of them. My mom would hold her arms around us as if to shield us from something evil. She would often take the initiative, and soon everybody would join in, saying the Lord's Prayer. When the danger was over, that penetrating siren returned for one whole minute. We had to endure one long, monotonous shriek that ended with a wailing burp, sounding almost disappointed, "Aaaah..., no bombs today."

But bombs fell, and there was destruction all around us. One day my mother stood looking out the window when she suddenly let out a cry, "Oh no, oh no!" To the north, high up in the mountains and outside the town, a plane came out of the sky and spiraled down and disappeared from our view. Moments after, flame and smoke.

That horrifying picture is forever stuck in my mind. Like the April morning, my mother knew I needed to be calmed and comforted. She took the time to sit with me and talk about this event that would have a great impact on our lives for the next five years. She also seized the opportunity to give me a dose of geography and fetched the world atlas and globe. She pointed and explained, "Norway's a small country, but it has a very long and narrow coast line facing the Atlantic Ocean. This is what Hitler wants, a perfect place to launch his great armada."

Mamma talked about the bewildering invasion in a clear way, without bitterness or anger. I asked a lot of questions. She kept her emotions under control, protecting me from her own uneasy feelings. I felt safe in my mother's company. Her love and strength was sufficient then and would be in the difficult years ahead. Emma was always my unforgettable significant character, my role model. She was my mamma.



Emma
Photo contributed by Paul Bussolotta.

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From Re-opening to REIMAGINING!

By Phoebe C. Godfrey

You don't need protests to convince anyone in this country that we have to get back to work and we have to get the economy going and we have to get out of our homes. Nobody. The question is going to become how, when, how fast, and what do we mean in terms of reopening? With reopening, I want to set the bar higher. Meaning the question shouldn't be when do we reopen? And what do we reopen? The question should be, let's use this situation, this crisis, this time to actually learn the lessons, value from the reflection, and let's reimagine what we want society to be. And since we are going to have to go through all of this and it's not going to be fast, let's at least make this a moment that when we look back, we can say, "Wow, we went through hell, but look at all the lessons we learned then look at how much better we made this place from this incident, right?"
Governor Cuomo



Yes, Governor Cuomo - the questions at this precarious and unique moment in our nation and species history are **not** 'when and how quickly can things go back to normal?' but rather how can we REIMAGINE what kind of a society we want to create going forward? As he astutely says, this is not a debate about the need for things to open up, for restaurants, schools, universities, and all other interrupted activities to return to the vital economic and social roles they play in our human societies once it is safe for all to do so but rather a much more profound and vital debate about how can we reflect, learn, make changes and make our society better? And if we are paying attention we can recognize that the need for improvements abound. As Joseph Stiglitz, a top world economist recently observed, the Trump Administration's response to the Covid-19 crisis has left the USA looking like a "Third World country" (despite nevertheless being the richest country in the world) given that, "The inequality ...[here]... is so large. This disease has targeted those with the poorest health. In the advanced world, the US is one of the countries with the poorest health overall and the greatest health inequality." Of course such extreme inequality has been a long time in the making in terms of a founding legacy of inequality and racism but the current crisis has certainly painfully aided in revealing these preexisting fault lines, which are increasingly in danger of fully cracking. However, I am not going to add to the already extensive doom and gloom streaming we have available for our lockdown digestion but instead I am going to take inspiration from Governor Cuomo and make a list of things within our community that I personally (hence these are bias... J) would like us to reimagine and which we have the possibility of achieving. Needless to say, on my full fledged reimagined list would be all the platform points made by former Presidential Candidate Bernie Sanders such as Medicare for All (wouldn't that have been a great help for addressing this pandemic!); The Green New Deal (more and more evidence is linking the pandemic, as well as future ones, to environmental destruction as I wrote about in my last neighbor's article); College Debt Cancellation (that would help so many currently); Free College Tuition (again what a boost this would be to the education levels in our country); Higher Taxes for Corporations (instead of bailouts for the banks and other C.S [see video to know what the acronym means] using our 'f—king money" to quote the comedian Vic who's raw, rude and truthful rant has gone viral²); Reducing the Military Budget (we spend more than the rest of the world combined) ...as well as all other policies and approaches that seek to make this country what we already claim it to be - the land of equality and justice for all (including the non-human beings). However, as we know, Bernie is no longer running although that is no reflection on the increasing saliency of his goals. That said, none of them can fully be addressed locally, although the philosophical and ethical essence of them, as in greater equality and justice, can be addressed locally in terms of small scale practices / policies / and priorities.

