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Seeing Through the Haze

By Bob Grindle

There was a time when the very idea of rain-fall seemed pure and umbilically connected to all that is un-frighteningly mysterious about our planetary shelter. A time when playing outside in the rain felt as gloriously right as simply waking up with the hours of a new day to spend. When the silly naïveté of youth seemed neither silly nor naïve and simply sliding down a wet, grassy or muddy hillside was all it took to open a mental slider to a world where exhilaration might be as simple as skipping a small flat stone across a pond or a puddle. The passage of time, however, often chauffeurs us through these lushly emergent moments, distracting us with a chattering driver’s knowl-edgeable narrative until the moment is lost and the rain only makes us wet and chill, and skipping stones might easily glance off and hit something—or someone.

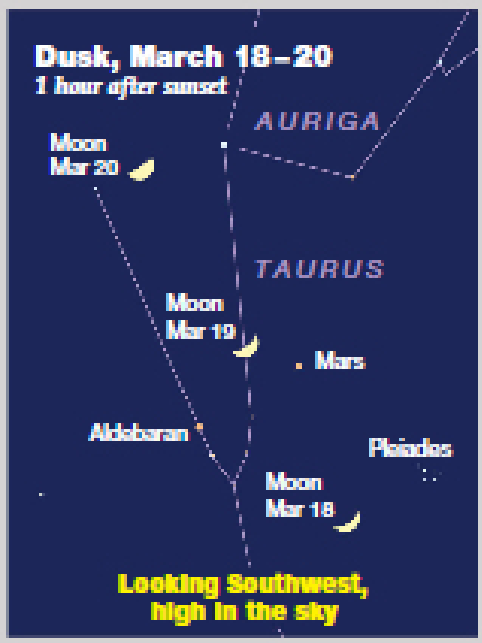
Clearly this quaint observation is nothing new. There’s the biblical tale of Adam and Eve and a snake, an apple and a garden, or perhaps the dreams and schemes and circus crowds of Joni Mitchell’s “Both Sides Now”. Maybe you prefer a darker view with Jack Nicholson in a Stephen King story. But as we all squint to see a pathway through the haze of a pandemic that feels like much more than a viral wildfire, and as we struggle with the script of a performance none of us volunteered to be a player in, it is comforting to hear a 22-year-old poet remind us all that for as long as we continue to draw breath from this globe’s air our life is not over...”unfinished” as Amanda Gorman put it...and there is more we can do, if we find it in ourselves to do it. It can be as simple as a helping hand offered to a neighbor; a few hours’ time volunteering at a nearby shelter or soup kitchen or school; perhaps a solitary walk along

the street or road picking up litter or a listening ear trying to ease a friend or loved one’s hurt, and the list could go on, limited only by the imaginations of every single person who has the gift of being able to help.

It’s raining gently as I carry the early plants out to the green-house—an unadorned assemblage of PVC, plastic sheeting and cedar shelving that we purchased nearly 30 years ago and have repaired, patched and added to steadily over the years as we started from seed, or protected from foul weather or propagated what must surely be tens of thousands of plants by now. Rain, even the chilly rain of this late February afternoon, is so much just a natural part of the life we have built that it feels good to know that the young onions and leeks and pansies and rosemary plants don’t mind the trip up the hill through the cool dampness. It has been suggested that play is the work of childhood; I wonder if there is a corollary that work is (or at least it can be) the play of adulthood. I know my father loved to play at me-chanics—he was good at it; my son loves to play at cabinet building—he is good at it.

At the end of a cold, sunny day, the greenhouse is a warm retreat and a good place to squint and see the stars start to appear through the hazy plastic sheathing. Whether you know them by name or not, it feels like a personal

discovery as each star hatches from its cosmic shell into your own personal bit of night stage and stepping out of the greenhouse into the cold air the haziness becomes a sort of crackling and brittle twinkle. In early March, looking to the Southwest almost overhead an hour or so after sunset, 7ish, the first star will be Aldebaran, the reddish eye of Taurus. Mars will be just a little to the right of Aldebaran, very close to the Pleiades. No need to rush, they’ll be there all month, but if you’d like a docent to help make sure who’s who, between the 18th and the 20th of March a waxing Moon will rise right through Taurus and help ‘id’ the pair...Aldebaran on the left and Mars and the Pleiades on the right. By mid-April, Mars will no longer be the only planet in the evening sky, because Venus returns, and with the return to the night sky of the fabled goddess of beauty, that just a few months ago graced the early morning sky, we get some small sense of the extraordi-nary continuity of the Solar system



we live in.

A year has passed very quickly. The oak outside my window has added a very thin growth ring, perhaps its 300th; a pandemic has taken millions of lives worldwide. Do try to keep things in perspective and stay safe.

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



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On our cover:
'Spring Blooms' - Black Dog still life with lilac blooms by Mansfield photographer Kim Bova. Read about Kim and see another of her photographs on page 13.

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

Neighbors
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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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Don't Stop Now

By Loretta Wrobel

Yes we are all breathing a collective sigh of relief now that the new President has been safely installed in the White House and Kamala Harris is the new Vice President. The furor over who won this election, and how many lawsuits does it take to verify that indeed the 45th president lost the election has subsided. As we move towards spring, the horror of the attack on the legislative offices in Washington DC is receding. However, we still have our Capitol surrounded by fences. It is disturbing to digest the fact that we need to protect our legislative building by a strong barrier so our Capitol will not be invaded by a group of anarchists who are trying to save our democracy!



It is not the time to rest on our laurels, sit back and believe that all is fine. It is the time to roll up our sleeves and hold the Democrats in power to accountability. There is so much that needs to be done in our stressed out, the rich-get-richer, pandemic-thriving country.

I see the heartbreak of homeless people shivering in the cold in Texas. I watch the stock market giving more to those that already have more than an entire country would need. I feel the pain of Black People dealing with loved ones suffering from a higher rate of COVID infections, hospitalizations, and sadly, a steeper COVID death rate. I cringe as I read that vaccination distribution is unequal, as rates for those who received the vaccine are high-est among white people and lowest among black people.

What is going on here? We are a nation divided with an increasingly few having 'money to burn,' as my mother would say, and an increasingly growing amount of our citizens being unable to pay for basic needs--rent, food, utilities and healthcare. And a sizable amount of the above are working long, hard hours. What about a living wage?

I read about the high cost of daycare that prevents parents from working, due to the low wages they receive. I understand that many daycares have closed due to difficulties associated with the pandemic. Many schools are on remote learning. How do parents (especially single parents) manage this dilemma? Not everyone is able to work from home, and this includes people who receive the lowest wages and have the least amount of cash on hand.

How do we begin to unravel these and so many other issues that are staring at us? It is not a time for complacency. It is a time for continued efforts to push and demand that our Country take care of all of its citizens, not just the upper privileged. We must hold our legislators accountable, and not allow them to take a vacation when climate change is causing intense frigid weather and power outages for millions of Texans.

If you are one of the vast majority of Americans that want more equality in our country, want Medicare for all so that every American has access to quality and affordable health care, and know that climate change is real and our human footprint needs to move towards sustainability, this is the right time to stand up for what you believe in.

The present administration needs to pay attention to what humanitarians have been talking about for the last four years. Our country needs a major overhaul. This is not the time for inattention, believing that Biden is a good guy and we have no worries.

Our country has cataclysmic issues that must be addressed if our democracy is to thrive. Our systemic racism has created deep wounds and divisiveness. We must drop our aggressiveness, and talk to each other to work towards solutions. Listening to each other and dropping our defensiveness can go far in breaking down the barriers that separate and divide us. We must continue to raise awareness of the injustices and suffering that too many in our country are facing.

Meanwhile we are continuing to battle the virus that has had a dramatic impact on everyone and has severely traumatized the most vulnerable. We need to provide more mental health services, better access to healthcare, and more financial aid to those that have been crushed by our economic downturn. We see the stock market rising upward as small businesses are lost, renters are unable to pay their rent, jobs are lost, and unemployment still is the reality for many of our citizens.

I recall that Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren were talking truths during the Democratic Presidential debates. Remember those arguments? We have to summon all that energy back, and continue to work for our environment, ourselves, and those that are unable or too fatigued to fight for themselves.

A return to business as usual is not enough. We want better. Keeping vigilant now is not easy. We are all ravaged by the trials of a pandemic, a hotly contested election, the hostility we daily witness, and our year-long isolation from our pre-COVID lives. Our divided country needs healing and more cooperation. Hatred and fighting are not the solution. We must engage and seek to build bridges with those who think differently. It is a time for patience and reaching out, not balling up our fists.

I often feel overwhelmed and tired. What that tells me is that I have neglected myself. If I don't pay attention to taking care of myself and feeding myself with tenderness, I either numb out or become rageful. Neither of these are helpful. Right now, it is necessary to keep a pulse on what I need to continue to be strong and clear. When I take care of my own needs, I become more effective in any actions I engage in. This is so easy to say and so very hard to achieve on a daily basis. In the midst of all that calls for my attention, I can't forget myself. I am learning to practice balance. Asking myself if am I in balance today helps me to remember the importance of being in a serene and peaceful frame of mind, before I step into the turmoil of our times.

I share this with you to encourage you to make healthy decisions for yourself. As you feel more balanced and centered, your ability to make significant changes increases tremendously. May we all walk in balance and allow the beauty around us to nurture and soothe us, creating a better world and maintaining our energy as warriors for justice, equality, and fairness. Pick your issue and join together, as it is easier with comrades, and not so lonely.



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Willimantic, Now and Then:

Retirement: With COVID, It takes a Community

By Mark Svetz

I retired in December. That will surprise some of my friends, who, over the years, might not have known I had a job. I can’t really blame them. I often didn’t know whether I was working for money, volunteering or just playing. A lot of good work was done in those days. Surprisingly, enough of it was on the clock to have earned for me a very small pension from the great state of Connecticut.

I was shocked *and* grateful to learn this last year, when I decided not to return to work in the growing pandemic. I love Social Security, but it requires a fairly spartan lifestyle. Every trickle in my income stream is appreciated. Especially since I am aware of having pretty much made the wrong choice throughout my working life when it came to my eventual retirement. I changed jobs for any reason, really: because somebody needed me, or there was a really interesting offer, or mostly, because somebody I liked was doing something cool. Money didn’t really enter into it. It was easy to live small in those days, and easy to earn enough money to do it. I love getting that note each month about the small amount of money deposited in my account.

Another thing I love is not having to figure out what I am going to do next to pay the bills. I was always cocky when I was young. I had skills, a lot of friends, and this was Willimantic, after all. You might say I didn’t “believe” in retirement. My life was pretty spontaneous. The future seemed so vague and far away. If I had next month’s rent covered, I didn’t have to think about it.

Living in the moment had its advantages for me. My life seemed to be one adventure after another, yet I rarely left Willimantic. I think there are advantages for the community in having an economy that allows those choices. In the 1980s, the global epidemic of HIV/AIDS descended on some of our communities here in Willimantic. My friend Tony Clark and I had the time to start a syringe exchange program and run it for five years as volunteers. This was a seven-day-as-week commitment that made our lives pretty chaotic.

I remember running into a young man years later. He told me that when he used IV drugs in his young life, he never had to use a dirty needle because of us. That’s worth more to me than a gold watch and a fat pension. If I hadn’t been able to pick up a small living on the edge, that might never have happened.

Things are a little different now. I have found this new century is a little more difficult to negotiate on the fringes of our economy. Jobs are tighter, qualifications more rigid, background checks more common; I don’t know, really, it just seems harder to dance at the edge of the maelstrom. Everybody wants us to jump in, fill out the forms, sign the papers, drink the cool aide.



Many of these changes are for the better. I’m sure. I guess we all got pretty human, back in the day. One thing I know about the “book” that everyone tries to do things by today, it wasn’t written in Willimantic. Our programs were less institutional and more human. I miss that. I worked mostly in education, human services and politics in those days and it didn’t really matter what side of the desk I was on, things got pretty “flexible.” It might be better now, but I think something was lost. I’m not sure you could pay someone to do what Tony and I did.

Well, the old days are gone and that’s for sure, but what I really wanted to talk about is how important friends are. I wanted to tell you something I learned already in my brief retirement. It takes a strong community to live on the edge, and the same thing might be true for retirement. Friends are like rain. It may not always be convenient when it rains, but we always need it, so we might as well enjoy it.

During what I might call my career, I always relied on the wonderful kismet of Willimantic life. When I needed some money, I’d talk to a few people, put the word out, and something would open up. In retirement, I found I needed company and conversation. All the places I had expected to find that were closed. Most of the things I looked forward to in retirement involved friends, mostly sitting across from me, over a cup of coffee. Suddenly I found there were very few friends in my daily life, which is an unusual and very discomfiting circumstance for me. Fortunately – this being Willimantic, after all, no matter what century – friends came through for me, as they always have.

When I felt starved for conversation, thirsty to just hear another voice. I reached out to friends, and guess what? Community happens. People stop by. This one returns a book. That one got a deal on some cranberries: “Would you like some?” they might call to ask. “Sure drop it off. I’ll put on a pot of coffee.” I have had a lot of chances to visit outdoors, masked and socially distant. I don’t know how I would have survived otherwise.

Just the other day, a friend came over. He had called first, so Sarah and I went outside and shoveled the snow off a sunny spot on our lawn. It was a pretty chilly day, but there was a spot where the sun was shining, and we decided to put some lawn chairs there. We thought it might be better than standing on either side of the car.

We had to keep shifting our clearing as the day wore on, but we got to sit in the thin February sun, having coffee and talking. We talked, shivering over our cups, until we moved along, each to our own next thing. It was a great Willimantic morning.

Look at that. A car just pulled into the driveway. I’m gonna grab my mask and see who’s here. I think I’ll put a pot of coffee on as I go out.

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

Birds Attacking Your Windows?

(StatePoint) If you’ve ever noticed a bird attack your windows, you may wonder why this strange behavior is occurring. Beyond the potential disruption it might cause your family, repeated attacks can be harmful to birds. Understanding the problem however, can help you put a stop to it, and better protect the birds nesting on your property.

The Problem

Many birds will stake out a territory, perhaps by your home, and vigorously defend it. If a territorial bird discovers its reflection in your window, it may perceive this reflection to be another bird competing for its territory and mate, compelling the bird to attack. This attack of its own reflection can take the form of pecking or scratching at your window, as well as flying up and banging into your window. When repeated, these actions deplete a bird’s energy and put its health and the health of its nesting young at risk. Though this can occur



at any time of year, it happens most often in spring, with males.

A Solution

You can help stop this problem from occurring. One good solution designed to do so is Stop Bird Attack, a removable, white coating that may be sprayed on any window. It eliminates the bird’s window reflection, calms the bird and stops the attack. Effective for Northern Cardinals, American Robins, California Towhees and other territorial birds, Stop Bird

Attack is made by WindowAlert, a brand that also makes bird window decals and UV Liquid products that help prevent bird strikes (another common hazard to birds). More information can be found by visiting windowalert.com.

Take it a Step Further

While you are at it, consider other dangers to birds that you can eliminate on your property. For example, by swapping out conventional pesticides with essential oils, you can ward off pests in your garden without putting birds at risk. You might also try keeping pet cats indoors or in an enclosure to prevent them from attacking birds.

“While your home’s windows can be an unexpected hazard to birds, it’s important to be aware of the easy solutions that can help keep them safe this spring nesting season and beyond,” says Spencer Schock, founder of WindowAlert.

Food Fight at the Bird Feeder

By Bob Lorentson

How closely do you watch your bird feeder? For the casual observer, likely not close enough to realize that a feathered version of the Hunger Games is taking place right outside your window. Not unlike a cocktail party when the shrimp platter comes out, there’s nothing like free food to show how different birds sneak, bluff, threaten, or outright bully their way to the table. But with so many possible bird interactions, the pecking order can be complicated to figure out. (By the way, the term “pecking order” was coined in 1921 by Norwegian psychologist Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe, while observing what he realized was a dominance hierarchy in barnyard chickens. Apparently some chickens are more chicken than others.)

Eliot Miller, a researcher at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, has been closely studying bird feeder power struggles, and with the help of 20,000 backyard bird watchers in his Project Feeder Watch, has been able to sort out the pecking order of 136 common American species. If you’re quiet, you might be able to catch Eliot as he shows off his dazzling study to establish himself as the dominant researcher in the lab and attract female ornithologists. In the meantime, thanks to Eliot, we can all watch our feeders with a new fight club-like interest, and a greater appreciation for grocery stores.

Generally speaking, the bigger the bird, the bigger the bully, though there are plenty of birds that punch above their weight. Test your observational skills with these featherweight matchups.

Black-capped chickadee vs. American goldfinch: Despite their flashy feathered finery and a slight size advantage, the goldfinch is more about glam than glory. In fact, it will fly aside to just about every bird at the feeder. Not that the chickadee is such a heavy hitter. It loses out to the tufted titmouse, the white-breasted nuthatch, and even the ground feeding dark-eyed junco. In fact, when the goldfinch isn’t around, the chickadee can often be heard complaining about the unfairness of life. No one listens.

European starling vs. Blue jay: An intriguing card with two heavyweight bullies, this matchup is seen by the ornithology oddsmakers as a draw. The blue jay has the bulk, but the starling brings new moves learned from its years battling European birds. With their bullying tactics and messy habits, it’s apparent that both enjoy being the bad birds watchers love to hate, but the patriotic choice here would be the American blue jay.

Cardinal vs. Mourning dove: The dove might be the messenger of peace and all, but don’t let that fool you. At least not too much. Although usually seen on the ground hunting after food spilled by more aggressive birds, it will still use its bulk to muscle out everybody’s favorite, the cardinal. It might be the reason why hunters shoot millions of them every year. Or else they just never got the dove’s message.

Red-bellied woodpeckers vs. Red-headed woodpeckers: Heads has it. Although the red-headed woodpecker is a Connecticut endangered species, it still beats out its red-bellied cousin. Interestingly though, starlings beat red-headed woodpeckers, while the red-bellies beat starlings. Who knew bird watching could be like a game of rock-paper-scissors?

Common raven vs. American crow: Both of these titans of the feeder will scare away any other bird, except for a raptor or a turkey. (Some raptors, like the sharp-shinned hawks and Cooper’s hawks, look at feeders as buffet tables. For birds, not seed.) Though the raven is much larger than the crow, a group of crows is called a murder. Enough said.

Almost as much fun as watching bird feeder dynamics is watching the different bird watchers in action themselves. When you see a bevy of birdwatchers, the dominant one can always be identified by its billed cap, the very expensive binoculars hanging from its neck, and its habit of pointing at birds no one else can see. Its repetitive hushed call of “There, a loggerhead shrike!” or “There, an Eastern wood-pewee!” can get old fast. The lesser birdwatcher is best differentiated from the dominant by its desperate call of “Where? Where?”

By far the most common bird watcher is the window watcher. This shy but sensitive creature is known for putting out seed for birds and simply sitting by a window to watch them eat it. No one really knows why. It’s occasional alarm cry of “#!*! Squirrel!” has been known to startle nearby persons.

Bob Lorentson is a retired environmental scientist and an active daydreamer.

CT Green Energy News

Submitted by Peter Millman

Welcome to the CT Green Energy News, a weekly digest of stories that has been condensed into a monthly format for *Neighbors* readers. To read the full stories online, just Google the titles below. You can also subscribe to the free weekly email newsletter by contacting Peter Millman at peter.millman7@gmail.com.

News and events for advocates of clean energy, energy efficiency, and climate action at the state and local levels, focusing on Connecticut. Brought to you by People’s Action for Clean Energy (PACE) and Eastern CT Green Action (ECGA).

Five takeaways from Connecticut’s new residential solar program changes
Energy News Network. “After years of debate over reforming the state’s solar program, stakeholders widely praised the new rules released last week. Connecticut utility regulators have reconfigured the state’s residential solar program in an effort to ensure its growth and drive innovation.” Plus: PURA Establishes New Residential Renewable Energy Program (FAQs from PURA)

Could Rolling Blackouts Happen In New England?
NHPR. “I think the biggest single issue is that winter is normal in New Hampshire and across the Northeast. We are used to seeing these types of intense winter storms and multiple low-degree days. The problem in Texas is, that’s not normal there. This is a once-in-fifty, one-in-one-hundred-years type of event. And given that, the overall energy infrastructure system has not been developed and constructed with this type of severe weather in mind.”

