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SUMMER 2020

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WELCOME

PUBLISHER'S NOTE



Cara Rosner

Welcome to the summer issue of *Seasons of New Haven!*

Like the rest of the world, our region is experiencing unprecedented times. Greater New Haven families, businesses, nonprofits, schools and neighborhoods have faced challenges we never could have imagined just a few short months ago. We hope this issue makes you smile even as so much uncertainty remains.

When Mayor Justin Elicker was sworn in to New Haven's top post on Jan. 1 of this year, the city – like the country and the world – was in a very different place than it is now. The Elm City had its challenges, and Elicker had ideas and plans to address them, but the COVID-19 pandemic pushed some of those priorities on the back burner as more pressing tasks emerged.

One recent afternoon, Elicker took some time out of his increasingly busy schedule to discuss what it's been like leading New Haven in a pandemic, some of his favorite local spots, and what he looks forward to most once the pandemic ends.

On the lighter side, we look at the rich history of the singing group The Carpenters, which has strong ties to New Haven; and catch up with the Connecticut Sun, a team eyeing a WNBA championship this season after coming so close last year. We also catch up with golfer Ken Green, whose journey overcoming emotional and physical hardships has inspired many; and explore ways to have fun with kids in the kitchen, since many of us are spending more time than usual at home with little ones.

Happy reading,

Cara

Cara Rosner
Editor

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NEW HAVEN
MAGAZINE

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Editor

Cara Rosner

Creative Director

Stacy Wright Murray

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Stan Godlewski

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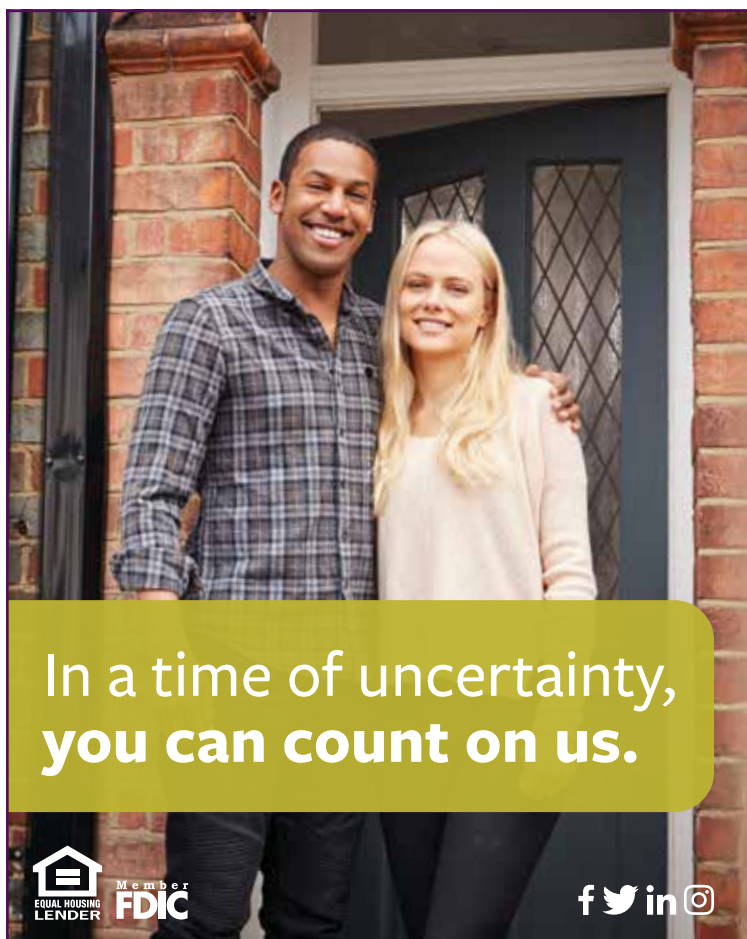
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TAKING THE LEAD

Mayor Justin Elicker guides New Haven through an historic time

by CARA ROSNER / photography by STAN GODLEWSKI

Leading one of Connecticut's largest and most diverse cities is no easy task under typical circumstances. But just a couple months into his first term, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker – like the rest of the world – was thrown a major curveball when the COVID-19 pandemic dominated the political, social, and cultural landscapes.