So here is my reimagining for Willimantic on the theme of "Wow...we went through hell, but look at all the lessons we learned then look at how much better we made this place from this incident, right ...", noting that nothing I propose is fully new, nor unique to my vision but rather fits in with a trove of ideas near universally shared as to what helps make communities happy, healthier and more equitable (not including income ...see Bernie's proposals

for that...!)

1. Let us begin reflecting on our own hearts and minds to address what most impoverishes any town (any state, this nation, our world) and it is nothing less than on-going racism / prejudice / bigotry and scapegoating. Whether it stems from inner insecurities, fears, and then has been nurtured by ignorance, lack of adequate progressive education or leadership so that it grows into blame, hatred and violence the result is the same- a divided / fearful society that looks at the world through the limited lens of 'us' versus 'them'. At this time when inequalities are already rampant, let us take inspiration from those who are currently risking their lives to help save others, regardless of who the patients are in terms of race / class / gender / sexuality / religion / nationality...etc., because they took an oath to serve and to abide by a code of ethics wherein they must put the well-being of others first. Should we not all have to do the same to put the wellbeing of others (as in "love our neighbors as ourselves"...) as well as the planet we share with all life, first?

2. Adding to #1, once we address such deep seated inequalities then we must start with the basics - food. Can we not imagine and then create more support for local organic farmers, as well as food producers and sellers that together can help to build resiliency and sustainability in our local food system? This would include finding ways to further support such organizations as the Windham Farmer's Market (as well as other farmer's markets), the Willimantic Food Co-Op, CLiCK, the Windham Food Network, the Covenant Soup Kitchen ...etc and developing more ways for them to connect horizontally, thereby helping to reduce food waste, food miles, and food inequality, while also helping to promote food equity and justice for all.

3. Then if we can imagine a more resilient equitable food system, can we not also add in more public art and desirable / inspiring places for young and old of all socio-economic backgrounds and races / ethnicities to spend time outside without having to drive? In this experience of being inside the need for aesthetically pleasing public spaces has been made ever more apparent. Further developing and exploring our river (as is being dedicatedly done by the Willimantic White Water group), our parks, and our shared community spaces so they are pleasing, inviting and inspiring should be a priority for us all.

4. Building on this vision is an idea that has been proposed before of finding ways or means or days or times to close Main Street to traffic and not just for Third Thursdays (which are most likely a wash this year) but on a more regular basis (weekends / or every odd -or even day). In the age of social distancing small, local, outdoor and walkable public places are far more preferable to shopping malls or highly crowded street fairs. Maybe now is the time to reimagine what Willimantic's downtown could look like and work to make it an on-going open, outdoor, cleaner and enticing place for small groups of people to enjoy on an on-going basis - more flowers, benches, more art, more food trucks (representing our community's diverse food pallet) ...etc

5. And linking again to these other visions can we not utilize the space at Jillson Square and the Shaboo Stage (and upcoming -one day- new senior center) more with greater diversity, inclusion and frequency? Can there not be other such events that are outdoors and build on the efforts already made by so many while furthering the cultural richness of our community? And again if these are outdoor events social distance guidelines can still be followed as needed.

6. Your ideas? Why not send them to me / Tom at Neighbors and we will print your Reimaginings in the next edition...neighborspaper@yahoo.com

Mortal Joy

For all who mourn

None of us, mates or victims, wanted this.

The grand journey we thought we were taking

together was to destination bliss,

all sensual skin, mornings full, aching,

electric with touch, anticipation.

Yes, we've shared moments of delirium,

the quenching sweetness of adoration

and lust, but lately, our bodies succumb

to inherent weakness. Fevers, cancers

genetic, environmentalóferal

destructions claw through, spread without answers.

We've lost our chance for visceral, mortal

joy: no guaranteed encore, no relief,

only our souls shredded, broken by grief.