Democrats Split Over Proposed Moratorium on Fossil Fuel Plants in Connecticut
CT Examiner. “We have an initiative to move to 100 percent, carbon-free electricity, so why are we powering up new plants that burn fossil fuels?” [Representative] Cohen said. “We have an existential crisis on our hands with climate change, and we need to start getting serious about shutting down dirty energy and moving to cleaner options, such as wind and solar.” Plus: As Finger-Pointing Over Unloved Gas Plant Continues, Who Really Gets To Call The Shots?

Historic Inn Replaces Oil Burning System with Energy Efficient Electric Heat Pumps
Renewable Energy Magazine. “We are always excited when a new type of property, in this case a boutique inn, takes advantage of C-PACE to improve their energy efficiency. This is also a great example of progress toward the State’s goal of electrifying buildings,” said Mackey Dykes, Vice President of Financing Programs at the Connecticut Green Bank. “Commercial properties of all sizes should look at their HVAC systems for opportunities to unlock savings..”

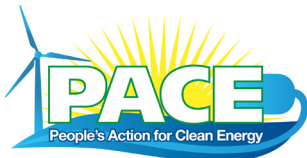


Middletown first in CT to have all-electric school bus
Middletown Press. “We like to be first here in Middletown,” Mayor Ben Florsheim said. “We like to be the leaders when it comes to new, progressive ideas that are going to not only help our environment, not only protect our future, but also it makes sense for our school district budget, our city budget, and for our taxpayers.”

Amid unprecedented storm damage, Eversource’s 2020 profits rise to \$1.21B
Hartford Business Journal. “Eversource said a lower effective tax rate also benefited its fourth-quarter bottom line.”

Newington considering solar power switch which could save town over \$5 million
New Britain Herald. “The portfolio of Newington sites the company examined would provide a cumulative energy cost savings over a 20-year term of \$5.17 million or an average annual savings to the town of \$258,446.”

CT has big plans for tackling climate change. Now it has to make them happen.
CT Mirror. “While the GC3 report in particular is receiving praise for its breadth – there is also concern that its sprawling array of options offers no blueprint for what the state should do next. And there is concern that even with the more than 230 people who participated in preparing the report, some key voices were left out. All of which raises the question: Now what?”



Eyeing Obstacles, Dykes Offers Optimism for State’s Green Energy Goals
CT Examiner. “Whether Millstone continues to run after its ratepayer-subsidized state contract ends in 2029 also plays a major factor in Connecticut’s renewable energy goals, considering it meets about half of the state’s energy needs and is the largest zero-carbon generator in New England. The fate of Millstone is one of the biggest question marks, and it weighs heavily on the plan – referenced 130 times in the 173- page document.”

Emanuel Synagogue in West Hartford Partnering with Verogy for Solar Installation
we-ha.com. “Once operational, the synagogue can expect to see savings on their energy costs throughout the next two decades...This project enables us to devote more resources to important synagogue missions, including fulfilling our obligation to preserve and improve the world around us by reducing the purchase of electricity produced by fossil-fueled power plants.” Plus: Solar Array Completed at West Hartford’s King Philip Middle School

Boston kicks off community choice electricity program, aiming to surpass state’s renewables requirement
Utility Dive. “The opt-out program leverages Boston’s collective buying power in a bid to deliver greener, locally sourced and more affordable electricity to customers — appealing to some consumer protection groups and environmental justice advocates alike.”

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The Neighbors paper
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We Need Community Supported Agriculture

By C. Dennis Pierce

Will March come in like a lamb and go out like a lion? As I write this, we are experiencing three days of rain which will melt away most of the remaining snow left from our mild winter. If March surprises us and does a three-sixty bringing on an early storm, roaring like a lion, let’s hope it goes out calm and docile, like a lamb. With March being such a changeable month, in which we can see warm spring-like temperatures or late-season snowstorms, you can understand how this month is truly unpredictable.

This past week we celebrated National CSA week. The CSA Innovation Network created a week of awareness for CSAs. CSA stands for “community supported agriculture”. CSA farms offer an opportunity for you to support a local farm and also reap the benefits of that farm’s harvest. You buy a share – essentially a membership or subscription for the growing season of that farm. This happens in the early spring, when farmers are busy buying seeds, planting, cleaning the greenhouses and planning their harvests. Each week, during the harvest, you get your share of what’s fresh, ripe and ready to be picked – from early spinach in the spring to tomatoes in late summer to squash in the fall. This past week CSA farms collectively promoted CSAs across the country with unified messaging and urgency for members to sign up. It’s a way to encourage CSA sign-ups while promoting the CSA movement across the nation.

In the Quiet Corner there are many options for local farms that offer shares. Some full and some half. A half share may be for a single person, smaller family or if you just want to try it out. The array of offerings is varied from farm to farm. So, does how the CSA operate, the days for produce pick up etc. I would suggest you do your research before hand to find the best fit for yourself or your family. When looking at pricing please keep in mind that a farmer has a lot of expenses plus, they often work six to seven days a week to make sure that their gardens are successful. They typically have not have income during the winter months and they rely on shares that they sell. Do not compare this experience with the price of produce that you would purchase in a chain grocery store. Instead remember local food is better for your health for a few reasons. To begin with, local foods retain more nutrients. Produce is allowed to ripen naturally, while food that travels long distances is often picked before it’s ripe. And food picked fresh and in season doesn’t have far to travel before being sold. Here is the State’s listing for CSAs: CSA Listing (ct.gov)

One of the many local options available is Cloverleigh Farm, www.cloverleighfarm.com, in Columbia. While now in a new location, Cloverleigh Farm had previously operated in Mansfield. Susan Mitchell, farm owner had been in search of farmland of her own since she had previously rented land. Through her network of CSA members, she came across an older farm that was idle. The owner had passed away and Susan researched the property and finally was able to correspond with a daughter who was interested in having Susan purchase the property since it would continue to operate as a farm as it did in the 1800’s as a small dairy farm. This farm had well drained and sandy loam soil. It also has about 14 acres of potential growing area. The farm is located on 448 Jonathan Trumbull Highway which is Route 87. Susan moved in December of last year updating the farm house and bringing electric to the outbuildings. Coverleigh’s CSA previously offered fresh produce to 120 full and half share members. This season Susan expects to grow the membership to 185. Susan and her staff will be working tirelessly this spring as she prepares for a bountiful crop. If you are interested in procuring a share for the upcoming season you can contact the farm at 860.373.6324 or email at cloverleighfarm@gmail.com.

I spoke to Susan this past week and asked her about her outlook for CSAs and she shared that it is amazing that most people do not know that CSAs exist, how they operate and the benefits they provide. She was thankful for the recent mailing that the UConn program



HeartCTGrown, (Heartctgrown.extension.uconn.edu), had sent out a mass mailing to local residents explaining the benefits of CSA membership. HeartCTGrown is the go-to location for information on everything local and I highly recommend it.

Certainly, soup is the ultimate comfort food. It does many things. It quenches your thirst, it satisfies your hunger, it fills your stomach, it aids your digestion and helps you sleep. I have not met anyone, who after eating a bowl of soup, walks away not feeling satisfied. So, as we trudge through the month of March and mud season end your day with the following recipe.



Susan Mitchell of Cloverleigh Farm in Columbia.

Dennis Pierce photo.

White Bean Soup with Kale

Serves 6

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of dried white beans such as navy beans
- 3 pounds of Kale, trimmed of thick stems, rinsed and drained and cut crosswise into 2 ½ inch strips
- ¼ cup of olive oil
- 2 large cloves of garlic, minced
- 4 medium plum tomatoes, fresh or canned, peeled and seeded, cut into ½ dice.
- ½ teaspoon of red pepper flakes
- Salt to taste
- 1 cup of croutons. Try making them yourself with older bread.
- Parmesan cheese

Directions:

- Pick over beans discarding any stones, etc.
- Soak overnight in cold water. Water should be 2 inches above soaking beans.
- Drain beans and place in a saucepan with water to cover by 3 inches.
- Bring to a boil over medium heat. Then simmer, with a lid, until the beans are tender, about 1 ½ hours.
- Remove from the heat. Set the beans and cooking liquid aside.
- Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil over medium heat. Add kale and cook uncover until tender. About 15 minutes. Taste a piece. If it is not tender cook longer.
- Drain and set aside.
- Heat oil in a large soup pot over medium heat.
- Add garlic and sauté until golden. Do not let it burn.
- Add tomatoes and red pepper flakes. Continue to cook for approximately 5 minutes.
- Add drained kale. Add cooked beans and the cooking liquid. Stir.
- Cooked an additional ten minutes. Stirring occasionally.
- Season with salt.
- To serve ladle soup in pre heated bowls. Top with croutons and a sprinkle of parmesan cheese.

How did March creep up on us so fast? I am so eager to have spring arrive. From dandelion greens salad to ramps, (spring onions), found at my secret spot, to rhubarb that seem to grow like weeds I am looking forward to embrace spring again. Stay safe. If you have a suggestion for a farm or a local grower or even a recipe that would feature a local ingredient, please let me know. I will do my best to share your suggestions in a future column. Drop me a line at Codfish53@yahoo.com.

Peas be with you...

Common Sense Car Care



By Rick Ostien

I was watching TV the other evening and I did something that I rarely do. I actually watched some of the car commercials. There were several that struck me as amazing. I wanted to talk about some of what I saw to give a little background and perspective on things.

The first one I watched was about the United States Postal Service. This struck me because we do a lot of road work and repair for them. The commercial was clean and the delivery vehicle was relatively new. Hmmmm... In 1985 the United States Postal Service needed to replace its carrier vehicles. Two American companies General Motors and Grumman joined forces. They designed and produced a vehicle fit for the USPS’s needs. The LLV or Long-Life Vehicle was born. These box shaped vehicles are what you see on the road today. Grumman developed the corrosion proof aluminum body and GM produced a heavy-duty platform. When we speak of a vehicle’s platform, we refer to the chassis and the running gear. The LLV has a load capacity of 1,000 pounds. This worked well for mail and light parcels. In 1994 production of the LLV was stopped. The vehicles you see on the road today are from that era. They have an average of 200,000 to 300,000 miles on them. Everyday nationwide there are 142,000 plus LLVs delivering mail and parcels. The simplicity of repairing and maintenance on a long-term basis worked well for the USPS over the years.

Like everything else, they have gotten old and really need to be updated. The postal service has decided on a vehicle built by Oshkosh Defense for its next generation of mail carriers. Oshkosh is an American company that has produced all types of vehicles for domestic and military use. The new vehicle looks like an LLV on steroids. This new vehicle is definitely high tech and comes with an electric or gas-powered motor. The simplicity of the LLV when compared to the new Oshkosh vehicles is gone. This will lead to a major revamping of postal repair facilities and equipment. It also will require a great deal of training for the technicians who work on these trucks. The first new vehicles should be in service by 2023. Progress takes time and always costs money.

The last thing I want to leave you with is the car/SUV ads I saw while engrossed in TV car commercials. The talking mountain that makes you want to trash your new vehicle. The off-road adventure for beef jerky or the old stand by of driving through snow banks. Today’s vehicles have external cameras to control many of the safety devices that they come equipped with. These cameras are located in the front and rear facials and look like little dots. They need to stay clean or they will not function properly. The point is the durability of these cameras and external devices and the cost to repair them when they are damaged. They can create quite an expense when damaged. So, the next time you have that feeling to charge the mountain or plow through that snow bank, think again!!!!

Rick Ostien is the owner of Franc Motors in Willington.

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Unsung Heroes of Soul:
Howard Tate

By Dean Farrell

As host of “The Soul Express,” 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 features Howard Tate, whose songs were later popularized by the likes of B.B. King and Janis Joplin.

He was born in Elberton, Georgia, on August 13, 1938 or ‘39. (Sources vary.) The Tate family moved to Philadelphia in the early ‘40s. As a teenager, Howard sang gospel with a group that included another future soul singer, Garnet Mimms (“Cry Baby,” 1963). They also sang Rhythm & Blues as the Gainors, recording for the Mercury and Cameo labels. Tate later joined the touring band of keyboardist Bill Doggett (“Honky Tonk,” 1956).

Through Mimms, Tate met producer Jerry Ragovoy, who got him signed to Verve Records. Together, they created a string of top-notch soul-blues numbers, including “Ain’t Nobody Home” (covered by B.B. King) and “Get It While You Can” (covered by Janis Joplin). The latter became the title cut of Tate’s 1967 debut LP. It also prompted Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records to phone Ragovoy from Muscle Shoals, Alabama, to say, “Rags! I’m with all the cats in the studio and we just wanted to let you know—your Howard Tate record is the Bible down here!”

In 1970, Lloyd Price (“Lawdy Miss Clawdy,” “Stagger Lee,” “Personality”) and Johnny Nash (“Hold Me Tight,” “I Can See Clearly Now”) co-produced his second album, “Howard Tate’s Reaction.” A 2005 online review stated, “Tate’s voice is still front and center, and his trademark falsetto swoops are well represented, but the overall effect is nowhere close to his work with Ragovoy. ... Its strengths still outweigh its weaknesses, and with Tate, those strengths are substantial. Get his other stuff first, then get this one.”

In 1972, Tate reunited with Jerry Ragovoy for the singer’s self-titled third LP (released on Atlantic). It included a cover of Bob Dylan’s “Girl From the North Country” and the Robbie Robertson/Levon Helm song, “Jemima Surrender.”

By 1974, Tate was on Epic Records, for whom he recorded the non-chart single, “Ain’t Got Nobody To Give It To.” By the late ‘70s, he had retired from music and went to work in the securities industry. Tate developed a drug habit following the death of his 13-year-old daughter in a house fire. He ultimately ended up in a homeless shelter. But by the mid ‘90s, Tate had cleaned himself up.



He became a preacher and counseled drug addicts and the mentally ill.

In 1995, PolyGram released a compilation of Tate’s Verve material. However, Tate himself was unaware of the CD—or of the international cult following his music had achieved—until 2001. That was when disc jockey Phil Casden bumped into Tate in a supermarket and immediately

recognized him. At Casden’s urging, Tate revived his singing career. In New Orleans that spring, he gave his first live performance in over twenty years.

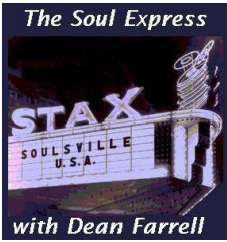
Tate subsequently hooked back up with Jerry Ragovoy, who produced his 2003 album, “Rediscovered.” Along with a re-recording of “Get It While You Can,” it included songs written by Elvis Costello and Prince. In 2006, Shout! Factory released “Howard Tate Live,” recorded in Denmark two years earlier. The same year, under the auspices of producer/arranger/songwriter Steve Weisberg, he recorded “A Portrait of Howard.” It featured compositions by Nick Lowe, Randy Newman, Lou Reed, and Carla Bley, as well

as songs co-written by Tate and Weisberg themselves. In Nashville, he recorded “Blue Day,” which came out in 2008. Tate also performed at the Blue Heaven Studios for a vinyl-only 2010 live recording.

Howard Tate died on December 2, 2011, of complications from both multiple myeloma and leukemia.

Charted singles:

- “Ain’t Nobody Home” (1966) R&B #12, Pop #63
- “Look at Granny Run, Run” (1966) R&B #12, Pop #67
- “Get It While You Can” (1967) Pop #134
- “Baby, I Love You” (1967) R&B #40
- “Stop” (1968) R&B #15, Pop #76
- “These Are the Things That Make Me Know You’re Gone” (1969) R&B #28, Pop #120
- “My Soul’s Got a Hole in It” (1970) R&B #31, Pop #100



Dean Farrell hosts “The Soul Express” twice on Fridays: on WRTC, 89.3-FM (www.wrtcfm.com) from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. and on WECS, 90.1-FM (www.wecsfm.com), from 9:00 p.m. - midnight. He plays vintage soul music of the 1960s and ‘70s--everything from #1 hits to long-lost obscurities. Dean’s e-mail address is soulexpress@gmail.com.

Functional Gear for Adventures or Emergencies

(StatePoint) The new normal and natural disasters are dominating the headlines. At the same time, consumers have embraced socially distant adventure travel. Whatever your reasons for wanting to be prepared, easy to carry, functional gear will prepare you for what’s to come. Here’s how:

Secure Packing

Whether you’re backpacking on your favorite trail or evacuating from a disaster zone, knowing your gear is protected from mishaps and extreme weather is important.

Keep organizational packing tools handy, such as Reusable Rubber Twist Gear Ties, that provide a versatile way to wrap and hang items. It may also be helpful to store a few Slidelock Aluminum S-Biners in your to-go bag to secure keys and water bottles.

Safe Water

Safe tap water is not a given on outdoor adventure trips or during natural disasters when local water sources can become compromised. Having a low-maintenance, long-term means to filter water, whether sheltering in place or on the road,

gives you peace of mind. Ultralight and durable, the LifeStraw personal water filter straw lasts for up to 1,000 gallons of water -- enough drinking water for an individual for over five years, and protects against bacteria, parasites, microplastics, dirt, sand and cloudiness. Another good choice for personal use --and great for hikes -- is the LifeStraw Go Insulated Stainless Steel water filter bottle, which not only protects against contaminants, but also keeps water cold for hours.

Illumination

Maintain visibility during power outages or when enjoying nature with battery-operated light sources.

A durable, tactical flashlight is a must. Try the INOVA T8R Power-switch Rechargeable Dual Color LED Flashlight to preserve night vision while pitching a tent or looking for the circuit breaker. For a hands-free option, consider a lightweight headlamp with a rechargeable battery.

Finally, let tools pull double-duty. The Radiant 314 Rechargeable Lantern will not only illuminate your home or campsite, its built-in power bank allows you to charge

devices anywhere, handy for staying connected when it’s most vital.

Protection

From emergency uses (e.g. self-defense) to the mundane (e.g. slicing fruit), you never know when you’ll need the utility of a pocket knife. Pack light with the Nite Ize Doohickey Key Chain Knife. Its 2-inch blade offers everyday portability.

Insect bites can be a major health hazard and an unwanted factor during weekend getaways or emergency scenarios. For naturally-derived DEET-free solutions, pack Natrapel Lemon Eucalyptus insect repellent. Individually-wrapped Natrapel Picaridin insect repellent wipes provide all-day protection from ticks and mosquitoes.

A high-quality first aid kit is vital for any household and the Adventure Medical Kits Mountain Backpacker contains hospital-quality contents ideal for multi-day adventures.

Whether you love adventure travel or just value emergency preparedness, great gear is essential.



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Speciation

By Delia Berlin

From an early age, I was taught to try to understand others’ point of view. My father’s work involved international travel and we often had guests from many different places and cultures. We also lived in various countries, which required learning different norms and, at times, languages. These experiences cause formative shifts. People who may seem strange when you are unfamiliar with their history and context can come to appear “normal” when your knowledge of their circumstances grows. With my kind of upbringing, making an effort to understand others from their point of view became both necessary and ingrained.



But there are some situations, like the violent episodes we experienced in our country recently, that pose real challenges to mutual understanding. No matter how hard I try, I cannot understand and justify hate and violence. Should I try harder? Personally, I’ve always had the good fortune of sharing my life with gentle people. This has been partly due to self-selection. In the 1920s, my grandparents left Spain, escaping violence. In the 1970s, I left Argentina, escaping violence. When anyone in my personal relationships showed the slightest brutishness, I’ve distanced myself. Can this self-selection be a catalyst for speciation? I am only half-joking when I wonder if our natural instincts and tendencies can separate us so perfectly into our own bubbles that we may have started the process of diverging into separate species. At times I’m almost convinced that we are already on the way to becoming *Homo sapiens* and *Homo brutus*.

Speciation is defined as “the evolutionary process by which populations evolve to become distinct species.” In practical terms, at some point, some occurrence triggers this process by causing a rift in a population. For example, if some individuals from a species are taken to an island and remain cut off from the mainland, they may start gradually adapting to the island’s conditions. Over time, enough adaptations may take place for these individuals to become so different from their ancestors that they are classified as a separate species. Usually, for such a group to be considered a completely different species, rather than a variety or subspecies, they must no longer interbreed with members of the original population.

Take, for example, the African grey parrot, *Psittacus erithacus*, concentrated in the center of the continent. Thousands of years ago, a number of these parrots migrated to the western coast. Over time, they became smaller and darker, with markings not seen in the original species. But because some interbreeding between the populations still occurred, taxonomists considered them a subspecies of the grey parrot. They called the original (or nominal) species *Psittacus erithacus erithacus* and the subspecies *Psittacus erithacus timneh*. For a time, these groups interbred occasionally where their ranges overlapped. But eventually, they stopped interbreeding, either because they became sufficiently distinct or their ranges no longer overlapped. Taxonomists then decided to classify them as separate species: *Psittacus erithacus* and *Psittacus timneh*.