Throughout the crisis, Elicker, who lives in the East Rock neighborhood with his wife and two young daughters, has been a near-constant presence to New Haveners, hosting press briefings almost daily to provide updates. From his earliest days as a mayoral candidate, he was eager to connect with his constituents, often organizing events where citizens could ask questions, voice concerns, and share their love of New Haven face to face. These days his outreach continues, though largely virtually.

One recent afternoon, more than two months into the COVID-19 outbreak, Elicker, 44, took time out of a busy day to talk – via Zoom – about what it's like to lead New Haven, some of his favorite local spots, and what he most looks forward to when the city emerges from the pandemic.

Q: WHAT LED YOU TO PURSUE A CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE?

A: I've spent most of my life doing things that were focused on having positive impact on the world. I've been a teacher in multiple capacities

[at the elementary and high school levels, as well as at Southern Connecticut State University], I was in the U.S. Foreign Service for five years, I was an alder for four years. We're on this Earth to leave it better than we found it. I've always been seeking ways to maximize my ability to positively affect the world. At the same time, there's an increasing lack of trust in government, and "politics" has become a bad word. I could complain about it [but] I felt like it was important to do something. So, I ran for mayor – twice. [Before he defeated former Mayor Toni Harp in November 2019, Elicker was narrowly defeated by her in 2013's mayoral race.]


Q: WHAT IS THE HARDEST PART ABOUT LEADING NEW HAVEN DURING THE PANDEMIC?

A: There are a lot of things that are challenging. The biggest challenge is knowing that there may be some things that we could have done faster, differently, that could have literally saved people's lives. In normal times, we often say things like that and it may or may not be true – but in these times, literally, if you don't make a decision one day or you make the wrong decision one day, that decision in two weeks may result in more people getting sick and potentially dying.

Our team has been working just nonstop. One of the most enjoyable parts of the work are the people that I'm working with. It's been so inspiring. Our staff is working incredible hours.



Elicker, who lives in the city's East Rock neighborhood, can often be seen biking to his office at New Haven City Hall.

A man with short brown hair, wearing a white dress shirt and a purple tie, stands in a room with large windows. He is looking out the window with a slight smile. The room has dark wood paneling and a window with blinds on the left. A semi-transparent purple box contains white text at the bottom left.

“The biggest challenge is knowing that there may be some things that we could have done faster, differently, that could have literally saved people’s lives.”



IN THIS TOGETHER: Throughout the pandemic, Elicker has called the family of every city resident who has died from COVID-19. But he also sees signs of hope: "It's amazing how people have been determined to continue life, even though it feels as if life has been shut down," he says.

I email my corporation counsel at 11 at night and she responds at 11:02, and that's the same for pretty much everyone on our team, because they care about the work and understand the urgency at hand.

I call the family members of people (New Haven residents) who have passed because of COVID. That part of the job inspires me more than it makes me feel down because in talking with the family members, it's incredible how strong people are. In a time when they're losing a close loved one, which is difficult enough, but then to add on top of that they probably weren't able to hold that person's hand or hug that person to say goodbye. They may have said goodbye over FaceTime, they can't get together with their family members or relatives in the typical way that we mourn. But they still say, "I understand why," and I find that inspiring about our community – that people are able to get through this tough time and show strength.

Q: WHAT OTHER UPLIFTING SIGNS OF HOPE OR COMMUNITY HAVE YOU SEEN DURING THESE DIFFICULT TIMES?

A: There are so many examples of that. Everything from news reporters attaching their mics to a long boom now so that they can interview you and keep themselves and you safe, to my daughter's school having a parade of teachers in their cars drive around the neighborhood, going by the houses of all the students with their cars decorated and their windows open, beeping and waving, to the public safety workers' salute to hospital workers, to the artists finding ways to entertain and inspire the community from their front porches or on Zoom. It's amazing how people have been determined to continue life, even though it feels as if life has been shut down.

Q: WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

A: My 1.5-year-old calls out at 5:40 a.m. and my wife and I look at each other and are both thinking, "It's your turn, right?" One of us gets up and hangs out with her until the 5-year-old wakes up. Then we make breakfast and get dressed. Then I head to the office – sometimes I bike, sometimes I drive.

There are only a couple of us in the office [due to the

pandemic]. I'm on Zoom almost all day. We have an 8:30 a.m. call with our core staff to discuss the ongoing projects and the emergency issues that have come up. There are lots of other meetings throughout the day. There are a lot of other partner organizations that are working to address the crisis throughout the day. I have a daily call with some members of the Board of Alders to bring them up to speed with changes. We typically have a daily press conference on Zoom. I try to get home, when I can, to have a brief dinner and get my girls to bed, then I'll hop on my computer to get to my emails and some phone calls.