Writer, reader, and poet, Claudia McGhee has dealt in and with words for decades. Claudia's chapbook of poems, Paperlight, was published by Finishing Line Press.

Swimming continued from page 12

and tried to pull me down to the black muck just outside the ropes. Where was my mother? Where were my friends? It was my fault - outside the box again. Alone.

When you reached a certain age, you began to explore beyond the small world of the swimming area. There was a trail that led to a dam that divided Stevie's Pond from Lake Cochichewick. Here, was a frightening world that my cousin Tina and I happened upon one day in our Lewis and Clark innocence for wanting to explore the world. Girls in bikinis, boys in swimming trunks, cigarette butts in the gray silt, rope swings that hung like lynching poles into the forbidden lake, the source of our drinking water. It was uncomfortable. We were not ready.

All throughout my childhood, Steven's Mill dominated the ambient background noise and the culture of the town. The echo of the looms reverberated through the night - second shift, third shift into the dawn. It was the pulse of my childhood - stronger than the heartbeat of my mother, those mills that churned cotton and wool for more than a hundred years, separated by an earthen dam as if that were enough to keep the workers at bay. It was a feeble attempt to segregate the haves from the have-nots - to keep a child from dreaming big.

In the late 1970's, I went home and discovered a discomfiting silence. Steven's Mill was gone. It had been torn down and replaced by upscale elderly gated condominiums with the quaint appointment of title: Mill Pond. But nothing of the "mill pond" was left except Stevie's Pond (the town beach), which had somehow lost its appeal. I could no longer hear the roar of the looms across the lake, and therefore could not sleep to the foreign lullaby of silence. The "town beach" was not the amber cream soda in which I swam as a child. It had become somewhat gentrified - the sand not so coarse - the parking lot paved - the concession stand somewhat less primitive with bathrooms that flushed automatically.

I wonder if an undercurrent still flows through the pond - that secret code of childhood which guides us to our stages of being: swimming to the ropes, making it out to the raft and back, spying on teenage girls who have wandered into forbidden territory. Is there still an earthen dam that separates the pond from the lake and the poor from the rich? Does anyone shiver as I did in that dark water and wonder what twist of fate has tethered them to the weedy shallows while others tread water in turquoise painted pools? I hope so. After all, what is the worth of swimming lessons in a world where everything comes easy and you expect to float on the surface of things in some dreamy pretense that there are no differences and everyone starts out on equal terms? You have to learn to swim against that tide of entitlement or it will suck you down and try to keep you in your place. You have to learn to hold your breath under the weight of water, eyes wide open and ready to break through the surface toward light.

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Covid 19 Has Stopped Many Things, But Not Learning

By Morgan Cunningham

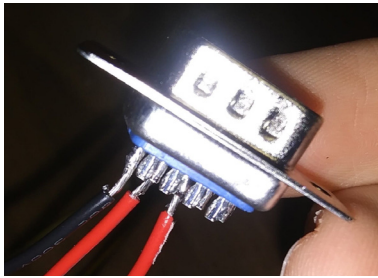


As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, I am continuing my weekly variety internet talk show at MorganTalks.com. However, rather than using this space to write about my talk show and its topics, I wanted to share how I'm spending my spare time.

Yes, many things have changed with the Coronavirus. Stores are shuttered. Everyone's hair is becoming a bit disheveled (I'm growing a beard out of boredom). And, where are the cleaning products?

As weird as things may seem, I am focusing on positives. Rather than vying for a parking spot for State Parks, I am mostly staying home to learn some new tricks.

Before I go on, a back story: throughout school, I never really understood electrical and/or wiring concepts. My solution was to avoid that stuff for the rest of my life.



Cunningham wires up a connector for his remote control button box. Contributed photo.

However, in my studio where I produce my weekly talk show, I was in need of some kind of remote to control several devices used during my show, like my CD player. This involves creating a custom set of buttons and wires, in one convenient "button box," connected directly to the intended devices. The procedure for going about this was a bit beyond me. But not anymore.

With the pandemic forcing my normal hangouts to close their doors, I decided to conquer my fear of figuring out wiring, and I called some of my engineer friends. They walked me through the process, and I spent an entire afternoon in April creating a blueprint for what I needed to do. I bought a few items, dug out my father's old soldering iron, and put my new skills to use. My remote control(s) now work!