Speciation has been on my mind as I struggle to understand the degradation of civil norms that has led to extreme radicalization and recent violent events. I recognize the existential difficulties in understanding each other in our present circumstances, but my head explodes when I try to imagine the perspective of violent people. Are there any circumstances under which I could feel like them? For sure, I could use violent means in self-defense or to protect my family. As a “little old lady,” the odds probably would be against me, but don’t be so sure. I am neither that little nor that old, and definitely would be no lady if I had to protect my child or grandchild. But there is a fundamental difference between using violence as a last resort and exerting violence to get one’s way.

Although this exploration of speciation has been mostly humorous, biological models can be helpful in understanding human behavior. All species display diversity along most traits. More often than not, individual differences coexist and the very survival of a species can depend on having populations with opposing traits. Since the future is unpredictable, one trait may turn out to have more survival value than another in different circumstances. By having diverse individuals, a species puts its eggs in many baskets and is better prepared for unforeseen environmental changes.

But for some of us, survival may not be worth it under certain circumstances, and living with hate and violence illustrates that perfectly. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of white nationalist

groups grew by 55% from 2017 to 2019. Such groups malign an entire population or class based on some immutable characteristic. Many in these groups defend their “freedoms” at any cost, ranging from the freedom to own and carry weapons of war to the freedom to not wear a mask during the pandemic. At the same time, they deny others their rights, ranging from voting to reproductive rights. Logic breaks down when trying to explain these positions, and I am finally learning to feel OK about no longer trying to meet these people halfway.

Perhaps logic fails to bridge the differences between peaceful people and bullies because these differences are not about issues, but values. If you value fairness and justice above wealth and power, you will try to resolve differences peacefully, even at a material cost. But if you value wealth and power above fairness and justice, you will fight for everything, even if you must cheat.

Since I value fairness above wealth, I have believed I could defend my position with logic. From my perspective, you can have dignity and decency without wealth, but not without being fair. I couldn’t look at myself in the mirror if I cheated to benefit myself. But I realized, finally, that those who value wealth over fairness would suffer more shame from being poor than from being unfair. Their sense of dignity derives from feeling power over others, rather than from feeling that they are just. Seeking understanding and compromise while holding such different premises only leads to a frustrating dead end. So, I no longer feel the need to debate every issue.

One night in early January, I went to bed pleased to hear that a mentally ill woman on death row had been granted a stay of execution. I woke up the next morning to learn that, nevertheless, she had been killed, after the Supreme Court overturned her stay. Her execution was ordered by right-to-lifers in the middle of the night, under cover of darkness. Take that in. As for me, I oppose the death penalty and that’s that.

Another topic on which I have closed debate is the Supreme Court. At this point, the majority of our justices have been selected by presidents who lost the popular vote. The highest court of the land is supposed to represent us, but its membership has been manipulated to cement minority rule. That is simply not fair, which is why I believe it’s OK to expand the Supreme Court.

I realize that I have wasted time trying to understand and rationalize the inexcusable behaviors of a minority. I have tried to find a “balance” between proven truths and their lies. But I understand now that there is nothing wrong with drawing a firm line between good and evil. In fact, how and where we draw that line is what defines us. Recognizing this is both liberating and necessary if we are to focus our efforts on doing more good.

See “Unlacing the Corset” on Zoom

Submitted by Bev York

March 13th: Tour of the “Unlacing the Corset, Unleashing the Vote” Exhibition at the Mill Museum will come to you virtually on Zoom at 7pm.

The live tour, by co-curator Chelsey Knyff, will be about 45 minutes long followed by time for questions. Discover the history of the binding garments that once held women bound to society’s rules and expectations. Do not miss this unique opportunity to view undergarments and corsetry that led up to the 20th century. The exhibit shares the story of how the Women’s Suffrage Movement and the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 which granted women the right to vote impacted their lives and fashions during the last 100 years. Many strong fashion statements reflect strong characters. Connect to these women of the past and fore shadows of our future. The exhibit opened last year but has been closed due to Covid. The price is \$15.00 and preregistration is required at the website millmuseum.org or call 860-456-2178. Chelsey Knyff, the co-curator with Kira Holmes, is a member of the Museum Board of Directors. She is currently a history student at Southern New Hampshire University and graduates later this year with a BA in History and Fashion. She is currently certified with Palmer and Plesch in fashion instruction and as a CSA sewing expert. She has won awards for her historical fashion related exhibits at Jamestown Settlement and Strawberry Banke Museum. She currently lives in Mansfield, CT with her husband and two children.

Nature’s Character in the Neighborhood

By Bill Powers

Saurochory represents a phenomenon that occurs widely in our area, nature’s character in the neighborhood. The term *saurochory* should not be confused with *sorcery*; and, if *that* is occurring; I’m not aware of it. In nature, seeds are dispersed in different ways, including the dispensing of seeds by reptiles, called *saurochory*: (*sauro – lizard, snake + chory – methods of plant or seed dispersal*).

One day I was fascinated by a piece entitled “The Turtle and the Mayapple” written by Katherine Hauswirth. She wrote: “I learned this past summer that Mayapple germination works best if the seed passes through a box turtle first! On a recent walk through the garden at the Goodwin State Forest, my guide also pointed out that Mayapples are just the right height for these creatures.”



Since I have studied Eastern Painted Turtle behavior as part of my research for the Master Naturalist Program at the Goodwin Conservation Center, it was inspiring to consider the ecological significance for the dispersion of seeds by turtles. I had not realized that Katherine Hauswirth had also attended the Master Naturalist program at Goodwin after I completed my program; I asked her to comment about her experience at Goodwin.



She replied: “I was so impressed with the gardens and signage in the cleared area not far from the rustic building where we did the training and was also so impressed with the knowledge of our teachers! I really reveled in each walk, each lecture—being exposed to the beauty and diversity of the plants and animals (the flora and fauna), and learning the connections they had to each other.”

I learned that the Master Naturalist program was not the only thing that I had in common with Katherine Hauswirth. In October of 2017, my wife and I attended a Sunday talk at Goodwin entitled “Living and Breathing Nature at Acadia National Park and Beyond” to hear Katherine Hauswirth talk about her experiences as a writing resident at Acadia National Park in Maine. We often attended Goodwin’s fabulous family programs about nature and conservation and the conversations that ensued, but we were especially looking forward to this event with Katherine Hauswirth because Acadia National Park is a place we love; and over the years, has become our favorite vacation destination for hiking and kayaking. In addition to her talk about Acadia and other natural places, Katherine read from her new book – “The Book of Noticing: Collections and Connections on the Trail,” 2017, Homebound Publications. My wife and I had already purchased her book, and it was a pleasure to hear her discussion of it – a great read! If you love being out in nature, walking in the woods and contemplating the meaning of these personal experiences, you will love this book.

Katherine’s writing focuses on connections and contemplations inspired by the natural world. In addition to her book, she has been published in Christian Science Monitor, The Day, Orion online, Whole Life Times, Connecticut Woodlands, Shoreline Times, Seasons, and the Wayfarer. Also, her Blog, First Person Naturalist, is a reflection on experiencing and learning about nature. Katherine’s writing has been awarded with artist residencies at Connecticut Trail Wood sanctuary in Hampton, and Acadia National Park.

The Goodwin State Forest’s Master Naturalist Program is sponsored by Friends of Goodwin Forest, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environment. The program provides background knowledge and skills needed by future volunteers. Goodwin is planning a new Master Naturalist class for this Fall. Their program is enlightening and inspirational wherein they create a wonderful understanding of nature and help to provide graduates with an opportunity to help others to appreciate the wonders of our woodlands and ponds.

Bill Powers is a retired teacher and Master Naturalist and resides in Windham.

Financial Advice for Women at Every Age

By Leisl L. Cording, CFP®
Vice President, Associate Financial Advisor



Women face particular challenges when it comes to financial planning, investments and saving for the future. Lesser earning power thanks to the gender pay gap, less tendency to take charge and take risks in financial investments, a greater tendency to leave the workforce to care for children and ill or aging family members all combine to reduce the amount of wealth that women amass over a lifetime as compared to their male counterparts.

In fact, a recent survey by The WealthiHer Network showed that, on average, a 60-year-old woman has just one-third the retirement savings of a man the same age. That’s especially troublesome considering that women tend to live longer than men, making their needs for retirement savings even greater.

The good news is, most of the factors that will affect your financial future are well within your control. Here’s some key financial advice to help women (and anyone, really) to make the most of their finances at every age.

In Your 20’s – Set the Foundation for Your Future

Build financial knowledge and the confidence to use it. One of the biggest challenges that women face when it comes to finances is a lack of confidence in taking charge of their long-term financial planning. Starting off on the right foot by building basic financial knowledge and putting themselves in the driver’s seat from day one can make a huge difference in ensuring they can make the most of all the future financial decisions to come.

Work hard and have a plan. Most of us have the most freedom to do as we please that we’ll have in our entire lives during our twenties, before the responsibilities of home and family begin to encroach on our time. This is particularly true for women, who still take on a greater share of child rearing and household chores than their male counterparts. So use this time wisely – work hard to build your income as well as your career opportunities. And take the time now to think seriously about your major goals for the future. Write them down, create a timeline for yourself, and get clear about what it will take to get there. Then, execute on that plan.

Live below your means so you can pay down debt and build up savings – while still building credit by using it wisely. Use the income from all that hard work mentioned above to pay off debt like student loans as soon as possible. Don’t run up credit card debt, but do open credit accounts and use them wisely, paying charges off quickly and on time so that you can build up the healthy credit score needed for future large purchases, like your first home. At the same time, contribute at least 10% of pre-tax income to a retirement account. If your employer offers a matching contribution, be sure to contribute enough to maximize that match.

Build an emergency fund so that you can weather the inevitable rough seas of life without getting blown off course from your long-term goals. Typically that means having between 3-6 months of spending saved in an easily accessible savings account should you need it.

In Your 30’s – Build Toward Your Goals

A lot happens in our thirties – your career will begin to build steam, you may get married and you might also have children. In the midst of all these large life events it’s important to continue with all the habits put into place in your twenties, while adding in these other important steps to the mix:

Continue to save at least 10% of your income for retirement, making sure to increase your contribution as your earnings increase. And, keep on stashing cash in your emergency fund.

If you get married, ensure an equal partnership in managing finances by maintaining good communication about your long-term goals and ongoing involvement in all major financial decisions.

If you have children, start a college fund for them. Many people wonder if it’s worth saving for college – it is, and you will be glad you did when the time comes (often faster than you could have imagined)

for your “little one” to leave the nest and start their own lives off on strong footing. (And hopefully without any parental loans required.)

Create a living will. It may feel odd or uncomfortable to think about creating a will while you’re still so young, but it’s a necessity once you begin to amass assets and start a family.

Meet with a financial advisor to ensure you’re making the optimal financial choices for your current situation and future goals. Those that have a written financial plan, tend to be more likely to execute on financial strategies to achieve their financial goals.

In Your 40’s – Stay the Course (And Course-Correct When Necessary)

Continue to stay focused on living within – if not below – your means. Earnings often increase during your forties and it’s easy to let that extra income go toward a few too many splurges that, in the long run, could put quite a dent in your ability to build wealth. Stay focused on your long-term goals and remain committed to maximizing savings and eliminating debt.

Continue to save for your children’s college education, and also consider the impact of potentially having to care for aging parents - but don’t put saving for your own retirement on the backburner. For women in their forties, the role of caregiver is often intense, as they continue to raise their children while also sometimes finding themselves providing care for aging parents.

Get comfortable with calculated risk and partner with a financial advisor to optimize and accelerate your ability to build wealth during your prime earning years. Women tend to be more cautious in their investments, which is a good thing overall. But avoiding any of the risk that comes along with the types of investments that bring the highest yield could result in seriously stunted growth in wealth.

In Your 50’s and Beyond – Formulate and Execute an Exit Strategy and Enjoy The Fruits of Your Labors

This is when all the hard work, careful planning and strategic investments of the last few decades begin to pay off. It’s also the time when a strong relationship with a financial planner is most essential. He or she will help you to:

Evaluate whether your goals for retirement have changed, and whether your current financial strategy will still be sufficient for you to meet them.

Adjust your investment allocations to decrease risk and preserve wealth for retirement.

Form your exit strategy from work or a succession plan for your business, creating a timeline for when you can retire based on your current financial situation and how long your current retirement savings would last you.

Consider downsizing your home to reduce resources and expenses required for upkeep.

Review your will and update as necessary based on any changes in your personal life or financial situation to ensure that your estate is passed on to your loved ones as you would like.

As I mentioned earlier, there are many challenges women face when it comes to finances, however taking these steps throughout your life, can have a profound impact on the wealth you can build. This will help you work towards achieving your financial goals so you can live fearlessly. At Weiss, Hale and Zahansky, we want everyone to do just that!

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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

Of Forests, Snags, and Woodpeckers



Photos and article by Christine Acebo

Trees grow really well in Connecticut. When I used to travel to other states, I was always struck, as I crossed back over the border, by how green and lush this state is. Some of that is due to the diversity of species in the forests and in the amount of forest we have, especially in the northern corners. We have tall and mighty oaks, hickories, maples, and ash trees that tower above shorter trees and bushes: the birches, poplars, laurels, rhododendrons, and saplings hoping for a piece of sky. A rich tapestry covers the floor of these hardwood woodlands, woven of ferns, wintergreen, princess pine, rattlesnake plantain, and other native orchids. Mosses and lichens coat rocks, stone walls, and tree trunks, adding more greens and silvers to the picture. Groves of thick-trunked white pines cast their shadows on earth fragrant with cast-off needles. Hemlocks and sycamores thrive in rocky areas with springs and brooks of crystal-clear water. If you are lucky, you might find an American elm. There is one very tall, very old elm in the middle of my white pine grove, discovered by Yale forestry students when they surveyed my woodlot. On the edges of the forests, smaller trees and bushes thrive: black cherry, dogwood, shadbush, viburnum, along with invasive plants like barberry, roses, bittersweet, and autumn olive. Greens...everywhere.

What we don't always notice are the dead trees in the forest, some still standing, others fallen, all in various stages of decay. Standing dead trees are called snags, and they provide many species of birds with places to hide, shelter, and raise their young. They also serve as lookouts for raptors to survey their domains without leafy branches obstructing their view. The downed trees provide spaces for dens and habitats for animals, amphibians, and reptiles. Wood debris in streams and ponds shelters fish and aquatic creatures, and rotting wood nourishes the soil. Just as it's important to leave some fields and mead-

ows unmowed for pollinators and wildlife, it's important to leave the forest's debris for the creatures that count on it. Messy forests foster life.

Pileated woodpeckers hollowing out roomy chambers in snags can be a boon for birds that can't make their own nest cavities. A large dead tree in front of my house has been a busy place for the woodpeckers for years now. The bark is mostly gone, and multiple holes have been created, a virtual apartment complex for the taking. It has never, to my knowledge, been used as a nest site by the pileated woodpeckers themselves, as it's too close to my front door. I think it has been useful to other birds, though, both for nests and places to store food. And of course, the several other kinds of woodpeckers in the area have feasted on insects living in this and other dead trees on my land.

I often hear the pileated woodpeckers calling and drumming in the woods around my house, but they've been extremely shy, rarely letting me see them except from a distance. This winter, though, one has been coming close, snacking at the suet feeder and hunting in the snags I've left for them. I think it's a young bird that fledged here last summer, because she is quite bold and unafraid of me watching in a



nearby window, something the wary older birds never tolerate. The beautiful bird in the photo was in my backyard on a tree I had had cut tall—a 30-foot-high “stump”—and left as a snag. This woodpecker combed the tree for over 20 minutes, and I got several photos of her using her tongue to lick up something after she ripped the bark off with her formidable beak. Some may think my dead, debarked trees are unsightly. I see them as woodpecker magnets and, in this year of hunkering down, I treasure visits from these and other wild creatures of the forest.

The Unpredictability of Party Policies and People's Actions

If having a soul means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans.
-James Herriot

By Phoebe C. Godfrey

One of the challenges of engaging in compassionate, reflective critical thinking is that one quickly realizes that nothing in life is as black-and-white as our dualistic “good and evil” culture seeks to make them. How simple it would be if we really did have “good guys” who were always good and “bad guys” who were always bad! This is particularly the case when it comes to politics and the policies passed by our politicians, which we tend to associate *with* them as extensions of their individual identities, rather than being merely passed *by* them, along with many others in the background. If we identify as liberals/Democrats, we like to assume that all the policies of former President Trump were bad (even evil) and all the policies of current President Biden are good. But alas, such assumptions are the refuge of those who are more attached to identity markers, party affiliations, and uncritical thinking than to the reality, complexity, and unpredictability of party policies and people's actions. Without nonpartisan scrutiny, staying committed to principles and ethics, we are confined to the land of hypocrisy and double standards. Let me offer two examples, out of many more, that have recently caught my attention.

The *Guardian* recently reported that Biden, not yet a full month in office, “may inadvertently achieve what Trump couldn't: destroying the Iran deal, Obama's main foreign policy achievement,” by bombing Syria, specifically a facility used by Iran-backed militia in “retaliation for rocket attacks against US troops in Iraq earlier this month.” The article goes on to state that this act, rather than improving our chances for diplomacy, has in fact brought the US and Iran “closer to a military confrontation.” The tragic irony is that this is not something of which Biden is ignorant. In fact, he made the same argument against Trump (who didn't bomb Syria until his fourth month in office), saying that a “maximum pressure strategy” is not effective. So here we are again, and yet the public outcry on the part of liberals and the left will be minimal, because when “our man” bombs, the bombs somehow become “good,” as if now blessed by the suffering of St. Biden. Yet for me, bombs remain bombs no matter who drops them or why, while diplomacy is the political embodiment of turning the other cheek.

The second example is more personal, and involves a ski trip with my wife, Tina, my brother, and a group of his ski buddies at Sugarbush in Vermont. We were all sitting around a table enjoying “apres-ski” drinks when one of the buddies arrived after the rest of us and the other buddies welcomed him with an unusual term of endearment: “The Skunk.” He sat down and explained to Tina and me how he got that name. Turns out that a skunk had gotten into the basement of his ski condo, and he had to figure out how to remove it without getting sprayed. He considered shooting it, but he had left his gun at home, so he called an animal removal service. The service came, but refused to remove it. So he got a Havahart trap, was able to capture the skunk himself, and put a blanket over

it, into which it sprayed. Then, contrary to our assumption as to where the story would end (the point of a Havahart trap is that you capture and release), he shared with us that he put the cage with the skunk in it into a garbage can and filled it with water, leaving the skunk to drown. Tina and I were horrified, but the others were laughing. We asked for clarification: “You mean to tell us that you intentionally drowned a caged skunk instead of letting it go back into the woods?” to which he replied, “Well, I didn't want to, but it would probably get run over.” This was bizarre, as we were in the Green Mountain National Forest. He continued, “I mean, it was a cute little guy and it was even trying to tread water, but you know it would just come back, and I needed it gone.” Trying to remain composed (these were my brother's friends and there are social norms to observe), I nevertheless added that had the skunk been a human, it would have been much like the torture of waterboarding, to which there was, unsurprisingly, no reply.

Now you may wonder what this has to do with government policies involving Trump and Biden. The answer is that later, I looked up to see if what he had done is a federal crime (many states have animal cruelty laws, but a federal one makes it easier to address such incidents). To my surprise, the answer is “yes,” based on the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act (the PACT Act), signed by Trump in 2019. This act outlaws “the intentional crushing, burning, drowning, suffocating, impalement or other serious harm to ‘living non-human mammals, birds, reptiles, or amphibians’” (fish don't seem to be listed).

My surprise was because Trump's record on the environment, including the Endangered Species Act, was appalling in terms of favoring corporations (specifically concerning privatization of public lands), hunters, and ranchers. However, what is interesting about the PACT Act is that it was bipartisan, gaining support from the National Sheriffs' Association and the Fraternal Order of Police, who recognize the links between animal cruelty and violence against people. Needless to say, this law has not been sufficiently publicized, nor has the connection between animal cruelty and inhumanity in general. For here was a wealthy white male who owns a ski condo and yet lacks the ability to engage in any nuanced analysis or action and instead drowns an innocent creature trapped in a cage, much as we bomb or shoot or torture people, who are most often innocent, trapped in social roles or identities that have limited their behavior and actions much as if they were in cages.