Q: WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO ENJOY NEW HAVEN WITH YOUR FAMILY?

A: We love going to parks to hike and play. My daughter Molly, in particular, loves the playgrounds. We love going out to pizza. [He declines to name which of the city's famed pizza restaurants is his favorite]. It [the pizza choice] depends on the day and depends on the mood. We like to eat ice cream downtown and being with friends.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE PLACES TO EAT IN NEW HAVEN?

A: At City Hall, when life was normal, I would go to Tikkaway [Grill] or Duc's [Place]. I'd get my coffee at Cafe Java in the morning. That feels like an eternity ago.

Q: ONCE THE PANDEMIC PASSES, WHAT IS IT ABOUT NEW HAVEN THAT YOU ARE MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING RETURN?

A: Even though we're trying to connect with each other over Zoom and remotely, it's so different to interact with each other directly. One of the things we don't have right now are the random interactions where you run into people who you're not intending to run into, but you have a conversation, an interaction that you may have not been expecting but you can benefit from in so many ways. I miss that. Because I think that when you're only seeking out those individuals who you intend to seek out, you don't grow as much as a person, you can't learn as much about the world around you, your ideas aren't challenged as much. And I think those interactions help make us whole and keep us interesting. 🐾



Dr. Amy Wasterlain

When Middlesex Health orthopedist Amy Wasterlain, MD, first set her sights on becoming a physician, she didn't think orthopedic surgery was even an option. "The whole stereotype was that you had to be a big, strong man to go into that field," she recalls. "I thought I physically wouldn't be able to do it and was intimidated."

But early in her first year of medical school, she met a female orthopedist, an encounter that would influence the trajectory of her career. After scrubbing in with her in the operating room and observing her in the orthopedic clinic, Dr. Wasterlain was hooked. "I discovered that orthopedics is a fantastic specialty to go into, where you have a wonderful opportunity to improve patients' quality of life," she says.

Today, Dr. Wasterlain, in turn, works to encourage and empower younger women to become orthopedic surgeons by teaching an annual outreach workshop for The Perry Initiative, a nonprofit organization geared toward inspiring girls to become leaders in the traditionally male-dominated fields of orthopedics and engineering. "We're seeing huge increases in the numbers of surgery residents who are female," she says with pride.

A PASSION FOR TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE

A native New Yorker, Dr. Wasterlain grew up in Brooklyn and Manhattan. She studied molecular biology at Princeton University, where she developed a strong interest in research and considered pursuing an MD or combined MD/PhD. "But I ultimately realized that I was able to get my research goals accomplished if I went the MD route," she says. "My passion was really in taking care of people rather than in bench research."

She earned her medical degree at Stanford University, and did her residency at the NYU Hospital for Joint Diseases in

New York. She completed an additional year of fellowship training in adult reconstruction (hip and knee replacement) at the Rothman Orthopaedic Institute in Philadelphia.

"For my entire life, I always thought I'd be a New Yorker," she says. But then an alumnus from her residency program reached out to her class regarding a possible position with Middlesex Health. "I really fell in love with the shoreline area as a place to live with my family, but I was also really compelled with the need out here for a joint reconstruction specialist."

Dr. Wasterlain, who joined the Middlesex staff last August, treats a wide range of orthopedic conditions, the most common of which is arthritis, the chronic degeneration of cartilage. "Evolutionarily, the human species used to only live a maximum of 30 years – so our cartilage often, unfortunately, doesn't last as long as our bodies do," she explains. "With age, you get wear and tear of the cartilage."

According to Dr. Wasterlain, age isn't the only risk factor for arthritis: Obesity increases the rate of joint degradation. Prolonged cortisone use can also make people more susceptible. Sometimes people who are on high doses of steroids

for asthma or autoimmune diseases experience avascular necrosis – or a loss of blood supply to the bones – which can lead to arthritis.

Whatever the cause, she says, arthritis is the most common reason that patients end up requiring hip and knee replacements.

IMPROVING HIP REPLACEMENTS

Though both congenital abnormalities in bone structure (dysplasia) and fractures can lead to the need for hip replacement, arthritis is the driving force behind hip problems for most replacement patients, she notes. The main symptoms that bring these patients to her office are groin or buttocks pain, sometimes radiating down to the thigh or the knee.