The point I am trying to make is that we can use this down-time wisely and feel good while doing so. The sense of accomplishment and positivity I feel is incredible! If there is something you have always wanted to try—especially at home—maybe this is a great time to make it happen! Before going to any kind of extreme, do some reading and/or chat with some folks who have experience in what you would like to try. It's so worth it in the end.

You can find a full archive of my talk shows and listen to them streaming live on Mondays 7-8 p.m. via MorganTalks.com .

Thanks for listening...try something new...and stay safe!

The Beast

He walks the earth covered in his cloak of evil,
always on the hunt for an empty vessel to
fill with his hate.

He laughs in the face of love,
mistakenly thinking he will win the war.

With a chameleon's ability to wear the face of many,
he pushes the lost to the depths of despair
and into the gates of their own personal hell.

His veil of deception is very real to the weak,
damaged and lost souls he aims to steal.

If you are standing on the abyss of darkness,
gather your strength and walk toward the light
for redemption is only one prayer away.

Listen for the thunder of the Almighty
as evil takes it's flight and a gentle
peace comes home to stay.

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Is Meditation a Civic Duty?

By Andrew Campbell

"It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."

Mahatma Gandhi

I would like to present a radical idea. Mental health is public health. In the modern, global, interconnected world, we each have the responsibility to take care of ourselves, to maintain our own mental and physical health through wise lifestyle choices, like exercise and meditation, in order to protect the public good. How does taking care of your own wellness lead to a healthier and safer populous? Great question.

The connection between mood, stress, and immunity is fundamentally important in global, community, and personal well-being. With the recent changes and concerns around coronavirus, many healthcare practitioners are closing, even though many people are experiencing greater levels of distress and need. This is a time when self-care and an ability to regulate one's own health and wellness has become vitally important. So how do we take better care of ourselves when access to health care is limited?

It has been said that a simple and effective way to visualize health, and maintain a healthy life in general, is to imagine a "three legged stool" of wellness, where one leg is medications (such as antibiotics or chemotherapy), another leg is medical procedures (such as surgery), and the third is self-care, things like meditation and exercise. It seems that we often rely disproportionately on the first two legs and disregard self-care as a luxury or even a nuisance. Furthermore, it has been suggested that 60-90% of visits to health-care professionals are stress related and therefore self-care, as an effective stress reduction method, could make up the greatest contributing factors to one's health.

Research at Harvard Medical School indicates that "stress is immunosuppressive. According to a large body of evidence, meditation appears to have profound effects on immune function in health and disease because of its ability to reduce stress." Recently, I wrote an article, "Is Meditation a Superpower?" (Neighbors, Feb, 2020) exploring some of the most common and effective approaches to meditation as well as their benefits to our mental and physical health. I outlined some simple, easily learned, and effective mindfulness practices to elicit a rejuvenating and relaxed state where the mind and body can heal and better cope with the ever-increasing levels of stress many of us experience on a daily basis.

With the emergence of this pandemic and the profound social changes that have occurred as a result, we have been thrust into a precarious position where we must balance our individual needs (social connection, emotional and physical health, economic stability, etc.) with the responsibility to behave according to the greater good (social distancing, wearing personal protective gear, extra hand washing, etc.). Many of these concerns overlap and even contradict each other in confusing and complicated ways. Do I go to the market, or not? See grandma, or don't see grandma? Is my job essential? If not, what does that say about my life?

Another challenging piece of this puzzle comes from how fundamentally important social connection is for our health and wellness. Especially in times of stress, we are best served by reaching out and connecting with others, leaning on and deepening our social connections. But now we are required to avoid the very thing that could buoy us in these challenging times, our connection with, and time spent around, other people. So much has changed so quickly, it's hard to adjust, hard to know what to do. What aspects of our lives remain that we have some semblance of control over? What can we do to help our communities and ourselves?

We all know we should help others when and where we can. We all know we could donate time or money to those in need, if we have either to spare. We all know that crisis is the time for altruism. But with so much changing so suddenly and so many options for helping and connection now off the table, I would like to propose the, again, probably radical idea, that this is also a time for taking care of yourself.