I hope there comes a day when we will see members of our society evaluated on their ability to exhibit compassionate, reflective critical thinking that translates into action, as opposed to making assumptions based on identity markers such as political party and all the other ways we try to classify individuals as either “good people” or “bad people,” including race, social class, gender, and nationality. This applies in particular to those with social and/or political power, because from those to whom much has been given, much should be expected. If this becomes a national priority, starting in elementary school all the way up to higher education, we may one day see citizens who have more soul than ego.

To all our contributors-
Thank You!

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

Questions and answers about solar in our community

By John Boiano

Join a community Q & A, conversation via ZOOM on 3/08/21 at 7pm. Topics to include: Benefits of residential solar, the soon to expire “free” CT Home Energy Audit and more. Please bring your questions. Zoom link info is listed below

Thank you to all who joined our zoom call and Facebook live event last month. A lot of questions were answered and great information was shared about residential and community solar.

A lot has happened over the past month relating to renewable energy: 5 wonderful potential changes coming to CT for solar distribution charges, Eversource looking to raise rates, energy challenges in Texas, a new solar farm in East Windsor, the Paris Climate Agreement and much more. I will cover a few here, be sure to join our open community conversation on 3/8 at 7pm for our continued conversation.

We are in this together:

As you may know the U.S. has rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement. I believe this is a very good thing. In reading a plethora of debate around the financial gain and control, what countries are contributing the most, or the least and who will benefit the least or the most is exhausting. The debate mentality of “us vs. them” for the support of our re-involvement must transition to the condition of our climate and what can we collectively do about it. Most of the debates I am reading are based on political affiliation. This must stop. We are one human race, we all have skin in the game and the need for a cohesive game plan is imperative. The philosophy of coming together goes beyond the scope of environmental issues. The discussion of who’s doing better only matters when we use that information to be better together.

5 Wonderful Changes for CT Solar Customers: “Excerpt from Energynews.us”

Connecticut utility regulators have reconfigured the state’s residential solar program in an effort to ensure its growth and drive innovation.

1.Net Metering isn’t going away! Net metering allows customers to draw on the solar power they are generating, and send any excess to the grid for a credit at the retail rate.

2. Credits will be in dollars and cents, not kilowatt-hours. Any monthly credit for excess power will show up in monetary form, not in kilowatts. This is better for ratepayers according to Brad Mondschein, deputy executive director of regulatory affairs for Solar Connecticut, an industry group. That’s because solar customers generate the most power in the summer, when retail rates are highest. Any monthly credit they receive will show up in dollars, which will buy them more power for the money when winter rolls around, and power costs less.

3. Solar customers will now have another option: a “buy-all/sell-all” tariff. If they choose, customers will have the option of selling all of their solar power to the utilities at a fixed rate over a 20-year term. The clean energy will be metered separately from the customer’s electricity consumption.

4. Homeowners will be able to size up their systems to allow for future electric vehicle plug-ins. The new plan allows for systems large enough to accommodate future electrification needs. Systems may be sized to allow

for the addition of up to two electric vehicle chargers and a changeover to electric heat.

5. Low-income ratepayers will receive additional incentives. The new program will seek to broaden participation by providing slightly higher payouts to customers below 60% of the state median income or who live in an “economically distressed” community.

Largest Northeast Solar Farm Coming to East Windsor: The CT Siting Council voted unanimously to approve the largest solar farm in the Northeastern U.S. to be built in East Windsor. The proposed 120 megawatt solar project is enough to power 23,000 homes. CT agreed to buy 20 MW of the project’s 120 MW as part of a 2018 solicitation for zero-carbon energy proposal. RI agreed to purchase 50 MW; the remainder will be sold to smaller utilities and businesses in New England. Anticipated completion is by early 2023.

Eversource Debt Recovery:

Reported in the CT Examiner on 02/23/21 – Eversource may leave customers on the hook to recover losses from customers unable to pay their bills due to Covid related issues resulting in a \$276 million loss. “That debt amounts to about \$250 for each of Eversource’s 1.1 million residential customers across Connecticut, and the company has told shareholders that it expects state regulators will approve rate increases to compensate for the unpaid bills. In its annual report, Eversource told shareholders last week that the company has seen an increase in “aged” overdue bills, but had still managed a profit of \$1.2 billion, an increase of 7.5 percent over the previous year.” This alone may encourage you to look into solar and control your own cost destiny.

Eversource is a necessary service and they are a great support system to the solar industry for net metering and supplying energy for customers like myself, who get a portion of their electricity from solar and a portion supplied by Eversource.

Questions from the community:

Question – Do I need a south facing roof?
Answer – Although south is the preferred direction, solar panels have come a long way and are able to handle producing energy from east and west facing roofs. I’ve also seen great production from a low pitched north roof. Shade is a factor in figuring production as well.

Question – Will solar panels produce energy on cloudy days or with snow on them?
Answer – Solar panels will produce a bit of energy on cloudy days. As far as snow goes, they will produce energy with a small amount of snow on them. A proper site survey and a final design crafted by an engineer will incorporate a 365 synopsis of solar production. At that time we have a strong foundation to confirm our initial findings.

Join the conversation:

Zoom meeting > 3/08/21 at 7:00PM. Please email or call me for the meeting link. Until next month... ENJOY!
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Inspiration for Willimantic’s Garden on the Bridge?

By Brian Karlsson-Barnes

3 Docents took a road trip from Boston’s Arnold Arboretum to a new horticultural treasure a few years back.

The Coastal Maine Botanical Garden with its near-mile of tidal shoreline opened in 2007, perhaps the largest botanical garden in New England. Full of planting ideas, it’s not full of people... you can escape the madding crowd.

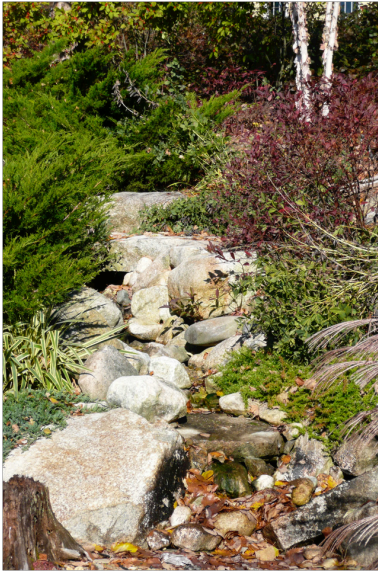
Why mention to our Connecticut audience?

Willimantic’s GARDEN on the BRIDGE was inspired by Massachusetts’ Bridge of Flowers where the Shelburne Falls Women’s Club took charge with vision and 80 yards of loam in 1929. Willimantic’s floral bridge dates to 2005 when the state gave the bridge to the broader town of Windham.

As Willimantic’s garden bridge is re-imagined 15 years later, plants have matured, roots expanded, and containers broken. Genie-like, the garden diva is out of the box! Make a wish...

What if we think “outside the box”... or in this case, outside the container? What if soil was retained with container remnants that still serve, fronted by natural stones mimicking the iconic fieldstone walls of Connecticut farmland?

Coastal Maine’s Botanical Garden has an abundance of horticultural ideas and remarkable stonework. Ornamental plantings are found throughout various displays and the family-themed, meditation and sculpture gardens. Naturalistic boulder dry streams are constructed to drain to the tidal Sheepscot River. Thought-provoking stone and sculpture is found throughout the property.



Coastal Maine BOTANICAL GARDEN Saturday 17 June 2017 -- We three docents drove north from Boston, I-95 to Boothbay, ME, in practically no time. Well, almost 3 hours up, 3 hours back, but we had fun! Driving I-395 to I-495 to I-95 from the Last Green Valley is a longer roundtrip. Better overnight.

It was still cool – as in Boston, spring flower was extended by a cool, wet spring – but bugs were already buzzing, some biting.

The sprawling coastal property is on 295 acres of gardens and tidal shoreline, larger than Arnold Arboretum’s 281 acres. We mentioned it at the visitors center and good that we did: Arnold members are allowed FREE (or \$16).

The gift shop has Director Bill Cullina’s book, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, A People’s Garden. Note its horticultural accuracy, eg: **Kousa Dogwood** is now named **Benthamidia japonica**, not the obsolete Cornus kousa. (Cullina is former head propagator at the New England Wild Flower Society / NEWFS in Framingham, Mass., where he wrote a tome on native plants.)

Many paths diverge from the visitor’s center through ornamental gardens and the nearby Children’s Garden, to a distant Fairy Garden where children (and one’s inner child) can use available materials to construct fairy houses.

Another path leads to the distant Meditation Garden among immense granite outcroppings, far removed from busy gardens.

Yet another path wanders the natural garden that is boreal forest of **spruce (Picea)** and **pine (Pinus)** with petite **polypody (Polypodium)**, an evergreen fern) along the quiet tidal river trail.

Take a blanket to spread, to read, relax, reflect.

PLANTS

But the highlight for this gardener was the showy diversity of ornamental shrubs, trees, and especially the herbaceous perennials. Striking displays of color, texture, scale and size filled large beds. Some flower August ‘til Autumn.

Rhododendron was still blooming in the Dell. A 5-ft tall and wide Rhododendron ‘Purple Gem’ was the largest I have ever seen! (Not the 3-ft dwarf littleleaf rhody that I have in Chaplin.) Anyway, I was there for the herbaceous perennials, the many remarkable plants that if hardy on the coast of Maine, are hardy in Boston and Windham. Certainly the daylily.

‘Spider Miracle’ Daylily (Hemerocallis)

Although flowers are similar, daylilies are not true lilies (**Lilium**). As the common name suggests, flowers last only a day. A mature 2 to 3-ft ‘Spider Miracle’ (pictured) can have 15 to 20 buds, maybe 2 to 3 weeks of bloom in succession on each scape (flowering stem), thus a long season of 9-inch bright lemon-yellow spider-like petals.



Common Daylily (Hemerocallis fulva) is the natural parent, the 4-ft orange species that is more shade-tolerant than its cultivars. It grows anywhere (aka ditch lily), a tough plant native to Asia. All have long strappy leaves that can yellow quickly; better seen from a distance with the unsightly spent scapes. Watering helps sustain green leaves but daylilies are well-suited to sunny hot, dry sites. Not growing from bulbs, they have tougher tuberous roots that survive difficult sites, and thrive with compost. Water when dry. Especially the newly planted, as all garden plants.

Japanese Painted Fern (Athyrium niponicum) is an attractive shady groundcover. Nonnative Athyrium is the most colorful fern with feathery fronds of green and grey-blue, with purple to maroon-red accents. Color is more intense with some direct sun, morning or late afternoon, but water when dry. It grows vigorously from spreading rhizomes in well-drained, humusy moist soil. Not hot and dry. It’s low height (18”) and spreading form is an ideal groundcover. (Rabbit browsing reported elsewhere.)

Common Lady Fern (A. filix-femina) is simply bright green and graceful. Athyrium are elegant plants for part-to-full shady places.

Cardinal Flower (Lobelia cardinalis)

stood out at the edge of a waterlily pond, the value of a bright red accent. A popular native wildflower, it has vibrant red flowers on spiky 4-ft racemes, mid-summer to fall. Attracts hummingbirds, butterflies and attention.



Found in wet places, full sun to part shade, it adapts well to moist gardens. Mulch to protect roots in soil-heaving, freeze-thaw winter cycles, and to retain moisture in summer. Not long-lived, but self-seeds where happy. (As at Diana’s Pool on the Natchaug River near my backyard.)

Clematis & Russian Sage (Perovskia, reclassified as Salvia yangii in 2017) is a gorgeous co-planting. A scrambling



Blue Double Clematis and Russian Sage



vine with large double flowers, the purple-blue Clematis contrasts with the airy lighter blue Sage.

Plant *Clematis* where the striking flowers are easily viewed. The wiry vine likes its “head in the sun, feet in the shade” and more nutrient and water for the luscious flowers. I topdress with compost and mulch annually. Russian Sage is a tough, low-maintenance, 3 to 4-ft perennial for full sun, hot and dry, with the rangy character of western sagebrush.

Purple Coneflower & Black Eyed Susan

(**Echinacea** & **Rudbeckia**, respectively) provide a colorful contrast from afar -- pink-purple and bright yellow -- showy flowers that attract birds, bees and butterflies -- blooming for weeks and weeks in a 3 to 4-ft mound.

Native to moist prairies and meadows, both adapt to sunny gardens, and Susan tolerates some shade. Hot, dry soils okay when plants are established. Like most garden plants, they survive with the right sun exposure, and thrive with compost and mulch. Water in dry weather.



Purple Coneflower and yellow Black-eyed Susan

RETURN

I visited again midweek in August 2017. Not as busy. Herbaceous color was in late summer glory, the Rudbeckia and Perovskia-now-Salvia.

Whether Bridge of Flowers, Coastal Maine Botanical Garden, or a private home, landscape appeal is important in every season. Perhaps improving property value 10 to 15%.

Late summer is early fall, but no fall color yet. Some might think leaves had changed on the ‘**Royal Purple**’ Smoketree (**Cotinus**), but it has purple leaves that turn brilliant red in the fall.



Purple-leaf ‘Royal Purple’ Smoketree (Cotinus)

Families headed to the Children’s Garden and the distant Fairy Garden. I observed a recent fortune cookie: It’s never crowded along the “extra mile” and headed to the tranquil fringe, the boreal forest along the Sheepscot River.

Alone the second visit, I could reflect... and remember that intellectual delight in aesthetics and science can be secondary to the spiritual haven of a walk in the woods.

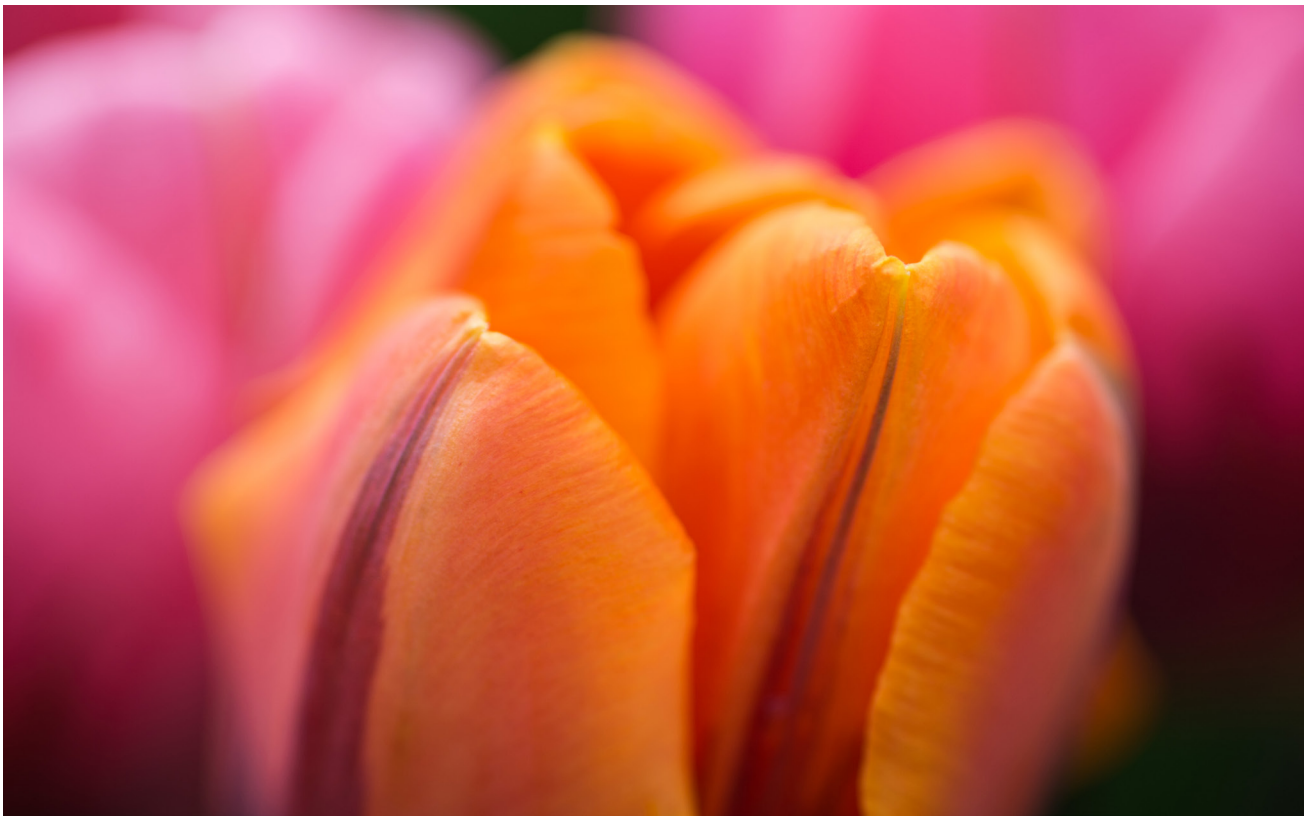


Thought-provoking stone sculpture

IF YOU GO GPS: 132 Botanical Gardens Drive, Boothbay, Maine. Open May 1st through mid-October. I suggest overnight stays, with a day to wander the botanical gardens. Near Boothbay food and lodging. Motels on US Route 1. After the pandemic.

Take bug repellent in warm weather, and don’t worry about food. There’s also a café.

Brian Karlsson-Barnes, Master gardener / designer and wanderer, Chaplin CT



Every year in early March, I make a trip to the Spring Greenhouse Show at the Elizabeth Park Conservancy in Hartford. I take only my camera and a 100mm macro lens—no tripod, flash, or reflectors. The challenge is to handhold the camera and make artistic images with only the natural light, existing weather conditions, and the crowds I find there at the time. Under these conditions, I can make images with a sliver of sharp focus (like this one) that are all about the feeling, colors, and essence of spring. KB

On Becoming a Photographer

By Kim Bova

Growing up in an artistic family has shaped my path through life. My mother was always creating something beautiful: painting in oil, knitting sweaters, cooking incredible meals. She and my father were avid naturalists in southwestern Connecticut, where I grew up. They were Audubon members and participated in birdwatching trips and hawk watches, many of which I had the opportunity to tag along on. As a result, I share their love of nature, and I learned a lot about bird identification which I’ve carried over into my current art photography projects.

My mother is no longer living, but my father, now retired, was a professional trumpet player and photographer. His photos were published in textbooks and other publications, including the *New York Times Magazine*. He imparted his knowledge to me while we were out on nature shoots together and in comparing notes afterwards. I was amazed at how different our photos were, even after shooting side by side!

My father documented our lives as a family in photographs. He made me understand how important photography is in preserving memories and creating a legacy. Later, when I became a professional photographer, I was drawn to wedding and portrait photography because it felt natural—like I had been preparing for it all my life. I did not realize that it could be a job until I got married and took note of what our wedding photographer was doing. A seed was planted.

My parents were my role models who taught me that I did not have to do only one thing in life, and how important it is to do what you love. In junior high and high school, I was equally interested in photography and music. I ended up choosing to study piano and earned my master’s degree from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. There I met Peter, also a Connecticut native. We got married and lived in California and Louisiana before returning to Connecticut in 1993 when Peter was hired as assistant professor of music at the UConn. We were happy to be back in Connecticut and closer to our families, but I found myself wondering what I was going to do next. Music did not feel like something I would be able to do here. I began to explore my other love, photography, and enrolled in the photography program at UConn Fine Arts.

The determining moment was when I offered to help a friend photograph a large family event at her home. When she saw the prints, she said, “You know, people will pay you to do this.” That moment was life changing. Since the art of documenting people’s lives had been drilled into me by my father, I already knew what to do. After my first small wedding job, I felt like a career in photography was perfect for me! Of course, I had plenty more to learn, so I joined the Connecticut Professional Photographers Association and Wedding & Portrait Photographers International. I highly recommend these organizations to any aspiring photographer for support, education, and the great friendships you can make. This was how my new career began.

Now, after fifteen years of weddings and portraits, I am shifting gears. I will photograph my last wedding this June. I still photograph families and individuals and do shoots for *Mansfield Connections* magazine, but my goal is to make more time for creating a personal body of work. What does that mean? Well, I’m finding out and I am having a great time doing it. Art photography requires a different mental focus than my previous work. So, I took the weddings off my website and built an art photography print shop there.