"People will complain of pain with any kind of rotation,



like swinging a golf club, getting in or out of a car, or even trying to put on shoes and socks,” she explains. “When it’s really starting to affect your quality of life – when you’re noticing pain with really basic activities, that’s when it’s time to consult an orthopedist.”

Though Dr. Wasterlain is a surgeon, she emphasizes that there are “a slew of nonsurgical things that we can – and will – do for patients before considering surgery.”

Orthopedists, she says, “are there to help you move more easily, with less pain, and restore the quality of life for everything related to movement.” Sometimes this can be done with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin), or by having patients modify their activities (if they’re having pain mostly while running, for example, they might switch to biking). Physical therapy, typically used to strengthen the muscles around the hip to improve gait mechanics and take pressure off the joint, could also help.

“The last non-surgical thing I recommend is a cortisone shot,” she says, “especially for people who aren’t ready emotionally to consider surgery, or who want a temporary step that gives them relief for one to three months so that they can enjoy the summer, or an important upcoming event.” But she notes that she typically won’t administer cortisone shots more than two or three times, as they have diminishing returns. “If the first one lasted three months, it’s pretty common that the next one will only last one to two months,” she says.

The good news, she says, is that hip replacement surgery has improved greatly over the last couple of decades, thanks to longer-lasting replacement joints and enhanced techniques, resulting in quicker recovery times, fewer restrictions after surgery, and less post-operative pain. In terms of surgical technique, Dr. Wasterlain says, the anterior approach has recently gained favor.

“There are many different ways you can get through the skin to the hip – anterior (through the front), posterior (from the back), and lateral (side) approaches,” she explains. “Most studies show that the end result in a year is fairly similar, but anecdotal evidence from my patients and some literature shows faster recovery time with the anterior approach.”

Typically, with other approaches, patients are advised to restrict motion in the first six weeks. Although Dr. Wasterlain still uses the posterior approach for more complex replacements, she says that patients with whom she has used the anterior approach can be off narcotics and walking without a limp in less than two weeks, versus somewhere between four and six weeks with other techniques.

Hip replacement materials have also improved over the past 20 years, with dramatically superior plastics today that wear away much more slowly. Another advance, Dr. Wasterlain notes, is that “we now have hip replacements without cement, so that the bone actually grows onto the hip replacement, increasing its longevity and reducing the risk of loosening over time.” The material in these

replacements, she says, can theoretically last up to 60 years. “The goal is that the hip replacement outlasts the patient.”

IMPLANTS THAT MIMIC THE NATURAL KNEE

Knee replacement surgery has benefited from similar advances, with more durable implants that more closely mimic the mechanics of the natural knee joint. “There are new shapes and designs in knee replacement that try to reproduce the natural movement of the joint,” Dr. Wasterlain explains. “While the hip is a very simple ball and socket joint that you can recreate with a sphere and concave socket, the knee is much more challenging for surgeons and biomechanics to reproduce.”

Like the newer artificial hip joints, today’s knee replacements are made of longer-lasting materials. And while the standard of care has been to use cement as a kind of “bone grout” to “glue the components to the bone,” cement-less knee replacements – which would allow the bone to grow onto the artificial joints – have recently been introduced.

Arthritic wear and tear is what necessitates total or partial knee replacement in many patients. In some cases, traumatic injury to one part of the bone may also be an indication for partial knee replacement. (Untreated ACL or meniscal tears can also lead to arthritis, and ultimately, the need for replacement.)

Like those with hip problems, patients suffering from knee issues may benefit from the use of NSAIDs, physical therapy or cortisone shots. “Gel shots, which increase lubrication in the knee joint, can also help some people, though the evidence is mixed,” Dr. Wasterlain adds.

In addition to performing routine joint replacements, she also specializes in complex replacements – essentially, “re-dos” of failed replacements. In these cases, “there is typically damage to the underlying bone, so you need to get more creative in restoring what bone used to be there – that’s where the extra training comes in handy.”

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

According to Dr. Wasterlain, orthopedic surgery results in immediate improvements to a patient’s quality of life, making it an extremely rewarding field. “I have patients coming in with a severe limp, miserable doing the most basic of things, like getting in and out of the car or falling asleep at night. In the course of an hour, I can replace a hip and eliminate their arthritis pain for good.”