Luckily the formula for wellness is relatively simple. Fresh air, exercise, healthy food, plenty of sleep, good relationships and ample social connection, as well as a regular meditation practice. Most of us know this and agree, but say things like, "who has time for that?" And indeed, this situation does present its own frustrating paradox; we need time and energy to do the things that will give us time and energy. Whew!

In my previous article I asked, given the overwhelming evidence for the benefits of meditation and the increasingly common knowledge of these facts, why aren't

more people meditating regularly? I wondered if perhaps we don't take time to meditate for many of the same reasons we don't take time to exercise or eat right, even though we know how important those things are. We're often too busy, too stressed, and may even feel guilty about doing something for ourselves. Or maybe there is still some remaining stigma associated with meditation as part of a counter-culture, "far-out" ideology. (Like jogging or lifting weights might have been seen in the 1930's or 40's).

But the fact is meditation works. This may be partially due to the way mindfulness puts most of the responsibility for change on oneself. An apt metaphor might be going to physical therapy after a physical injury. Physical therapists can help you increase strength and flexibility in a specific area with particular practices. Or think about working with a physical trainer to help get in shape. If one was leading a sedentary lifestyle, most people would agree that there would be a significant benefit to one's physical and emotional health from regular exercise like running or biking or lifting weights, from using your body more. Meditation works in much the same way but perhaps operating in an inverse way. By non-doing, taking a "brain break", and eliciting the "Relaxation Response," one's physical and mental health significantly improves. This seems to be a universal truth and I wonder why more people are not engaging in these self-care practices more frequently.

One potential pitfall with this line of reasoning, and one I am eager to avoid, is causing people to feel stressed about feeling stressed. No one wants to feel guilty about not doing the things they feel they should. Guilt is a poor motivator for positive change. Instead, my hope is that I can offer an argument that will help some people cut through their resistance to doing something good for themselves by couching that process in selfless, altruistic, other-oriented terms.

So here is the situation as I have come to understand it. Meditation strengthens your immune system. A strong immune system makes you less vulnerable to illness. Having greater resistance to illness means you are less likely to be sick and contagious. More people being less contagious means fewer sick people in general. Fewer sick people in general means more health care resources available to those that need them at any one time and lower overall demand, lower costs, and better care for everyone. Therefore, we all might learn to meditate regularly in order to improve our own lives, our communities, and even the world.

Anyone who has flown with an airline knows the instruction, in the case of an emergency, "put your own oxygen mask on before attempting to help others." What a perfect metaphor for the times we are living in and the current health care challenges before us. Again, my hope here is to plant the seed that meditation could be included, along with sleep, diet, physical exercise, and social connection, in the recipe for a healthy lifestyle. And further, that you might want to learn to meditate for your own mental and physical health, the health of those you love, or for the greater good.

So, what ever your motivation for practicing, I look forward to sharing this journey with anyone interested in greater health, happiness, and well-being. Currently, I am offering drop-in meditation groups via Zoom, please email me to register. When we finally return to our new "normal" (whatever that will look like) I will offer live, in person, meditation groups to share these ideas and practices and to cultivate a sense of community. Together we can make a powerful contribution to our own well-being, as well as that of those around us.

Please visit my website (andrewfcampbell.com) for more information as well as more detailed daily meditation instruction, guided meditations, links to resources and talks about meditation and mindfulness, and information and ideas about developing your own practice.

Andrew Campbell is a Licensed Professional Counselor and certified therapeutic mindfulness instructor with 10 years of experience in private practice. Andrew has also served on the adjunct faculty of Southern CT State University and the University of Connecticut teaching courses on psychotherapy and has worked in the counseling centers at both Southern CT and Sacred Heart Universities. Please send any questions, comments, or concerns about this article or mental health and mindfulness to afbcamp@gmail.com.

Creativity vs. COVID

By Rebecca Zablocki

During these difficult times all of us are learning to adapt, many of us are feeling anxious, dealing with hardships or mourning. There are so many negatives, some so strong that we cannot find a positive to combat the circumstances, but we all know that. We are all aware of the sadness and hard times that coronavirus has spawned. While we cannot fix what has been lost or broken, we can bring some positivity to light.