In preparation for this change, I have been taking classes in art photography, one at the George Eastman House (right around the corner from my grad student apartment in Rochester!), and I joined a portfolio building and mentoring class at the Griffin Museum of Photography near Boston. Given the constant changes in technology, being a lifelong learner is essential. I have learned a great deal from my classes and have benefited from my contact with other art photographers who are doing fascinating work.

This June, I will participate for the first time in the Art and Garden Tour here in Mansfield, where artists of all kinds show their work in and around their gardens. Gardening is also a love of mine, and the challenge of combining gardens and photography is very exciting to me. I look forward to new adventures as I continue to grow as a photographer.

Kim Bova is the founder and owner of Kim Bova Photography. Visit her website (www.kimbova.com), follow her on Instagram, or join her email list to receive info about her work, print sales, and future events.



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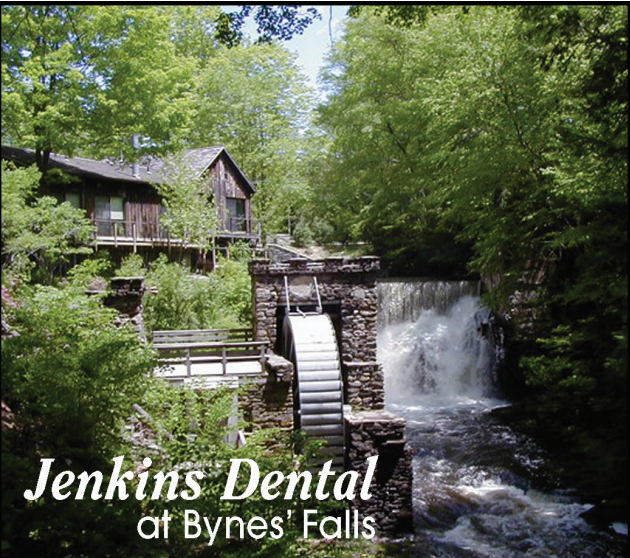
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Did I Ever Tell You Black Lives Matter?

By Donna Dufresne

I recently learned of a picture book titled *Have I Ever Told You Black Lives Matter*, by Shani Mahiri King. I immediately ordered it to add to my collection of racial and social justice picture books for children. The book is described by the publisher as “a tender and powerful affirmation that Black lives have always mattered,” but I particularly like the bold statement that follows:



Black lives matter. That message would be self-evident in a just world, but in this world and this America, all children need to hear it again and again, and not just to hear it but to feel and know it.

Black lives matter. It is a seemingly benign statement, yet it can spawn outrage and vitriol in so many white Americans. Especially those who have been smitten by the oh-so-clever rhetoric of white supremacy. Even those who haven’t jumped into the culture wars of right-wing extremism behave as though their whiteness is going to be cancelled out or tarnished by one simple phrase. “Black lives matter” is the emotional button pushed by that big old white elephant in the room that Americans don’t want to talk about. Instead, the collective “we” rant and rave like tempestuous children and blame the Black Lives Matter movement for “triggering” this errant behavior. It goes to show that we will do anything to avoid discussing systemic racism, so deeply entrenched in our history. However, it must be discussed if we are going to overcome the wound of America’s past: slavery.

The reaction to Black Lives Matter reminds me of the fifth-grade girls who were outraged if I encouraged or complimented another girl in our classroom. Usually, the other girl would happen to be the one they were currently ganging up on in their ongoing “odd girl out” game. As their teacher, I couldn’t keep up with who was in and who was out, but I did my best to educate them about bullying and tried to curb the posse with lessons in kindness. Like the white reactions to Black Lives Matter, the girls would become vitriolic if I happened to give their victim any attention. They would accuse me of favoritism and unfairness, even though they received just as much attention (if not more) because they felt entitled and demanded it.

It would be comical if it were not so pathetic that white Americans are so darned fragile when it comes to talking about racism. Unfortunately, we have a long history of white supremacy in America. Like those fifth-grade girls, we do not want to be knocked off our self-appointed pedestal labeled “We are better than them.” You and I wouldn’t say that as individuals, but it is the underlying mantra throughout American history, that whites are superior. The proof is in the pudding of policies enacted to keep African Americans “in their place,” from the enforcement of slave laws to the policing of the new Jim Crow justice system. Every step forward in the march toward civil rights and justice has been met with a violent force pushing us ten steps backwards, and the reaction to Black Lives Matter is no different. White supremacist pushback became virulent when millions of white allies stood by the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020. Right-wing extremists responded with insurrection and brought the Confederate flag and a hangman’s platform to the Capitol, both symbolic of the terrorism inflicted upon African Americans in the Jim Crow South. The current pushback from the far right during Black History Month is an attempt to curb the teaching of Black history in public schools. Cloaked in terms like *cancel culture*, the rhetoric is intended to make you believe that the teaching of Black history cancels out American history. Now if that doesn’t sound like those fifth-grade girls! Black history *enriches* American history. Black Lives Matter enriches all lives.

The fifth-grade-girl analogy is not limited to modern times. In 1832, Sarah Harris, a young black woman from Canterbury, approached Prudence Crandall. She asked if Miss Crandall might admit her to the Canterbury Female Academy, an exclusive school for white girls from well-to-do families. Sarah, who came from a successful family of black abolitionists, wanted to “get a little bit more learning” so that she could become a teacher. She could afford the tuition. Equal education was already a movement among the black middle class of the 1830s. Besides, Sarah’s friend, Mariah Davis, frequently sat in on Miss Crandall’s classes. She was an employed servant

at the school, but Miss Crandall allowed her to attend lessons if her chores were completed. None of the students appeared to mind.

Prudence Crandall did not make her decision easily. She knew it would raise the ire of her Board of Visitors and the parents of her students. But after a sleepless night and substantial prayer, she admitted Sarah Harris to the school. After all, “Sarah Harris was a good, intelligent girl who could afford the tuition.”

Perhaps the other students didn’t notice at first. They were used to Mariah sitting in on their classes. They may not have even mentioned it to their parents at all were it not for the fact that Sarah Harris was beginning to outshine them. Miss Crandall herself may have made the mistake of complimenting Sarah in front of the other girls. It didn’t take long before outraged parents visited the school and demanded that Miss Crandall dismiss Sarah Harris. It was an affront to their own social status to have their daughters attend school with a black girl.

After weeks of harassment from the parents and her Board, Prudence Crandall closed the Canterbury Female Academy and opened the Canterbury School for Little Misses and Young Ladies of Color. That was when the real trouble began. Vitriolic and hateful letters to the editor in newspapers throughout Connecticut attest to the outrage of its white citizens. Their white superiority had been challenged. Arguments were made in court against the full humanity of Miss Crandall’s students and “wasn’t it a cruel thing to give them the false hope of education.” Phrenologists were brought into the courtroom to prove the “inferiority of the negro brain,” and, of course, the old property value argument was used to put pressure on Miss Crandall’s neighbors to boycott the school. The townspeople tainted the well with manure, shops refused to do business with the school, the church barred its doors, and the doctor refused to treat the black students. Eventually, a mob destroyed all the windows in the school and Miss Crandall had to close the school to protect the students from further violence. I have no doubt that Prudence Crandall knew that Black lives matter.

We Americans like to think that we have come a long way. And we have. We’d all like to believe that our neighbors wouldn’t behave like the people of Canterbury in the 1830s, and that we would have stood up for Prudence Crandall and her students. And yet, we have turned a blind eye to the persistence of white supremacy. We ignore the coded language of politicians, with their voter suppression policies. We assume that the slow drip of hate exuding like sludge from the far right will go away with a different president. In Northeast Connecticut, where the Confederate flag waves above the “Back the Blue” banner, some folks are afraid to put a Black Lives Matter sign on their lawn. After all, nobody wants to be accused of “hating the police” simply because they are speaking out for reasonable justice. And then there are the angry white men who strike a posture of pseudo-patriotism in their pickup trucks bedecked with flags, and the armed local militia posing as a “neighborhood watch.” This is why we need the reminder that Black lives matter.

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To find a farmers market close to you visit the CT Department of Agriculture website for a link to markets.

“Leitrim”

By Judy Davis

The photos of my Irish relatives
remind me of stories I had been told,
all of my life.
And,
I realize,
with pride,
that I am
my ancestors wildest dream.
In my slumber
I can hear their voices,
whispering of their days
in the village of Mohill,
in County Leitrim.
They tell me of their past;
of love won, and lost;
of friends, and strangers; and
I revel in our connection.
Someday,
I hope to stand where their homes once stood;
so I can recite the ancient poems,
sing the old songs, and breathe
the same air.
I only wish I could feel their young arms
around my shoulders,
where I can look down,
on a day in the sun,
and see our shadows – together.

Abstract Work by Xanda McCagg at Lyman

Submitted by Rebecca Dawson

New London – The Lyman Allyn Art Museum announces the opening of Xanda McCagg Recent Work: Icon, on view Feb. 13 through Apr. 18, in the Glassenberg Gallery on the first floor as part of the Museum’s New contemporary series.

Using the language of line, color and mark making, McCagg’s work comments on the dichotomies that define and shape our lives. Observing the world around her by exploring the cause and effect of shifting relationships as they occur in nature and in humanity, McCagg creates compositions that speak to memory, metaphor and perception.

Xanda McCagg’s abstract paintings are investigations of the human condition on both a global and an intimate level. They push and pull the viewers perception through layers of distilled human experience. “At the core of my work is a fascination with the human experience. Motivated by an innate urge to communicate, I express myself through materials, directly marking, drawing, pushing paint, placing and forming,” McCagg explained. “Exposure from an early age to different cultures, arts, and history by my mother, a sculptor, and my father, an Eastern European historian, had an enormous impact on me and opened my path of expressing myself in the artistic arena. Moving from classical training and working from observation, my work has evolved in to abstraction and metaphor.”

The virtual opening reception will be Friday, Feb. 12, from 6 to 7 p.m. Please visit the calendar of events tab on lymanallyn.org for event registration information. For more information, please contact Rebecca Dawson by email at dawson@lymanallyn.org.



Mama’s Rolling Pin



By Kathy Lepak

The smooth, well-worn surface of the wood has been marked with slight imperfections over decades of use spanning two generations; the patterns of the grain still vividly evident along its length. Two slight cracks have emerged recently and seem to be permanently lled with the remains of our that had been dusted over the top of the dough, but that only seems to add to its character. It is, after all, more than likely older than I; some might call it an antique and I suppose, in reality, it is.

The painted red handles must have been designed with a woman in mind, as they mold perfectly into the curve of my hand. They are held together by a metal rod passing through a hole in the center of the wood and with each stroke there is a comforting sound as the pin is lifted - it becomes a soothing, rhythmic sound - almost a lullaby in the quiet of the early morning.

Two cups of our (or a bit less), two-thirds of a cup of Crisco, ve tablespoons of very cold water (per cup of our), and one-half teaspoon of salt. My niece, who is a reg-istered dietician, was astounded at the use of Crisco in the recipe and asked why I didn’t use butter. A standard answer from most that have had recipes handed down to them -

Dear Reader-
Please consider contributing to Neighbors- Write an article about a person you admire or a local program you believe is import-ant. 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 commu-nity.

T. King, Publisher

**THE STORM
JUST HIT AND
WE WENT FROM
DONATING TO
THE FOOD BANK
TO NEEDING IT.**

Donna, Louisiana

**HUNGER
IS A
STORY
WE CAN
END.**

FEEDINGAMERICA.ORG

“Because that’s how my mother did it.” Although it sounds like a simple recipe, there is an art to making a proper crust and the key is in the “feel” of the dough. It took me quite a long time to capture that feel, but the end result is a won-derfully tender crust.

Baking pies is like a right of passage. It brings back echoes of years past; the smells of apples and cin-namon, pumpkin and mincemeat llings; the lull of quiet kitchen conversation, gentle laughter, and the company of loved ones. Spending time preparing for a family feast or just a simple afternoon of tea and pie with friends is time well spent. My children and my older grandchildren always ask me to make pies for special occasions and I am always happy to do so. While I am still here, however, I would rather teach them to make their own pies and pass along that family tradition. It is my hope that the rolling pin will be passed along together with the pie recipes.

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MARCH ON!

By EC-CHAP

March

*“If you want something you never had,
you have to do something you’ve never done.”*
-Thomas Jefferson

Last month we asked the question, “what matters to you” – the members of the communities we serve. We indicated that we were very interested in hearing from YOU, so that we may better understand what is important, and how we can continue to support your cultural needs during this unique time. We then asked you to take a few minutes and let us know your thoughts by emailing us. Well... we then published an email address with a typo (Ooops... no wonder we haven’t heard from anyone). We hereby acknowledge our error, and are providing the correct email address here: info@ec-chap.org. As your Regional Cultural Center, EC-CHAP wants to hear from you, and we apologize for our previous error. Please let us know your thoughts.

EC-CHAP is looking for volunteers! Julie Engelke, our Volunteer Coordinator is seeking individuals that may possess video production and social media experience. If you are interested in learning how you may be able to help support this effort, please contact Julie at: volunteer@ec-chap.org.

If your EC-CHAP membership has expired, or if you are interested in becoming a new member, please visit: <https://www.ec-chap.org/membership-information>. Memberships and renewals established by March 31, 2021 will be extended for Two Years at the Annual Rate.

We completed our recording of Greg Abate and his Quartet in concert at The Packing House on February 27th. Greg was joined by Matt DeChamplain (piano), Lou Boccia-relli (bass), and Ben Bilello (drums). We’ll be compiling the files this week and producing a film of the concert to be viewed online for 24-hours from **2:00pm, Saturday, March 6th through 2:00pm, Sunday, March 7th**. Tickets are available at www.thepackinghouse.us/upcoming (details below).

EC-CHAP has been offering our monthly Virtual Talent Showcase since July 2020. We are streaming our Virtual Talent Showcase on the **2nd Wednesday of the month at 7:00pm**. Please consider participating by sharing your talent, or just join us to see and hear local and regional creatives sharing their talent (details below).

March on!
EC-CHAP Board

“The only way to do great work is to love what you do.”
- Steve Jobs

EC-CHAP JAZZ SERIES IS BACK (Virtually)

“GREG ABATE QUARTET” - 24-Hour Viewing: 2:00pm, Saturday, March 6th through 2:00pm, Sunday, March 7th.

GREG ABATE jazz saxophonist, flutist, composer, and International Jazz/Recording Artist returns to The Packing House for a Virtual Concert!



In the mid 70’s after finishing a four year program at Berklee College Of Music, Greg played lead alto for the Ray Charles Orchestra for 2 years. In 1978 Greg formed his group ‘Channel One’ which was a favorite in the New England area. From there Greg had the opportunity to play tenor sax with the revived Artie Shaw Orchestra under leadership of Dick Johnson from 1986 to ’87.

Following this experience Greg ventured out as post hard bop soloist playing Jazz Festivals, Jazz Societies and Jazz Clubs throughout the U.S., Canada and abroad, including most of Europe, UK, and Moscow and Georgia Russia. Until COVID surfaced, he toured the globe with over 225 performances a year.

Greg’s newest release Gratitude, with the Tim Ray Trio has received glowing reviews and a lot of international airplay. The project includes eleven originals featuring Greg with members of the Tim Ray Trio - Tim Ray (piano), John Lockwood (bass), and Mark Walker (drums).

The Greg Abate Quartet will be recording a live session at The Packing House on February 27th. This video will be available for viewing 24-hours from **2:00pm, Saturday, March 6th, to 2:00pm, Sunday, March 7th**. Greg will be joined by **Matt DeChamplain** (piano), **Lou Bocciarelli** (bass), and **Ben Bilello** (drums). Tickets \$10.00 or Free Will Donation (available on our website).

Matt DeChamplain

Matt deChamplain grew up in Wethersfield, Connecticut attending the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts during high school, obtaining his bachelors degree from the Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz at the Hartt School of Music and graduated magna cum laude with his masters from the University of Toledo in Ohio in 2012.



He has opened for Wynton Marsalis’ Quintet, Dave Brubeck and Hank Jones, played with Dave Brubeck, Shawnn Monteiro, Nat Reeves, Steve Davis, Greg Abate, Javon Jackson, Jose Feliciano, Paul Keller and Jon Hendricks and has appeared at the JVC Jazz Festival, the Monterey Jazz Festival, the Kennedy Center, Jazz at Lincoln Center and jazz clubs such as the Regatta Bar in Boston, Smalls in New York City and Yoshi’s in San Francisco.

Ben Bilello

Ben Bilello received his Bachelors Degree in Jazz Studies at the Hartt School of Music, where he studied with Ben Toth, Glen Velez, Michael Carvin, and Tony Leone. Since graduating from Hartt, Ben has performed and recorded with Mulgrew Miller, Eddie Henderson, Branford Marsalis, Curtis Fuller, Javon Jackson, George Cables, Joe Wilder, Anthony Braxton, Charles Flores, Steve Davis, Jimmy Greene, Wayne Escoffery, Dezron Douglas, New Jazz Workshop, and Shelton “Fatman” Laster, among many others.



In addition to performing with noted jazz musicians, Ben has toured with the South American folk groups Viva Quetzal and Markamusic. At this time, Ben can be seen performing with his own trio, Josh Evans and The Connection, bassist Jeff Fuller, and Earl MacDonald’s New Directions Ensemble, as well as many others.

Lou Bocciarelli

Lou Bocciarelli is a member of the Hartford Jazz Orchestra, Al Copley’s Band, Bill’s Seafood Jazz All-Stars, Charlie Holland All-Stars, Vince Thompson & TNFT, Johnny and the ECR, Mystic Jazz Ensemble, New London Big Band, can be seen at venues & festivals around the New England area.



Lou has had the good fortune to perform in the Jazz world with many wonderful artists including Phil

Woods, Louie Bellson, Joe Morello, Dave Bruebeck, Bob Mintzer, Claudio Roditi, Dick Johnson, Tom Kubis, Steve Allen, Donn Trenner, Roger Ingram to name a few. Equally comfortable in the theater, Lou has performed in many pits including performances with the Goodspeed Playhouse in CT, Foxwoods Casino, and the Mohegan Sun Casino.

Tickets: \$10.00 or “Free Will Donation”.
Tickets available at: www.thepackinghouse.us/upcoming.
For additional information or questions, please call 518-791-9474.

JOIN US FOR EC-CHAP’s Virtual Talent Showcase: 2nd Wednesday of the month!

EC-CHAP

Virtual Talent Showcase



Live Stream

7:00pm - April 14th

Submit your videos by April 7th (15-Minute Max)

CALL 518.791.9474 FOR UPLOAD INSTRUCTIONS

We would love to include local and regional artists to share in our virtual events, and invite you to participate. All events are free to the public.

CALLING ALL acoustic musicians, film makers, poets, comedians, jugglers, puppeteers, and creative artists of all ages are invited to perform in our virtual Talent Showcase! Here is an opportunity to showcase your work together with other “creatives” STREAMING LIVE in our VIRTUAL SETTING. Test ideas and concepts; and receive comments.

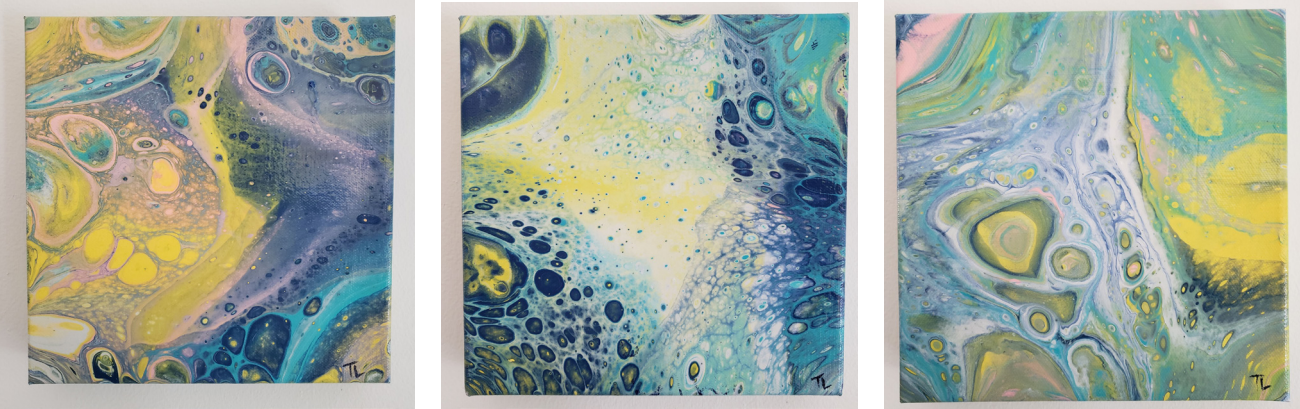
Our Talent Showcase is designed as a platform for local and regional performers to share their talent in front of a live audience. Until we are able to return to live performances in The Packing House, we are offering a Virtual Talent Showcase which will be prerecorded and streamed live each month. We are **streaming our monthly Virtual Talent Showcase LIVE on the 2nd WEDNESDAY of the month at 7:00pm**.