When Dr. Wasterlain isn’t working, she enjoys spending time biking with her husband, playing with her two children and the family’s new goldendoodle, or engaging in what she calls a “dorky pastime” of hers – quilting. She took her first quilting class at around age 5.

“Quilting fits with my personality – I like fitting things together into complex geometric patterns,” she says. “It sort of reminds me of the thrill I get when I fix a fracture and the bone fragments go together nicely.” ■

Lori Miller Kase is a freelance writer living in Simsbury.

A person with curly hair, seen from behind, is walking two dogs on leashes along a path in a park. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows. The trees are tall and thin, and the grass is green with some fallen leaves. The text "The best anywhere right here" is overlaid on the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

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ON HIS GAME:
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Curt Miller keeps an
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Eyes on the Prize

After coming so close to a championship last year, the Connecticut Sun is hungry in 2020

By **JOHN TORSIELLO** / *Photography courtesy of CT Sun*

In early spring, Connecticut Sun head coach and general manager Curt Miller was still wishing he had a few minutes back from the fifth and deciding game of the 2019 WNBA Championship Series against the Washington Mystics.

With the series tied at two games all and the championship on the line in game five, the Sun was up by three points with just under seven minutes to play. Then the bubble burst; the Mystics went on a 13-2 run that powered them to an 89-78 victory and the title. What also stung the Sun's coach and players was the fact that they had led in the game by as many as nine points in the third quarter. They were, oh, so close – they could almost feel the trophy in their hands.

"If we could have a portion of game five back, where a couple of calls went against us and changed the whole momentum," says Miller wistfully. "But that is what makes our game so special," adds the fifth-year coach. "It's a chess match, and things happen and calls are made

or not made that completely change the game. It's difficult to describe the feeling of losing in game five of the championship series. But it leaves a pit in your stomach."

It was the third time the Sun had advanced to the championship series in its 18 years of existence and the first time since 2005.

Despite the difficult-to-process loss, Miller calls last year "a great ride."

"When I was hired four years ago, a lot of people wondered if Connecticut would ever truly compete for a title again," he says. Indeed, the Sun had endured three straight losing seasons. Miller's first team went 14-21. Then came back-to-back 21-13 campaigns, and then a 23-11 regular season record and a playoff sweep (3-0) of the Los Angeles Sparks last year. "In many ways, it was incredibly gratifying to watch our building process over four years and to get to the championship series."

So, for Miller, it's a hoop half-empty, half-full approach to 2019.



MAKING A MOVE:
Forward Alyssa Thomas comes
down the court.

Amber Cox, vice president of the team, calls 2019 “such a special season for our entire organization and our incredible fan base. A run like that is not only memorable for our long-time fans but, with all the exposure and excitement, we welcomed many new fans into the Sun family. We’re looking forward to carrying that momentum into the 2020 season,” she says.

Cox says last year’s team had tremendous chemistry. “The core had been together for four years, so both on the court and off, the group had a special connection. They wanted to win for each other. It was always team first.”

For Connecticut native Bria Holmes, a guard who averaged 6.3 points a game in 2019, last year was definitely a fun ride.

“That experience will be unforgettable,” she says. “The key to getting to the finals was that every single person was locked in and ready to play when their number was called.” She says the team “practiced hard day in and day out” and “went to battle every game, giving it our all.”

When they hired him, Sun management allowed Miller time to build a winner “from a core group of players” and end what had been an almost-constant turnover of the roster in previous years. It was a similar approach to the ones Miller had used in building winning programs at the collegiate level (at Bowling Green University and Indiana University as a head coach).

“It all came together last year,” says Miller, “and management made the decision to go all-in on the season, push the chips in, and give us the players to make a run at a championship. We knew we would lose some of our free agents after the season and that our 2020 roster was going to look different.”

The Sun will indeed have a new look in 2020 after losing several players to free agency. But Connecticut landed probably the prize of free agency, DeWanna Bonner; added several other pieces; and will welcome back players who played roles in the drive to the championship series. Bonner is a two-time WNBA champion and three-time All-Star.

“We knew we would lose some players, especially given the new collective bargaining agreement,” says Cox. “Change can be difficult because bonds are formed. I’ll certainly miss seeing the players who moved on. But it’s a business and, ultimately, change is inevitable in sports. We’re excited about the players who are still with us – who

understand our culture – and we are thrilled about the players we’ve been able to add during free agency.”