With the lack of PPE (personal protective equipment) artists and crafters all over the globe stepped up to the plate and with that so did appreciation for those with the capability to create. The combination of sewing and artistry is something that we, as a thread mill turned arts organization, can truly appreciate! While some have been able to create makeshift masks from household items, the CDC provided multiple recommendations and many artists have taken to following those guidelines to create re-usable, washable and more ear friendly masks. If you are a health-care professional, you know what we mean by that, the results of wearing masks for long periods of time and the pain that elastic can cause on the ears.

Many are using their skills to create these masks and then donating them to hospitals, nursing homes, homeless shelters, or leaving them for passersby. Those who do not have time, equipment or the capability to sew are realizing the benefits of these reusable masks and the importance of craftsmanship and buying from small businesses, including artists and seamsters. Not only do these reusable masks help save N-95 masks for the people that need them most, but it will help to cut down on waste. Reducing the number of disposable masks tossed to the ground, rubber gloves are a whole other story, but there are recycling programs to help with this.

PPE is one thing, but what about PPB? Personal Positivity Boosters! Artists all over the world have joined online efforts, creating beautiful visuals for public service announcements, online exhibitions highlighting other artist's work and supporting one another by sharing via social media or purchasing art. Art is a part of everyone's daily life, even if they don't know it. Apps on your phones, patterns on your curtains or pillows, art is everywhere and this difficult time has highlighted the need for some beauty and creativity even more.

In all aspects of life, people are buying from small businesses to help keep them afloat, however if you are personally experiencing financial hardship, this is not always an option. The Eastern CT Center for History, Art & Performance is not immune to the difficulties of this time. EC-CHAP is one of many non-profit, arts organizations that have had to cancel events such as our performances in The Packing House and close the Dye & Bleach House Community Gallery and the Gardiner Hall Jr., History Museum for the time being. Donations are always welcome so if you are able to support it is greatly appreciated, however financial support is not the only way to help during this time. Word of mouth, social media support and recommendations are always one of the best ways to support artists, small business & arts organizations. So feel free to spread the love by talking about EC-CHAP & some of our efforts; share videos of performances on social media; shout out some of our performance guests; repost some images from our gallery on Facebook and Instagram; and post some of the cool facts or items you learned about in the Gardiner Hall Jr. History Museum.

As the Artist-In-Residence for EC-CHAP, it is always a joy to share some of our local partners and the artists that we have worked with. Share joy and art. We hope to see you in the Dye & Bleach House Community Gallery or at other events soon, here at EC-CHAP, located at 156 River Road in Willington, CT.

Rebecca Zablocki is the EC-CHAP Artist-In-Residence, and Director, Dye & Bleach House Community Gallery. You may contact Rebecca at: communitygallery@ec-chap.org



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The Elements of Writing - Creating Believable and Enduring Characters

By Felix F. Giordano

“Creating Believable and Enduring Characters” begins with your imagination.

One of the first items that you want to address when conceiving your story is creating characters. After the story’s plot, usually the characters either drive or support the story. Think of memorable characters in classical literature like Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Captain Ahab, Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, Jules Verne’s Captain Nemo, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and Othello, or especially Charles Dickens’ character Ebenezer Scrooge which approximately thirty years after his novel A Christmas Carol was published, gave rise to the term scrooge meaning a cranky miserly person. What better way to praise an author’s character creation by ingraining that character so deeply in the minds of people that the character’s name becomes a part of the language?

There are usually two main characters in a story, the protagonist (hero) and the antagonist (villain). It’s easy to identify the protagonist. It’s the individual whom we root for. Think of the ultimate protagonist, Superman. Although he is all powerful, even he has a frailty. Kryptonite renders him weak and ineffectual and his antagonists use it as the best way to defeat him. When creating a protagonist it is good practice to establish a flaw in the character. That way, readers can identify with him or her and know that he or she is vulnerable just like anyone else. For how can we root for someone who is so strong, so powerful, and does the right thing all the time? Because in that case, we would then know the ending of the story soon after we begin and that would lead to a very boring story.

On the other hand, the antagonist is not always the villain we can identify early on in the story. In who-done-its, we often don’t find out who the antagonist is until late in the game. In other stories, the antagonist is a good person but something happens along the way which forces him or her to venture off toward the dark side. The flash-point could be sibling rivalry, financial woes, lack of appreciation, physical or emotional abuse, or a perceived wrong of some nature. In a few instances, the antagonist is not even a person at all but instead a corporation, bureaucracy, the forces of nature, or even a vice that has consumed the protagonist.