Our **March Talent Showcase** will be streamed **LIVE 7:00pm, Wednesday, March 10th**. We hope you can join us.

EC-CHAP’s **April Virtual Talent Showcase** will stream live at **7:00pm, Wednesday, April 14th**. If you would like to perform in our monthly Virtual Talent Showcase, please call for instructions to submit your video and be placed on the schedule. You may have up to 15-minutes to present your work, and we encourage anyone - of any age - to share your talent. **(Please call 518.791.9474 for information and be placed on the schedule. The deadline to submit your video is April 7th.** Join us for an evening of “talent sharing talent”! Virtual Access at: www.thepackinghouse.us/upcoming the day of the show.

If you have missed our Live Stream offerings, you can view them on our YouTube channel at: (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCE7849dIweGDhNCQvAEa8wQ>).

Acrylic Pour Art is for Everyone



By Tyana Lopez

Acrylic Pouring is a fantastic art form that involves mixing and pouring acrylic paints strategically in order to make organic looking paintings. This process, while appearing relatively simple, is deceptively complex. Taking a look at Acrylics origins, we can see how it may have evolved into what we know today as pour art.



With the discovery of Acrylic Resins as a binding agent in 1915, Acrylic paint became a popular art form around the 1950s, with 1955 producing the first widely and commercially available acrylics. With this, new movements such as Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism began to take hold. Acrylics proved to be a fun new medium to work with as opposed to oil paints, as they dry quickly and allow for bold layering and lines. They were a popular choice with artists such as Andy Warhol, Robert Motherwell, Larry Poons, and Helen Frankenthaler just to name a few.

The flexibility of this new medium has since evolved into many forms since its introduction, and subsequent popularity in the 20th Century and onward. Today, acrylics are used in a variety of different art styles, including Modernism, Abstract Art, and Photo Realism.

Since its inception, Acrylic Pour art has taken off with artists and non artists alike. The process is simple enough: put paint in a cup, pour the cup over a canvas or panel and boom! Art! This however can be made more complex with the inclusion of stabilizers and silicones. In order to have the correct consistency for pouring your acrylics, often stabilizers are used to thin out the paint in a way that won't weaken its integrity. They can be anything from commercial paint flow additives, to a mixture of Elmer's glue and water! Silicone can be added in small amounts to increase the chances of "Cells" being created.

Cells are often sought after in acrylic pour art. They are pockets of layered paint that split apart on the canvas, leaving an organic cell like shape behind. Silicones act as a barrier between the layers of paint, and will help encourage the layering and splitting effect.

These processes can get additionally more complex with new techniques being created. Some people work with a spinning canvas, others with a strainer to pour their

paint through, others prefer the simple "Dirty Pour" with paint in a cup. Each technique produces fantastic organic looking paintings that are colorful and eye catching.

The best part of this art form is that anyone can do it! If you would like to create something both fun and beautiful, I highly recommend this technique. While messy, it is incredibly satisfying and can make some truly unforgettable art.

The Dye and Bleach House Community Gallery welcomes all to visit our facility, which is open under CDC and CT state guidelines on Saturdays from 10am to 2pm or by appointment. We request that all visitors wear a mask and stay 6ft distant while they visit and enjoy a variety of art, including sculpture, painting, and crafts. We are located at 156 River Road in Willington, CT. Check out our website or social media for announcements and information regarding opening hours or closures: WWW.EC-CHAP.ORG.



The Dye and Bleach House Community Gallery encourages all local and regional artists alike to participate in our gallery shows! Whether you are a beginner, or an experienced professional, we would love to show your work. Consider adding a gallery show to your resume! We love finding new and exciting art to fill our space, and our next feature could be yours. If you are interested in joining us in showing art, please contact us at CommunityGallery@ecchap.org.

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

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In the many hours within familiar walls
I listen for the harkening of the wise soulful few
Sages and soothsayers and shamans and such
Not sure if I am seeking answers or insights into
questions to ask
Temple tap rings in the emptiness like a gong
My attention fleeting between notions, potions, and
spells
In the distance love plays on an old piano
Just the right notes to open my seeking senses to
gathered instances and melodies that accompany my
desire to never forget
Photo and poem by Wayne Erskine.



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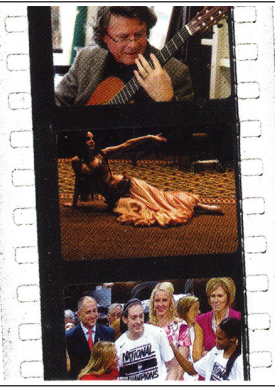
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Medical Marijuana in Connecticut Has Problems Legalizing Adult Recreational Use Can Fix Them

By Mark Mathew Braunstein

Connecticut has gotten right most aspects of its medical marijuana program, but some parts are broken. Legalizing adult recreational use of cannabis can fix what’s broken and can prevent from breaking what’s fixed.

What’s working? Its ballooning rosters of patients, physicians, and dispensaries are hallmarks of a successful program. So let’s look at those numbers.

Medical marijuana (MMJ) was legalized here in 2012. By 2015, 4,914 patients had registered. In 2017, that mushroomed fourfold to 22,279. Last June, that nearly doubled to 41,292. As of January, 49,721 total. That means one of every 75 Connecticut residents is now a registered patient.

In 2012, thirteen conditions qualified a patient. By 2016, the list expanded to 17. In 2020, doubled to 38, when chronic pain of at least 6 months duration became a qualifying condition. Long term or short, chronic pain has opened the floodgates.

The Commissioner who oversees the MMJ program predicted the June 2020 figure will quickly double. At this twofold rate, by 2023 every darn one of us Nutmeggers could be enrolled. So let’s save ourselves the piles of paperwork. Let’s legalize cannabis for adults.

The roll call of physicians who sponsor patients also has steadily increased. In 2017, checkmark 801. In 2018, tally up 1010. As of January, 1,381 total doctors.

My doctor since 1992 for treating my spinal cord injury is one of them. When my permit came due for annual renewal, I simply emailed him a reminder. No special appointments, so no extra costs. Our routine appointments were fully covered by medical insurance. That’s the way it’s supposed to be. But when he departed my local hospital after its merger with Yale New Haven Health, I was left in the lurch.

In 2018, in search of a new sponsor, I learned that hospitals typically prohibit their hundreds of affiliated physicians from sponsoring MMJ. Their institutional bias emerged during my in-person appointments with specialists within Yale New Haven Health, at Gaylord Hospital in Wallingford, and at Mount Sinai Hospital in Hartford. My medical records state that my sole medication is MMJ, so cannabis does stand out. Without my asking, they bluntly stated that they do not sponsor MMJ patients. End of conversation.

I hit the same brick wall within Hartford Health-Care, but with a twist. While supportive of my 28-year-long use of MMJ, the physician referred me to his go-to “pot doc.” Doctors even outside the umbrella of hospital networks dread dealing with bureaucratic red tape or risking being branded as pot docs. To meet patient demand, a cavalcade of pot docs has sprung to action.

Search the internet for “Connecticut medical marijuana doctors.” You’ll discover dozens of doctors each with multiple offices, and multiple websites each with dozens of doctors. Even “Connecticut pot docs” will get you there. If you dare click on the links, run for your life.

For instance, one pot doc maintains eight offices, six spread across our state from Greenwich to Hartford, plus one each in Miami Beach and Manhattan. “100% online medical cannabis evaluations for an MMJ card in CT, FL, and NY.” He must spend more time commuting between offices than treating patients.

Canna Care Docs has over 30 offices in 12 states and Canada, so is the largest network of peripatetic pot docs. It formerly maintained three offices in Connecticut, until two of them skipped town, leaving those patients high and dry. Okay, just dry.

Canna Care Docs competes with a knockoff imitator named CCD Care Docs with offices here and eight other states. “Ask a licensed practitioner anything and get your medical card in hand as soon as possible.” That “anything” means anything goes.

Quick Med Cards maintains offices here and 17 other states. “Get Your Official Med Card Fast. Lowest Price in the State!” And, “Our prices include the State Paperwork Fee that other doctors charge for separately.” Except that no such paperwork fee exists here.

MD Prime alleges it maintains an office in Hartford, though its 15-minute office visits costing \$199 are

conducted “100% online.” In a scant 15 minutes, surely also 100% off base.

Miracle Leaf Health Center with offices in 33 states deserves The Pot Doc of the Year award. It advertises “Fast & Easy Medical Marijuana Certifications” with its clinic open 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. “Franchise Opportunities Available!” Its alleged Glastonbury franchise has no concrete address because “Telemedicine Only.” The three fastest modes of modern communication: telephone, telegraph, and telemedicine.

Few pot docs qualify with medical insurers, so their patients pay out of pocket, on the spot, and through the nose. The rock-bottom rates blared on the internet are \$175 for initial appointments and \$150 for annual renewals. Those who don’t publicize their prices charge up to \$300 a pop.

Our MMJ law was intended to prevent reenactment of the Wild West of California where shyster doctors in shady clinics used to grant “weed cards” to anyone who shelled out the cash. Yet, our legislators messed up when

they specified “a bona fide physician-patient relationship.” “Bona fide” is a nebulous quality, and qualities elude quantifying. “Long-term,” indeed “one year,” would be clearer. How to banish pot docs from Connecticut? The same way that California shut them down. By legalizing recreational.

Our MMJ law sought to boost the state’s economy by requiring that cannabis be grown within our borders. Initially, three of our four cultivation labs were Connecticut-based companies. Likewise, our six startup dispensaries were run like mom-and-pop stores precisely because most of them were owned by moms and pops.

In just eight years, two of the four grow labs were acquired by larger out-of-state corporations, while six dispensaries grew to 18. Thanks to the State’s puzzling choices in granting new licenses, our nation’s largest cannabis corporation that already grew cannabis here now also owns four dispensaries here. CEO’s call that vertical integration. Regulators and watchdog agencies call that monopolizing. Aptly, that behemoth’s newest dispensary sits diagonally across the street from a Walmart.

Years ago, we patients rhapsodized in online forums and political rallies about our MMJ community. Presently, grow labs and dispensaries tabulate in spreadsheets and annual reports their MMJ industry. Community has been lost to industry. Has anything been gained?

Granted, cannabis now is safer and cheaper. But not cheap enough to compensate for annual license fees and, for patients forced to consult them, pot docs’ renewal fees. Patients would save more if we could legally grow our own, same as next door in Rhode Island since 2006 and in Massachusetts since 2012.

In Massachusetts, recreational cannabis is heavily taxed, while MMJ is not. Connecticut could collect its fair share of revenue by taxing recreational consumption. Then, patients who chose to retain their permits sponsored by “bona fide” doctors would avoid paying both recreational taxes and exorbitant pot doc fees.

A massive billboard advertising a Massachusetts pot shop greets drivers on I-95 in Providence. That’s Massachusetts’ way of tacitly thumbing its nose at Rhode Island. While our legislators dally, another billboard might yet be posted to greet drivers on I-84 or I-91 in Hartford. And Massachusetts will duly be taunting Connecticut. Unless legislators stop fiddling while MMJ burns. Unless legislators act to legalize recreational cannabis.

Mark Mathew Braunstein provided in-person testimony in support of Connecticut’s medical marijuana bills at seven of the eight public hearings held from 1997 until its passage into law in 2012. www.MarkBraunstein.Org/medical-marijuana



photo illustration by Mark Braunstein

Chill sun

above me in this morning’s sky, thin scrim
of clouds wind-whipped between winter and spring.
Red-winged black birds, cardinals, robins sing.

The swales and asphalts are riven with ice,
my morning walk a deliberate dance,
feet wary along the edge of balance.

Nose drips. I haul tight twinging hip uphill
through lightness and air, past lichen and vine.
Droplets of sweat trickle cold down my spine.

Downhill, wind’s invisible backhand slap
stings eyes and cheeks, weaves pain, sharp, tight and shrill
throughout bird song, twigs, the stream’s liquid spill.

In the open air, I breathe through cracked lips.
Heat under my clothes on top of my skin
dissipates west to east to west again.

This life spans health and illness, age and youth,
I lift my body’s song up into trees
paeon to pain, joy, effort and ease.

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.

5 Hobbies to Keep Your Body and Mind Healthy and Happy

StatePoint) As the pandemic continues to restrict many of the places you are able or inclined to go, finding ways to stay active is important for keeping the body and mind healthy and happy. Here are some ideas for new hobbies to try.



Learn a language: Bonjour! ¡Hola! With an array of online language classes and tutorials available at your fingertips, learning a new language is more accessible than ever. Start now while you fantasize about a post-pandemic vacation overseas.

Play an instrument: Learning to play an instrument is not only a great distraction for the current moment, it can provide you with years of joy as your skill develops. Consider starting your musical journey on a Casiotone keyboard. By connecting the keyboard to the free Chordana Play app, you can easily learn to play your favorite songs from downloaded MIDI files. Once you’ve mastered the instrument, the portability of the keyboard will come in handy, whether you play solo or join a band.

Become a home chef: From sushi to soufflé to dumplings, there are likely a range of dishes you have never attempted making at home. Tackle your culinary bucket list, one-by-one.

Go hiking: There is no better hobby for staying fit and communing with nature than hiking, which works every muscle of the body, boosts cardiovascular health and even improves mood and mental well-being. Track your hike using a wearable tech tool geared for outdoor enthusiasts, such as a watch from the Casio’s Pro Trek line. Quad Sensor technology packs all the measurements you need into one compact hiking watch, including a compass, altitude/barometer and temperature measurements, along with an accelerometer that tracks step count. Calorie calculations use both step count and altitude information to take upgrades and downgrades into consideration, and data is recorded by the Pro Trek connected app.

Volunteer: At a time when many people are struggling, consider volunteering your time to serve those in need. There are plenty of safe, socially distant volunteer opportunities, from delivering meals to the homebound, to video conferencing with socially isolated seniors to helping boost adult literacy via remote tutoring.

Amid the ongoing pandemic, staying busy and positive may take creativity. However, discovering new hobbies and pursuits you love can nurture the body, mind and soul.

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Observations of an Aged Pagan

By Dan McGinley

I took a fast drive in a light rain on the highway this afternoon, westbound out of the Quiet Corner all the way to Mondazzi Books in South Windsor, lucky to grab the last available parking spot at one of the most popular stores in Connecticut.

“We just hired four more people to handle the crowds,” said a man who appeared to be the owner, ringing my purchases. “More and more people are coming here from out of state, asking about nearby restaurants and other businesses. It’s really fantastic considering the pandemic and everything.”

Our enlightened kid had asked to check out some books before heading back to college, and I was naturally curious about this metaphysical store with countless treasures and an authentic Himalayan Salt Room, which is not found on every corner of New England like Dunkin’, but probably should be.

I was not disappointed, transported to a mystical realm cross-pollinated from the plants of a Renaissance Faire, a wiccan nymphaeum in the woods, the magical book store from Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman’s Good Omens, a cave full of powerful crystals illuminated by the moon peeking through a tiny crevice at the midnight hour, and . . . oops. Getting all “East Coast elitist” and self-entertainingly smug. Well kick my candelabra.

“You’re getting weird on me,” Gunner said last week, sipping a vodka tonic on our patio with his feet up on the chiminea, a low fire sending sparks into the night sky. “Living way out here in the deep backwoods of a town cursed by George Washington.”

“Guy was overrated,” I said, poking at the fire with an old hockey stick. “Martha called the shots.”

“Came through here in 1789,” he said. “November.”

“Binging History Channel again?”
“Said the roads sucked and went to a lame church service.”

“That would describe most of them in the seven-teen-hundreds, Gunner. Fire and brimstone.”
“Like you ever attended one?”
“I’m talking about the roads.”

He laughed and gulped his drink. I was taping our talk as usual because . . . Gunner.

“I remember when you stopped going to church up in Sudbury,” he said. “Took your collection money down to Friendly’s Ice Cream and met-up with Mark Valentino. Probably hit on the waitresses.”

“My parents caught wind and I told them god did not exist.”

“You put a dagger in your mother’s heart. A dagger.”

“She told me I was Catholic because of baptism and parochial school, where I was beaten, forced to repeat third grade, and eventually expelled.”

“They say if you’re baptized in the Catholic church, you can never be possessed.”

“Proved that wrong.”
“Your older brother was an alter boy.”

“Still is.”
“No way.”

“Okay, a Deacon.”
“How about the younger one?”

“Lives in Florida.”
“Another possession.”

“I don’t know what his beliefs are anymore.”
“You don’t talk much?”

I shrugged, and he left it alone.
“I had a Rabbi,” I said, raising his eyebrows. “We used to meet at The Wooden Spoon on Thursdays, before this pandemic. He had great wisdom and insight. One day he laughed and said, ‘How can I be your Rabbi anymore? I’m not even Jewish, and neither are you.’”

“Kind of a prerequisite.”

“I was gut punched, really. All this time he claimed to be a Jewish Rabbi and looked the part. It really hurt me.”

“Right. Didn’t you deliver bagels for a Jewish deli once, up near Boston?”

“The Breadbasket Bakery, yeah.”

“And you sat with some Rabbis once a week?”

“The owner would bring me to this diner in the plaza, and I would listen to these Rabbis discuss ways of the world. It was an amazing education for a young guy still wet behind the ears. I was in awe of their intellect, their humor, their cool Lennon glasses.”

“What about your Deacon brother?”

“He’s definitely in their league. Got a master’s



degree from Providence in theology. History degree from Amherst. Great high school quarterback. Married a protestant. Taught me about human decency and how to buy a reliable car.”

“But different beliefs.”
“Much.”

“And you?” he asked. “What are your beliefs nowadays?”

“Do the right thing, be the best you can be at whatever you do, and don’t count on anything when you die.”

“Because there might be nothingness?”
“There might be nothingness.”

“Or somethingness.”
“Something like nothingness.”

“That hurt my head.”

Gunner gulped his drink, and I brought up an incident in Fort Benning, when a Catholic priest invited me to attend his service, after I said that Christianity was an interesting philosophy.

When I took up the offer, he berated me in front of the entire congregation.

He was on the front steps bidding farewell to parishioners after the service, and I paused to shake him down.

“Nice move,” I told him. “Playing the bully pulpit card. Wow.”

He stared in alarm, not so brave now without a stage and captive audience. Washington would’ve been proud.

“Animal heads,” Gunner said, changing gears.

“You always had a thing against animal heads.”

“You ever go to one of those outdoorsy restaurants with animal heads?”

“Like Outback?”
“Outback or Bugaboo Creek maybe?”

Gunner shrugged. “I don’t do chains.”
“Of course; they don’t have lap dances.”

“So true.”
“Animal heads on the wall.”

“Parts of a carcass, I know, I know. We had this discussion in Maine, remember? That guy shook his head and said to go back home with the other wussy tree-huggers.”

“Um . . . okay.”

“You don’t remember?”
“In a bar?”

“Duh.”
“Rest my case.”

“You thought the bear head on a wall was a black lab, and asked what kind of a monster would stuff his dog’s head like that. Remember now?”

“Sure.”

“And the bartender shut you off, and the guy said something about you being . . . not smart.”

“Was he wearing a plaid shirt or maybe some camo?”

Gunner just stared at me. “It’s Maine.”

“So what happened?”

“You argued that the only difference between a bear and a dog is that a dog lives with humans and kisses their ass.”

“And?”
“It confused him.”

“Really?”

“He said a dog is smaller and does tricks, so you mentioned those giant shaggy Newfoundland dogs, and the genius bears at Clark’s Trading Post who shoot basketballs and ride bikes, and then he got really mad, and they closed the bar.”

“Damn.”

“But then after we walked outside, they locked the door and nobody else left.”

“I see.”

Gunner nodded. “Not the first time. They were all laughing and waving good-bye at the windows.”

“Nice folks.”

He nodded again. “Now we sit on your crooked patio and discuss life and death.”

“And Jesus.”
“Buddha.”

“Upanishads.”
“Brahma.”

“That serpent god of the Mayans.”
“That crazy cool Hindu with all the . . . arms.”