Most of us are familiar with the Frank Capra movie, It’s a Wonderful Life. We can all sense that George Bailey is the protagonist and we identify with him. But how many can identify the antagonist? If asked, most people would say it’s mean old Mr. Potter but wait, are you sure? The real antagonist in the movie, which Frank Capra keeps building upon until George Bailey’s epiphany, is the despair that overwhelms poor George. The injury that leaves George Bailey with a hearing loss, his giving up the college tuition savings to his brother, having to run the Building & Loan after his brother gets married, the run on the banks, and the ultimate loss of the bank deposit all add to the increasing despair which ultimately consumes George Bailey’s life. It’s only by divine intervention on the bridge that interrupts George’s catastrophic decision to end his life of despair.

Now that we have identified who or what can be a protagonist and an antagonist, we can consider additional characters. Some major characters purpose is to support the protagonist or antagonist, or serve as a means to drive the story in a certain direction. The person of faith who helps the protagonist decide what is truly important in life, the corrupt politician who persuades a character to commit a violation, or the stray dog who proves to a troubled youth that kindness can deliver miracles.

To develop a character whether it is a protagonist, antagonist, or minor character, we need to create a name for our character. It can be a cool name that you just simply like or a name that offers meaning to the story such as in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter. Hester Prynne, who is in a loveless marriage, is made to wear a scarlet “A” on her dress by the community to define her as an adulteress. However, in Hawthorne’s brilliant mind, the party to the adulteress affair is presumed to be the minister, Arthur Dimmesdale. So while everyone thinks that Hester Prynne wears the scarlet letter in shame, Hawthorne’s real intent was to have Hester Prynne wear it as a source of pride for her unending love for Arthur.

In creating your characters, once you get past deciding the names for your characters, you need to define them. Not just their physical attributes such as male, female, young, old, weight, height, race, hair color, etc. but also whether they are rich or poor and what their occupation is or not. In addition, their likes and dislikes, their history, accomplishments and failures all come into play when defining your characters. When you compile a

personal background of your characters then you can use this information at any point in your story to drive why a character acts the way that they do.

To provide you with an idea of how to construct a character profile, here is one for a supporting character in my novels:

Rocco ‘Rocky’ Salentino, Cedar County Undersheriff, met Sheriff Jim Buchanan while they were United States Air Force buddies serving in Kuwait. At the start of the series, Rocky is 32 years old, 6-feet tall with a stocky build honed from years of body building. He has brown eyes and black, crew cut hair which is hidden from view under his helmet when he rides his midnight blue Harley. Rocky was hired in 1995 after Jim was elected to a four-year term as sheriff. Rocky is a first generation Italian-American who was born in and his family originates from Avellino, Italy which is a medium sized town near Naples. He moved to Brooklyn, NY with his family when he was nineteen. He is a former Fulton/Rockaway street-wise Doo-wop corner crooner and his Brooklyn friends nicknamed him ‘Double O’. Rocky left the love of his life in Avellino, the lovely, blue-eyed Eleonora Paravicini. He longs to return to Italy with the hope of renewing his relationship with his soul-mate, Eleonora with whom he still communicates via letters.

This description not only provides us with a physical image of Rocky but it also hints a bit at what we can expect from him in a number of different situations.

With a certain degree of accuracy, we sense that Rocky will not stand around while others are being bullied, he probably likes to have a good time especially if music is involved, and he has a long-distance relationship with the love of his life so he’s not interested in establishing a local love interest. We know that Rocky is an imposing bruiser, has a strong commitment to country and duty, loves music, and may also be sensitive with a soft heart. However, if you know what’s good for you, don’t mess with Rocky.

It’s these characteristics which not only define our characters but provide us with a roadmap for when we write our stories. When we have this information available for every character in our story then we can plot out how our characters interact with one another. When this happens, you will see your characters come alive and say things that you didn’t expect to hear or do things that you hadn’t outlined in your story. That is when the creative part of our brain subconsciously tells our characters what to do. When that happens let it flow and your characters will grow with such depth that you will be amazed at how that occurred and wonder with awe what will come next.

We defined “Creating Believable and Enduring Characters” 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: Driving the Story

To all our contributors- Thank You!

Without your submissions of writing, poetry, artwork and photographs, this paper would not exist. T. King, Publisher

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Count Your Blessings

By Jabez Manning and Grace Preli

Has there ever been a better time to be alive? We think not! Despite the problems we humans and the earth might currently be facing, the reality is that we have a greater access to information, ideas and resources than ever before.

There are so many beautiful things available to people; new advancements and innovations but also a growing devotion to the re-discovery of methods that are just as useful and pertinent now as they were then. We humans have spent millennia honing our craft, discovering what works and what doesn’t, making advancements and making mistakes.

We’ve found so many things that work and work well. And where we’ve yet to find a way or an answer or an ideal, you can bet that people all over the world are working hard to find creative solutions to their problems. Nowadays, things are being invented so quickly and times are changing so fast that there might be things that could improve your entire life, you just don’t even know about it yet.

We at Manning Enterprizes work hard when we build to bridge the gap between old and new technology, between the tried-and-true and the not-quiet-yet-tested, between time-honored tradition and the innovation of today.

How would you like to combine old school joinery with the latest tech from Apple for a desk that’s uniquely suited to you and your work flow? How about a kitchen redesign built out of the most beautiful salvaged lumber but fully integrated with Amazon Echo so you can control it all with your voice or phone?

If this kind of thing gets you excited then you might like our Pimp My Life program. This program is an homage to both the old and the new and puts our focus fully on YOU! What do you need to help you live the life of your dreams? How can we help you work with what you’ve already got? What sort of cool new ideas are you itching to implement? We’re your people!

It’s all about perspective and there’s never been a better time to be alive. We take the best of the best from what has worked for hundreds of years and combine it with the new of the new for a unique, sustainable and innovative experience for you!

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Performing Arts



Kate Taylor

May... we entertain you?

By EC-CHAP

May

"Make hay in May for you may never know what June is coming with and you may never know what July will present! When you see May, make hay!"

-Ernest Agyemang Yeboah

This month, we would like to give focus to some of the many artists that have graced our stage at The Packing House. There are simply too many wonderful performers we have had the privilege of collaborating with for all to fit here (no specific priority has been given to those whose photos are included below).



Grass Routes



Lara Herscovitch



Steve Katz



Aztec Two Step



HMS Select Chorus



Twice Around



Bob Malone



Joe Davidian Trio



Bruno Raberg Trio



June Bisantz



Luke Hendon



Carla Ulbrich



Jacqui Naylor



Kala Farnham



Patti Rothberg



Eclectica



Kat Kennedy



Matt Dechamplain Trio



Nicole Zuraitis



EC-CHAP VIRTUAL FILM SERIES

Virtual Screening of “The Making of: A Canvas of History & Social Change” with Live Comments. Thursday, May 14th, 7:00pm. FREE. Join us for a showing of the making of the mural that overlooks RT32 at EC-CHAP’s home at The Mill Works. Free Virtual Concert Pass at: www.thepackinghouse.us/upcoming.

If you were unable to join us for the dedication of this historic mural, please consider viewing this video with us. This year-long project was partially funded by the CT State Office of the Arts. Screening 7:00pm. “BYOB&F” - Bring Your Own Beverage & Food to your own Living Room! Locals can also order from Willington Pizza House (or WP Too) for take-out / delivery the night of the show. Ask for “The Packing House” pizza! For information, please call 518-791-9474.

The Packing House will reopen in the Fall 2020. Please visit our website for upcoming virtual and live performances and events: www.thepackinghouse.us.

The Dye & Bleach House Community Gallery and the Gardiner Hall Jr History Museum will remain closed until further notice. Please check our website for reopening dates and times: www.ec-chap.org.

“Life is like riding a bicycle.
To keep your balance, you must keep moving.”

- Albert Einstein



Nina Romanenko



Seat of our Pants



Tolland HS Jazz Band



Val Rogers



Seeking New Board Members

The Eastern Connecticut Center for History, Art, and Performance (EC-CHAP) is a 501.c.3 nonprofit cultural organization serving Eastern Connecticut and beyond.

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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