“Who was first?”
“Upanishads, then Buddha, then Jesus, no . . .

wait.”

“Brahma.”
“Iktomi, the trickster.”
“Nobody knows how far back that goes.”

“I’m sure Homo Habilis worshiped. They knew things.”

“What about the Pali texts?”
“The Tipitaka?”

“The Tipitaka tu tu.”
“Seriously.”

“The bible stole a lot from that.”
“Don’t ever tell a Christian.”

“It’s true . . . you ever read that thing?”
“I don’t even read the papers anymore.”

“Really.”
“I only trust Norah.”

“CBS Evening News. Those blue, blue eyes.”
“Norah O’Donnell never lies.”

“Norah O’Donnell has the genes of Walter Cronkite and every beauty queen crowned in the world, ever.”

“Norah O’Donnell saves homeless puppies.”
“Puts out fires.”

“Stops tornadoes in their tracks, and still has perfect hair.”

“Norah O’Donnell . . . can kick Chuck Norris’s ass.”

“A bridge too far.”
“Agreed.”

We were silent for several minutes after that, listening to a very loud owl in the forest, discussing how they were supposed to be spirits, and then it just went on and on into the night, at one point Gunner angrily bringing up Trump signs still being up, and me pointing out at they were on private property so who gave a rat’s ass?

They can suck a binky and clutch bright red MAGA blankets, their misery and angst buried at home, unlike those people talking loudly to themselves in public places as others cross the street and get on with their lives. Quickly.

Gunner took off after sobering up for a while, his twin turbo Ford interceptor wailing north toward Route 84, and the owl started up again, my local forest spirit continuing our conversation.


“I’m here and I’m real,” he seemed to say. “Got mice?”

So there is nothing like politics or religion to fire up a conversation, boil the blood, and raise a few eyebrows, but if you want something completely different and enlightening, I suggest a trip to Mondazzi Books at 570 Hayden Station Road in Windsor.



You can tell them I sent you, but it may only elicit pity and gnashing of teeth, so I strongly advise against it.

Just go and have some fun, with a very open mind.

Till next time, thanks for reading and please be safe. Your shot is coming. Literally, your vaccine shot is coming, if it didn’t come already. Please follow the science, but avoid crowded rest rooms.



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The Elements of Writing

Setting

By Felix F. Giordano

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines setting as the time and place of the action of a literary, dramatic, or cinematic work. On face value, setting may seem to be an innocuous part of telling a story. You may wonder what difference does setting mean to the overall substance of the story. After all, it’s our characters that drive the story, isn’t it? The setting would seem to simply be a one-dimensional concept at best. But setting is much more than that.

Setting can be described as that which brings a story into our consciousness. Setting can refer to time as in the present day, or time in the historical sense, or time in the future. It can also be defined as a geographical location, a fictional world, or a mixture of both. Setting can also include the landscape, climate, weather, cultures, and societal hierarchies and in the case of movies, the soundtrack.

Setting can greatly influence our characters. Would Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein still be as scary if it took place in Death Valley at high noon? Would Alice in Wonderland or the Wizard of Oz be as magical if they took place in boring suburban landscapes? Setting becomes the canvas for the story upon which our characters act out their emotions, transgressions, and acts of heroism.

When you have an idea for a story, first consider the setting. Maybe you wish to insert your characters into a story that takes place in the past. Think about how the world appeared back then and incorporate the elements of that world into your story. Utilize the language, customs, clothing, and the many societal norms that were present.

Think of how some period films have been presented, Ethan Frome, Far from the Madding Crowd, Little Women, Downton Abbey, and Emma. We learn from the settings in these films how the characters lived, loved, and died. How their hardscrabble existence or privileged up-bringsings influenced their lives, made them become who they are, and drove the story.

If you choose to write a story in the present day, look around you. Use what you see to develop the richness of your story. Consider interviewing people who are representative of the characters in your story. If you make your setting believable it will resonate with the reader.

A story set in the future provides you with an abundance of ideas to develop the setting. You can create a utopian world, an apocalyptic world, or a fantasy world. Look at the settings in the Star Wars franchise and the four more groundbreaking films soon to arrive over the next seven years in the Avatar series.

With today’s use of digital imagery, costumes, and stage props, producers and directors have brought past and future civilizations to life right before our eyes. We become immersed in the lives of the characters and their worlds become real to us.

For those of you who are not familiar with the 1982 science fiction movie Blade Runner, the opening of the film sets the mood for the remainder of the story. It

takes place in Los Angeles 37 years into the future and it looks like nothing we have ever seen before. The imagery and music is wild, beautiful, frightening, and awe-inspiring all at once. That opening scene or “setting” prepares us for what we will see and sense throughout the rest of the film, a society that runs the gamut from bordering on genius to outright dangerous.

One of the best ways to determine what your setting should include would be to read books or watch movies that occur in the same time and place as your story. Take notes of even the minutest details of the clothing, buildings, transportation, weather, languages, customs, dialects, etc. Then you can research them further to give your story the richness that it deserves.

But the setting doesn’t change...or does it?

I’m sure you have read a book or watched a film where there is a turn of events and the protagonist has to perform an act that will challenge their fortitude or commitment in doing the right thing. Invariably, when the protagonist comes face-to-face with their quest and they see that their goal is in sight, something may happen that becomes an impediment to their success. Most of the time it’s the antagonist that gets in the way but once in a while the setting becomes the obstacle. How often have we seen a vampire hunter venture forth to kill the undead during a violent storm? A sudden gust of wind arrives and causes the vampire hunter’s torch to extinguish. That’s the writer’s use of setting. It’s also apparent when, for instance the protagonist has only minutes to save the life of another character, and they become delayed in their quest by a city traffic jam. In both examples, the writer’s use of setting to influence the story becomes very powerful. Because these are unforeseen events, it gives the reader or viewer pause and makes them say to themselves, “Oh no” right at the height of suspense. These changes in setting elevate the tension and make the story more dramatic and interesting.

Whatever it is that you wish to write about, consider your choices of time, place, and weather in the story. Use them to your advantage. Think of them as characters themselves. Let them speak to you and convey the mood of the story. Use them to further the darkness, the comedy, the romance, the complexity, the meaningfulness, and the richness of the storyline.

We defined “Setting” 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 7,000 and has had more than 3 million pages of his books read by Amazon Kindle Unlimited subscribers. His website is jbnovels.com. 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: Research

Courage

By John Coffey

As a young person, I think a lot about the future. What will life be like in 15, 20 years? What will my family be like? What will society be like? What will the church be like?

It’s often pointed out that the present moment in history is fraught with a host of immense problems—a pandemic, climate change, disinformation on social media, income inequality, racism, sexism, and on and on. The problems in society are mirrored in the church, but the church also has its own problems—cultural relevance, aging congregations, generational divides. I was taught that many of these problems are due to the worldview shift from modernity to postmodernity and whatever is beyond. It’s comforting to know there’s a root cause, but it doesn’t actually help solve anything. What will the future be like?

Times of change are dangerous—once you start changing, it’s not clear where you’ll end up. But change is imperative. We can’t go back to the way things were—the past is full of racism, sexism, environmental abuse. Going back would be a race to see which happens first, societal implosion or global catastrophe. We have to move forward.

But moving forward involves change, and change is difficult. Change requires leadership. Leadership involves courage.

As a white male from the rural south, “courage” immediately makes me think of John Wayne, William Wallace, and Maximus Decimus Meridius. I immediately think of characters that are strong, resilient, ready to face danger for the sake of the downtrodden and oppressed, whether the oppressors be bandits, nobles, or Caesars. They do what others cannot do for themselves.

I tend to think that should speak to all of us. Sometimes we need a hero, someone who can reach down and pick us up from the mess we find ourselves in. Sometimes we can’t get ourselves out of the muck and the mire.

I think I need those characters to show me what I can be, who I can be. They empower me. They light a fire in my soul, one that keeps me warm regardless of the circumstances. It doesn’t really matter what people say or think, does it? Set your mind and go. Refuse to give into temptation, refuse to stop, refuse to back down.

Here I am, and I realize I’ve drifted somewhere from where I started. Perhaps that’s as it should be. When I think of the epitome of courage, I think of big, strong men who can take hold of a problem and move it. But when I get down to describing courage, “stand on your own two feet, face the problem, and refuse to stop,” it doesn’t sound like it inherently involves being a big, strong man.

Perhaps that’s as it should be. Why should courage be related to strength or size or gender? In fact, in the Lord of the Rings the creatures with the most courage are the hobbits. In the Chronicles of Narnia, a case could be made for Lucy. How many times have I needed courage and heard the line, “Courage, Pippin,” from Gandalf? How many times have I been reminded of Lucy’s simple courage, her unwillingness to move from the truth, even when she knew it wouldn’t be popular with her siblings?

Even so, what does all this have to do with societal upheaval?

America has always had an ideal of individualism, even though it has never been realized. A lot of that we need to repent of—only a select few have been able to succeed “as individuals,” which is in quotes because the system that enabled it was built on the backs of people who were refused the opportunity to advance in society. But as we repent of individualism, we shouldn’t forsake this empowering truth—that we each have the capacity for courage, to face our difficulties head-on, to stand on our own two feet and refuse to back down.

When I think about the many issues we’re facing, I think what we need most is courage. Many of these changes will cause financial hardship, loss of status, loss of power, acceptance of sin and culpability, and who knows what else. Any one of these is rough; all of them together is a death blow. But it doesn’t have to be. We can face these challenges, these changes, these situations over which we have so little control, with courage, determined to overcome and make the best of the situation. We can. And when we do, we empower those who see us and come after us, showing them that they, too, can have courage, they, too, can overcome.

Here I am, and the truth is, I’m not actually sure how to have courage. Any courage I have is fleeting, swallowed in fear of failure and a desire for ease. Two responses to that come to mind.

The first is that courage is not from some hidden reserve of inner strength, but from the understanding that God is still working around me. The good things I strive to do are merely a participation in what God is already doing. Any success is therefore God using me; failure is simply God refraining from using me. The pressure isn’t on me, so I can have the courage to step out without worrying about success or failure. This is why one of the most common commands in Scripture is “do not fear.” Fear is a sign of self-reliance or idolatry. With God there is no fear, only trust and confidence.

The other is the reminder that Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10), the one who lays down his life for his sheep. When read in the context of the crucifixion, that’s a call to being willing to die. But read more in the context of shepherding, it’s about courage in the face of danger. A shepherd doesn’t fight a wolf saying, “well, I’m sure this will be the end of me, but better that I die first.” What, do you think the wolf will stop at killing the shepherd? No! He takes care of the shepherd so that he can eat the sheep at his leisure afterward. No, the good shepherd has no intention of dying. He does have every intention of putting his life on the line, because that’s what it will take to get rid of the wolf and keep the sheep safe. Read in that light, Jesus is calling his disciples to be courageous—difficult times are ahead, and leading through them is not for the faint of heart.

I think about the future and I see dark days ahead. But even in the darkness, there is light, specks of courage, ordinary people unwilling to give up and give in. May those of us who struggle with courage see their example and find our spirits strengthened. Together we can overcome.

John Coffey is a minister at the Storrs Road Church of Christ in Mansfield Center.

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The Disability Day of Mourning The Solution

By Michelle M. Baughman

The degree to which a society safeguards a person’s civil rights is an indicator of how that person is valued by the society. The ultimate violation of a human being’s civil rights is when society allows his or her life to be taken with impunity.

Filicide, the murder of vulnerable individuals at the hands of their parents or caregivers, is rampant among the disabled population. Disabled people are twice as likely to have violence perpetrated against them than non-disabled people. And when this violence results in death, the media coverage often defends the murderers and gives little attention or recognition to the innocent victims whose lives were cut short by the very people whom they trusted most. The unconscionable fact that a parent took the life of their own child gets glossed over, and the media twists and spins the “optics” to portray the murderer with sympathy for having to deal with the “heavy burden” of caring for their disabled child. In the criminal justice system, these murdering parents receive lighter sentences than murderers of non-disabled people.

This is because there is a deeply ingrained, pervasive prejudice in our society that disabled life is less valuable than non-disabled life. This prejudice is called “ableism.” And according to disability self-advocate Amythest Schaber, “The very pillars of our society—our medical establishments, our educational systems, our government in all of its departments—have been built on a foundation of ableist ideals and practices.”

This culture of ableism, this pervasive, chronic devaluation of disabled lives, is oppressive. As long as it persists, disabled individuals are denied their civil rights in every facet of their daily lives, from equal access to education, employment opportunities, medical care, organ transplants, and the right to equal protection under the law. Since 2016, there have been 719 disabled people reported murdered worldwide at the hands of their caregivers. Of these murders, 418—more than half—were committed in the United States. It is important to note that many murders go unreported, so the actual numbers are probably greater. The Autistic Self Advocacy Network has been curating these statistics since 1980, and they can be viewed at <https://disability-memorial.org/index-by-year>.

March 1 is the International Disability Day of Mourning, when the disability community gathers across the world to remember victims of filicide. To find a vigil near you, visit <https://autisticadvocacy.org/2021/02/2021-day-of-mourning-vigil-sites>.

Michelle M. Baughman is a late-in-life diagnosed adult on the autism spectrum, an educator, a parent of a twice-exceptional child, and a trauma-informed AANE Certified AsperCoach who provides intensive, highly individualized coaching to people with Asperger Syndrome and related conditions. Michelle ascribes to the neurodiversity paradigm and writes to help debunk the general misconceptions surrounding this condition to help autistics live their best lives and to change the negative cultural narrative about autism. She may be contacted via email: LifeCoach.PELC@gmail.com, cell phone: (860) 207-4263, or online at <http://linkedin.com/in/michelle-m-baughman-28b5a92b>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1015628291826263>; and <https://www.alignable.com/storrs-mansfield-ct/personal-evolution-life-coaching-2>.



By Angela Hawkins Fichter

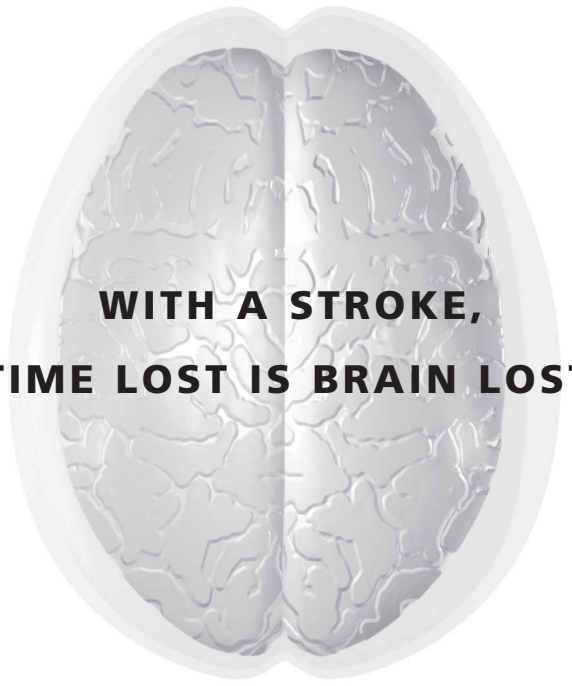
Here we are in the middle of a pandemic from a covid-19 virus that can make people very sick, and a lot of them die. At the time of this writing almost half a million people in the US have died of this virus. According to various website data there were 116,516 U.S. military deaths in World War I and 407,316 in World War II, so we really are at war against this corona virus. That’s a very sobering thought. The good news is that a few pharmaceutical companies have devised a vaccine for this. However, some people don’t like taking vaccines. They don’t care that if they won’t take the vaccine, that makes the virus happy because they can spread the virus to others when they get it. What’s the solution to this dangerous nuisance?

Most of us in this country believe in law and order and justice. But not everyone does. And some of those people commit crimes that damage people’s property, health, and life.

Our nation has many jails in which live people convicted of crimes. The majority of them, when they are released from jail, commit more crimes (that’s called recidivism). What’s the solution to this problem?

When I was waiting on line (a very long time, outside in the cold) the other day getting my first of two vaccines for the covid-19 virus, I overheard a couple people discussing this need for a solution to safeguard society against criminals and people who won’t take the vaccine. Here’s the solution they came up with. They decided that the US government should buy Greenland and deport to Greenland criminals and people who won’t take the vaccine. After all England once owned Australia and used to deport criminals there. Greenland is still under the control of Denmark, even though they have self-rule now. Who lives in Greenland? The native people are Inuits. There are also Inuits in Canada and Alaska. Other Greenlanders have Danish background, which means they have Vikings as ancestors. (Vikings are those ancient Danish people who invaded other countries and took stuff, and if they liked the place, stayed there and took over). Why would Greenland accept criminals, especially since they hardly have any jails? Why no jails? Because they don’t need them. If you commit a serious crime there, you are put to hard work, and in the winter the government provides no shelter. Since the criminals know they will freeze to death if they keep committing crimes, crime is very low. If the US buys Greenland, we could send the vaccine deniers there with the criminals, but we would give the criminals vaccines, because they are going to get better. Frigid cold is a very good incentive to get better. The vaccine deniers will all get the virus, and many will die, so out of the people the US deports to Greenland, only the criminals will survive and become nicer people. As for the vaccine deniers, they won’t be a problem for anyone anymore.

So did the couple ahead of me in the vaccine line have the solution?



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T. King, Publisher



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Visit our OurCompanions.org for full job descriptions and volunteer requirements or call us at 860-242-9999.

Ashford’s First Poet Laureate

The Ashford Arts Council and the Town of Ashford have proclaimed Anthony Paticchio as our first town Poet Laureate. In celebration, we plan to honor Tony’s appointment with a virtual party March 21st at 4:00 p.m. on Zoom with poetry by Tony, virtual toasts, and then an Open Mic for town well-wishers to read their own poems. Please email Christine Acebo to register for this event and get the Zoom link: cacebo@mac.com

A Tale of Two Brothers Captives, Black Civil War Soldiers and Other Hidden Figures

By Donna Dufresne

This essay begins at a lonely little Civil War grave marker in the Natchaug Forest. The stone, pristinely readable in spite of age, is for Charles Webster of the 29th Colored Regiment, Company H., who Died June 17, 1864. Someone places a fresh Civil War Veteran flag at the site every year. Often there are coins lined on top of the stone, a lost symbolism that reminds me of the pebbles placed on graves in Jewish cemeteries. Local folklore is that a settlement of Nipmuc Indians who were also the descendants of slaves once lived there and worked in the Cat Den Quarry a mile to the south.

I first came upon Charles Webster’s Civil War grave marker in the Natchaug Forest in the early nineties. The private property wasn’t posted back then, and after continuing west on an old wood’s road, I discovered several cellar holes indicating there was more than one family that lived out there. Later, I would learn that Charles Webster’s grave marker is in the Lambert Cemetery. There are six other graves, marked only by field stones, their names long forgotten.

Unlike the Higginbothams from Lost Village, the Lamberts and Websters didn’t leave much of a trail. Their gravestones may have had wooden crosses with names and dates long ago reclaimed by the earth, like those of Jonathan Randall’s enslaved Africans who are buried in the Lost Village cemetery. But for the most part, they have remained hidden figures who never quite made it onto the hallowed pages of history yet remained in the understory of local lore and oral history. Theirs is an untold story, the descendants of Nipmuc Indians and African captives who eked out a living by their hard labor in Cat Den Quarry. The paper trail may be scant, but I’m following the clues etched in the stonework at Lost Village and the possible skilled labor of the Randall captives who may have cut stone and built the foundations and chimneys for the Randalls, Higginbothams and other neighbors.

Long before I found Charles Webster’s grave-stone, or noticed the remains of a quarry nearby, I was told by an architectural historian that the stonework in the Higginbotham cellar holes which were built in the late 18th century, reminded him of cellars and chimney bases in some houses in Newport which were built by enslaved Africans. Although the sills had disappeared years before, there was evidence they may have been cut from a large rock ledge behind the house of Darius Higginbotham. I wondered if Darius had hired out the labor and skill of Jonathan Randall’s enslaved Africans who were given to Patience Bowen Randall, as a wedding gift from her grandfather who lived in Newport. He had earned his wealth in the slave trade.

New England captives were often called “servants”, which was also the term used for white indentured servants. The term, servant, confuses white people and keeps us from accepting the blunt historical truth that captivity was not an apprenticeship or a contract that ended after seven years. There was no end except through manumission. Captives were imprisoned by laws cultivated in the soil of an inhumane justice system and reinforced by white terrorism. Like Native Americans, these were a people whose lives had been stolen through deliberate cultural genocide, the remnants of which are evident to this day. Their language was stolen from them and discarded with their family names, which makes it difficult to trace them back to their captivity. If one is lucky enough to find captives mentioned in a primary source before manumission, there are no sir-names and few Christian names. One can sometimes find captives listed with the livestock as Prince, Cudgel, Cudjoe, Cudge, Cuff, Silas, Caesar etc. as if they were a prized horse or a hunting dog. Some of those names are West African in origin.

One hundred and sixty-five years had passed from the first shipload of African captives to the gradual aboli-

tion act of 1784 in Connecticut. And by gradual, I mean that Connecticut slave owners found legal loopholes to hold onto their property well into the 19th century. If they were fortunate, African captives might have a master who followed the law and emancipated them when they turned 21, but even then they often had to transition into a life of second-class citizenship and a state of limbo, free in name but stuck in servitude or low paid labor. Some of the Christian and Sir-names claimed by captives who were manumitted may have been chosen for them by local officials. The last names sometimes reflect their latest “master”, the local minister, or someone famously adored in the national



Donna Dufresne photo.

popular culture, i.e. Washington or Jefferson. The Randall captives played a prominent role in local folk lore and ghost stories told for generations. One version is that they were buried in the Randall/Higginbotham cemetery and marked only with field stones. They were not happy about the unmarked burials and vowed to haunt the place. There are three or four unmarked graves in that cemetery buried apart from the Randall’s and Higginbothams and marked only with small field stones. Obadiah Higginbotham’s grave is marked with blank stone as well but sits prominently in the front of the burial ground next to his wife with a large stone for the head and the foot. The stories that Jonathan Randall owned slaves could have been subjugated to hearsay were it not for the fact that he, a wealthy 18th century man was in the good company of others including many of our “founding fathers”. In the 1790 census, Jonathan Randall Esquire owned three slaves in Pomfret. We don’t know how many were still living on his property in Cranston, RI. There were 15 slave owners in Pomfret in 1790 including his neighbors, the Grosvenor’s. Most of them owned one or two captives on paper but Godfrey Malbone in nearby Brooklyn had at least two dozen. Although the Gradual Abolition Act stated that any negro or mulatto child born after 1784 must be freed at the age of 25 (later 21), slave-owners didn’t give up their “property” easily. The 1784 Act may have contributed to the decline of slavery in Connecticut, but it wasn’t until 1845 that all slaves in Connecticut were freed. Between 1784 and 1845, enslaved people were still at the whims of masters when it came to manumitting them at age 21. In one case, a gentleman in Woodstock sold an eight-year-old back and forth to a neighbor on paper over the course of several years. Each time he re-acquired her she was still eight-years old even though she would have been in her late twenties and legally free. Those who were born before the Act of 1784, could be held until they were too old to work, and then cruelly turned out to fend for themselves. Laws had to be passed to prevent slave owners from abandoning elderly or feeble slaves because towns didn’t want to be responsible for them. The laws ensured proper burials and care of elderly slaves.

In Susan Griggs’ 1949 book, *Folklore and Firesides*, she mentions that “the late Mary Webster and Lucretia Taylor were descendants of the Randall Slaves”. They were sisters and the great granddaughters of Reuben Randall who was born in 1777 in Pomfret. Reuben was one of Jonathan Randall’s enslaved Africans. In 1827, Reuben married Waity Brooks of Ashford in the Westford church. The Brooks family had Nipmuc heritage. Charles Webster’s grandmother, Sarah, was also a Brooks, so both families were part Nipmuc. Reuben and Waity had a daughter, Phebe, who married Sandford Whitehouse and they had a daughter, Almira Lucretia. Lucretia Whitehouse married William Lambert in 1860 despite some bad blood between Waity Brooks and William.

Lucretia and Mary Lambert were the daughters of William and Lucretia Lambert who lived in the little settlement in Eastford where Charles Webster’s grave is. Lucretia was born about 1865 and Mary in 1869. Lucretia Lambert married William Taylor in 1889. Mary Lambert

continued on next page

Ode to the Winter Biker

Ed. note: A note from Elizabeth Huebner of Willimantic - I thought you might be interested in an article my brother-in-law wrote about biking in the winter. He lives in MN which makes it even more amazing that he bikes all year long. He has parkinsons disesase now and so is no longer a bike delivery person which he did until a few years ago (he is 67) but still bikes in the winter in Minneapolis. I asked him if I could submit his piece and he said sure! He writes a left wing political newsletter called Nygaard Notes (<https://www.nygaardnotes.org>) and is a writer I respect.

By Jeff Nygaard

I’ll never forget my first time. East 15th Street, Minneapolis, right where it crosses 35W. Fresh snow, well-traveled intersection, my bike goes out from under me. Flat on my back, bike on top, suddenly I’m sliding westbound toward the Convention Center. Maybe it hurt, maybe it didn’t. All I remember is thinking, “Yeaaaaahhh! I LOVE this winter biking!”

Twenty-some years later, now I’m that nut on the bike, the one you hate so much, swerving down the street through that gritty snow, threatening to wipe out right under your front bumper and ruin your goddamn day. I’m sharing the road with you whether you like it or not. So deal with it.



Contributed photo. Not Jeff Nygaard.

I’m hooked. You can’t get me off this bike now. I got the mittens, I got the mask, I got the shoes, I got the boots. I got the wool, I got the cotton, I got the synthetic materials came all the way from Finland. You want bikes? I got bikes. I find ‘em, I buy ‘em, I build ‘em. I ride ‘em with an attitude.

You gotta have the attitude, or you won’t last. I’ve been screamed at to get off the street, I’ve been screamed at to get off the sidewalk. You’re always getting screamed at by people who feel bad about being trapped in their auto-centric lives. You can’t take it personal.

They’re screamin’ at me because they know I’m screamin’ at them. “You got to BREATHE, people!” I’m screamin’. “Get out of that car and FEEL that wind-chill hittin’ you in the face! You got to have the tears ROLLIN’ down your cheeks ‘til they freeze on your chin and you start LAUGHIN’ hysterical because you’re so cold you can’t feel nothin’ no more!”

Can you imagine getting out of that car and biking to work when it’s twenty-two degrees below zero Fahrenheit? Bikers don’t need jumper cables, man, we got hot coffee and we got those legs. We got the freedom that comes with the revolution of the wheel and the wheel is put into motion by those legs.

Those legs start working and your blood is moving through your veins and you are warm at the core. You are free, and you are biking right past those people cranking their engines, hurling sand under their spinning wheels, and scraping their pathetic windshields, and you are laughing at the privatized petroleum culture that spawns this absurdity, denying it and defying it and leaving it behind and boy does it feel good. It feels good to lift a frostbit finger to obscenely reject the extraction and the vile abstractions, and it’s all done in a sort of holy reaction to this auto-insanity that is the Car Culture. It feels so good you can’t imagine.

Wind-chill be damned. You can’t get me off this bike now.

ended up marrying Charles Webster’s younger brother, Edgar, who was born in 1866, two years after Charles died in the Civil War.

Charles Webster had a younger brother, Daniel, born in 1843. Daniel and Charles mustered into the 29th Colored Regiment on the same day, March 8, 1864. Daniel had enlisted on December 28, 1863 listing his residence as “Suffield”, while Charles enlisted six days later listing his residence as Pomfret. It’s likely that Daniel listed himself as living in Suffield because they offered a decent bounty. In 1860, Charles was 19 and living on the Samuel Sumner farm as a laborer. Daniel was 17 and living on the William Sherman farm in the same neighborhood, also working as a laborer. Within five years, the two young men would be among the 40,000 African American casualties of the Civil War. Charles died in Hilton Head, South Carolina, the first stop the 29th regiment made while awaiting orders. He was discharged with a disability on May 24, 1864, and died June 17th, probably in an army hospital. Daniel died in “The Gulf of Mexico”, June 20th, 1865. The regiment had just sailed down to Brazos de Santiago, known as Brazos Island on June 10th, where they awaited orders to muster out and return to Hartford. According to army records, Daniel died of acute dysentery either on ship or in an army hospital about 4 months before the regiment mustered out and returned to Connecticut.

Through census, birth, and death records I’ve been able to trace some of the Lambert and Webster families. I am still sorting out patterns of work and labor between the families. So far, I’ve discovered that free blacks who were the descendants of African captives and Nipmuc Indians were listed as black or mullato depending on the date of the census. They were mostly laborers on farms in the mid to late 19th century and can be found later working in lumber camps. Mary Webster shows up in 1920 living on the Andrew Sharp farm in a rented house. Her sons Charles Lord Webster, William, Irving and Irving’s wife, Rebecca Taylor Webster also lived in the house. Charles and his brothers listed themselves as teamsters and laborers in Andrew Sharp’s lumber camp. Andrew Sharp listed himself as a “lumberman”, meaning that he owned a sawmill. Mary and her daughter-in-law, Rebecca, were housekeepers working for a private family, possibly on the Goodrich Estate which was next door to the Sharpe farm. Mary’s husband, Edgar Webster had died in 1915 and she was listed as a widow. By 1928, her son William was working in Frank Paine’s sawmill on Drown Road and in the 1960’s he rented a small house along the railroad in the Elliot section of Pomfret.

The skin tone of Pomfret, like many rural towns in Northeast Connecticut, was browner than it is today. In the early 1800’s free blacks were scattered across the landscape living on farms as laborers, working in lumber camps and quarries. Some were in transition from enslavement to low-wage laborers. The census reports from the early 19th century list African Americans and Native Americans as slave, black or mulatto.

Where to find the Neighbors paper

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Coventry Highland Park Market Meadowbrook Spirits Coventry Laundromat Subway Booth and Dimock Library Song-A-Day Music	
Eastford Eastford Post Office	

In the 1810 and 1820 census, Reuben Randall was living in Ashford and was head of household. His household included two free blacks and two slaves. The free blacks were of an age where they would have been manumitted at age 21 (born after 1784), possibly Reuben’s siblings. Reuben, born in 1777 missed that opportunity and would have legally “belonged” to the descendants of Jonathan Randall. He was the oldest. There was another enslaved member of the household, 25 and over and not yet free, indicating the complexity of the gradual abolition act of 1784. By the 1830 census there are no slaves in Reuben’s household. It’s just his wife and child. Waity Brooks was later listed as Mulatto on census reports which makes me wonder if the Nipmucs and other Native Americans were generally listed as mulatto rather than black.	In 1856, Mary Malbone was living in a small house next to Samuel Sumner’s sawmill on Lyon Brook. She was listed as black. That house may have been a tenant house for the Summer Farm. Samuel Sumner also owned the Sumner Tavern about a mile east. It’s possible that Charles Webster lived in the house during the 1860 census when he was working for Sumner – especially if he worked in the sawmill. Mary or her husband would have been the descendant of one of Godfrey Malbone’s slaves. Labor had transitioned from enslaved servants and farm laborers to low-wage service. It’s possible that Mary worked as a housekeeper or cook at the Sumner Tavern.
By the late 19th century, work became scarce in rural areas as many struggling farms were sold off to wealthy landowners. Eventually tractors and other vehicles had usurped the need for farm laborers or teamsters in lumber camps. However, there was a gilded age in Pomfret where locals including African Americans could find work on the large estates. In 1883 and into the 1920’s, the descendants of Reuben Randall were still working for the Randall family. Anna Maria and Amasa Lambert were servants in George Randall Jr.’s house in Cranston and Pomfret. But many of the estates went to ruin during the Depression and the descendants of enslaved Africans migrated to mill towns and cities in search of work. Yet fragments of their lives remain in the understory of Northeast Connecticut. Lonely Civil War grave markers, unmarked fieldstones in a burial ground, and cryptic census reports molder in the rich soil of an American story waiting to be told.	
<div><div>To all our contributors- Thank You!</div><div>Without your submissions of writing, poetry, artwork and photographs, this paper would not exist. T. King, Publisher</div></div>	

Build a Raised Garden Bed



(StatePoint) Fairly easy to construct and even easier to maintain, raised garden beds are a great way to raise plants and vegetables in the comfort and convenience of your backyard.

In a recent episode of the Exmark Original Series, “Done-in-A-Weekend-Extreme,” landscape designer and show host, Doug Scott, spoke to organic gardener Joe Lamp’l of “Growing a Greener World” about the ins and outs of raised garden beds.

Here are some of the top insights and tips Lamp’l shared.

Why use raised garden beds? A raised garden bed can help facilitate the ideal growing environment, as most people don’t have that perfect soil naturally in their yard. Their accessibility makes them easier to work in and maintain. Plus, they’re a nice architectural design element in any landscape.

What’s the ideal size? The main rule of the thumb applies to width. The bed should be no wider than 4 feet, as you never want to compact the soil when working. Length however, is based on personal preference and needs. As far as height is concerned, you want the roots to be able to grow out and down as much as possible -- 6-inches at minimum. While 12-inches is common, anything higher is a bonus.

What materials work best? Treated lumber is the most readily available and economical material and will likely last the longest, however, being an organic gardener Lamp’l prefers untreated hardwood, as it lasts almost as long and doesn’t contain chemicals. Other materials you have around the home and yard, such as rocks, old tubs, etc., can work too.

Where’s the best location? Build your raised garden bed on level ground, in full sun exposure near a water supply.

To build a 10-foot x 4-foot x 18-inch raised bed, you’ll need:

- Nine 6-inch x 6-inch x 12-foot cedar timbers
- Tape measure, t-square and marking pencil
- A saw and extension cord
- One box of 10-inch heavy-duty exterior wood screws
- Ten 24-inch x 1/2-inch rebar stakes
- Twenty 10-inch galvanized timber spikes
- Sledgehammer
- Impact drill and long drill bit
- Level, Hammer, Shovels, Hardware cloth, wire cutters and fence staples
- Work gloves, safety glasses and ear plugs
- Wheelbarrow (to transport soil)

1. Begin by cutting six, 6 x 6 timbers, each measuring 10-feet 6-inches in length. And six, 6 x 6 timbers, each measuring 4-feet 6-inches in length. Drill rebar holes in each timber.
2. Once the first layer of bed has been placed, leveled and squared in your desired location, fasten the corners using 10-inch wood screws. Secure the entire layer to the ground with 10 pieces of rebar.
3. Place the second layer of timbers, staggering the corners and fastening them with wood screws. Secure this layer to the first with ten 10-inch galvanized spikes.
4. Install galvanized cloth to prevent burrowing pests from eating earthworms and destroying plants.
5. Place the third layer of timbers (following above directions.)
6. Fill with soil and plants.

For more tips and complete build instructions, check out “How to Build Raised Garden Beds” by visiting Exmark.com/backyard. Exmark’s Backyard Life is part of a unique multimedia destination with a focus on helping homeowners make the most of their backyard. There you can also access other series, including “Prime Cuts” and “Dream Yards.”

Note: Some locations may be closed due to pandemic.

What is The Garden Club of Windham?

For the Garden Club of Windham, 2021 is a Brand New Spring: New Beginnings, New Growth, and New Members. Join Us!

Submitted by Pam Wright, President

The Garden Club of Windham is a big tent organization where members from Windham and surrounding towns can meet and enjoy the many different aspects of gardening. We all have individual reasons for first joining: perhaps to exercise creativity, or share our love of beautiful, healthy plants, to learn more about the different species and sustainable gardening, to fulfill a desire for community involvement, or just to enjoy the pleasure of being outdoors, surrounded by nature, either alone or with like minded companions. Our garden club is a place for all these things.

A Little History:

Our first project, our “raison d’être” if you will, was the Garden on The Bridge. We enlisted help from the Town, the CT Master Gardener Association and many other local groups and volunteers who worked as partners with us in this marvelous endeavor. This beautiful pedestrian pathway across the Willimantic River remains our signature project.



Blooming Hydrangeas, colorful annuals and late blooming perennials line the sidewalk near the Lower Main Street entrance to the Garden on the Bridge.

In the following years Garden Club members took on the tasks of cleaning up and beautifying many additional public spaces in and around our town, creating the Schilberg Butterfly Garden, many small pocket gardens around town. and adding and caring for plants in existing public areas.

Our mission is not only to beautify our surroundings, but to share our love and knowledge of Gardening. We believe that Gardeners play an important role in protecting and preserving the environment around us. We have always had an annual plant sale, information booths at numerous public fairs and festivals, suggested activities, and presentations on topics related to the interests of our members.



Schilberg Butterfly Garden at Jillson Square 2020 with native JoePye Weed, Rudbeckia and Purple Cone Flowers in full bloom providing a haven for butterflies.

The Community Wildlife Habitat Committee was our first ‘special interest’ Ad Hoc Committee, eventually becoming a standing committee of the club. It reflects the sustainable gardening and environmental interests of our group.



Volunteers planting a native Tulip Tree in Memorial Park, phase two of the 325 Trees Project. The Tulip Tree, (Liriodendron tulipifera) is a large beautiful native suitable for parks due to its size. reaching well over 100 feet in height. Its straight trunk was used by Native Americans for their long-boat canoes and Daniel Boone also used the wood of this tree for his 60’ dugout canoe. George Washington planted tulip trees at Mount Vernon which are now 140’ tall. Like other natives it has significant wildlife value. This tree provides food for many animals. Young trees provide Winter browse for white-tailed deer and rabbits. The spring flowers provide nectar for ruby-throated hummingbirds. Tuliptree seeds, maturing in summer and persisting into winter, provide food for both birds and mammals, including finches, cardinals, quail, mice, red squirrels, gray squirrels and rabbits.

With the help of the National Wildlife Federation of America, we developed activities to raise awareness of the individual gardener’s role in preserving the health of our environment. Stressing the role of native plants and animals in our ecosystem, we created plantings, educational activities and engaged in community outreach. We developed partnerships with the town, the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, civic organizations, schools, churches and individual homeowners.

Our efforts were rewarded in 2011 when we were officially recognized by the N.W.F. as a National Community Wildlife Habitat City. We have maintained our yearly re-certification ever since, and remain one of only two cities so recognized in Connecticut.

Our most recent endeavor is to work with the Pollinator Pathways Organization here in Eastern CT, to create, connect, and label pollinator friendly areas, and to educate and engage the public concerning the importance of this project. Tips on wildlife gardening and sustainable living are posted on our “Willimantic Wildlife Habitat” Facebook page.

Concern for the health (and beauty) of our local environment also led to our 325 Trees Project. Much damage has been done to our natural native New England tree cover over the past years. Natural decline, urban growth, and the introduction of alien insects, diseases and plants have all greatly damaged our local ecosystem. To celebrate the 325th anniversary of the incorporation of our



2010 photo of the original Community Wildlife Habitat Certification Team Jean DesMet, Faith Kenton, Pam Wright, Lynn White and Marty LaVoy.

town in 2017, the Garden Club proposed the planting of “325” relatively mature native trees to replace those lost to age and urbanization. This multiyear project has more than met its original goals. It will conclude next year with the planting of a wildflower meadow at the High Street entrance to the town. Happily, this natural setting to our Victorian City’s “Welcome” sign, will also serve as a way station for pollinators visiting or passing through.

This year, member Faith Kenton is chairing a new committee, The Friends of the Garden on the Bridge, established to renovate, improve and repair the ravages that the last 15 years of heavy use have visited upon this scenic public pathway. Goals include repairing planters and renovating the Pleasant Street entrance to the Bridge.



Native Rudbeckia blooming along The “East Coast Greenway” Path through Willimantic provide a bright spot for pollinators and pedestrians.



Volunteers planting native trees along High Street during 2020, the third year of the project. Vibrant Autumn colors of the native Sourwood (Oxydendrom arboreum) and Blackgum (Nyssa sylvatica) are in the spotlight now, but Spring will see blossoms on Crabapples, Fringe Trees and native Azaleas.

Whatever your particular interest in gardening, whether you are a “newbie” or an ‘old hand’, we hope you will consider joining us in 2021. Whether you enjoy playing in the dirt, want to swap plants, love learning about attracting the ‘birds and the bees’ (and other info on sustainable gardening topics or just wish to keep an eye on what’s going on in town, Join Us for as much or as little time as you wish. We will enjoy your company. Let’s grow together in 2021.

Applications to join The Garden Club of Windham are available at the Windham Town Hall, and information about meetings and activities can be found on the Facebook Page of the “Garden Club of Windham.”



Phlox, daylilies, Fleabane, Milkweed, Mountain Mint and Sunflowers brighten this certified wildlife garden along the city sidewalk at the site of White Water Park on Bridge Street.