Cox believes “we absolutely can get right back to where we were a year ago and hopefully hang a championship banner for these fans.”

In addition to Bonner, Cox referred to the addition of Briann January, an 11-year WNBA Champion and All-Star who averaged close to 7 points and four assists a game in 2019; as well as a player familiar to UConn fans, Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis. Mosqueda-Lewis is one of the elite three-point shooters in the WNBA and a proven winner at the collegiate and pro levels. The veteran leadership will gel nicely with a core of Jonquel Jones, Alyssa Thomas and Jasmine Thomas.

Jones is a star in her own right and averaged 14.6 points and 9.7 rebounds a game in 2019. Alyssa Thomas scored 11.6 points and hauled in 7.8 rebounds a game, while Jasmine Thomas scored 11.1 points and had 5.1 assists per game. All three figure to play prominent roles in the 2020 season.

Bonner, who plays both the forward and guard positions, averaged 17.2 points and 7.6 rebounds last season and is “beyond excited” about joining the Sun.

“It’s a great organization with amazing staff and players,” she says. “My number one reason to sign with the Sun was to try and help the organization get its first championship. Secondly, Amber, Curt, and I really had the same goals and expectations when we met. We talked and they made me feel extremely comfortable with things, both on and off the court. I think my babies and I will have a great time in Connecticut.”

She called the fan support for the Sun “amazing,” adding, “Connecticut fans always come out, support and show love, so I’m looking forward to connecting with all of them.”

As for the team’s prospects for 2020, Bonner opines, “Of course the cliché answer is to say we have a group of players that can win a championship, which we do. However, it won’t be easy, and we know that, so we are all just super-motivated to put in the work to bring one to Connecticut.”

Mosqueda-Lewis, who played for Seattle and averaged 5.3 points a game in 2019, is excited about re-connecting with fans from her UConn days. “Those were some of my best memories and I am looking forward to making more,” she says. “Hopefully, with me and the other new additions, we can bring something else to the table to make us even

**Connecticut fans
always come out,
support and show
love, so I’m looking
forward to connecting
with all of them.**

—DeWanna Bonner



TEAMWORK: Bria Holmes (left), Alyssa Thomas and the rest of the Connecticut Sun are ready to make headlines again this year.



better. I think this could be an amazing season.”

Holmes, who played at New Haven’s James Hillhouse High School, comes right to the point when asked her goals for the new season: “My expectations are to win a championship for Connecticut and for me to be a better player and teammate than I was last year. It’s always been a dream of mine to play in the WNBA, but to play for my home state is indescribable. It’s so much fun playing in front of my daughter, family and friends. I enjoy the support from my home state’s fans. I have so many family, friends, and supporters that come to every home game to support me and my teammates. The love I get is unreal.”

Holmes is involved heavily in the team’s community outreach efforts, something she takes seriously: “It’s enjoyable knowing we can give back to others and put a smile on others’ faces. It’s more than just basketball. Being in the community and supporting others goes a long way when you’re a professional athlete.”

On his 2020 expectations Miller says, “Obviously, landing Bonner, one of the premier players in the league, was key. We were able to bring back Jonquel Jones as well as Bria Holmes, two other important moves. We were going to lose pieces, but we brought in some great pieces and fan favorites.”

Miller believes his team will “obviously” be one of the championship favorites in 2020. “I feel real good about our starting five and how we look on paper. When we get to training camp, we will see how things work out. We have competition for spots on the roster.”

It will take time for the 2020 Sun to gel and collectively figure out the team’s chemistry, he says. “There will be speed bumps along the way. Our system has worked well for four years but you can’t just snap your fingers and make it happen. We ask that the fans stay patient as we go through trial and error at the start.”

And for those loyal Sun fans who have faithfully followed their team for 18 years and showed up in droves last season at Mo-



STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS: Coach Miller makes sure his players are on the ball.

hegan Sun Arena, Cox has nothing but praise.

“It’s really special. Most of our fans have been with us since the team arrived in 2003,” she says. “There have been highs and lows, but they have never wavered in their support. And again, it’s been great to continue adding new fans, especially young girls and boys who can look up to these WNBA players as role models. Beyond basketball, this team and this league mean so much more. We are a symbol of diversity and equal opportunity.”

The Sun’s regular season was to begin May 16 against the New York Liberty and conclude Sept. 20 against the Mystics. But the season’s start and conclusion will depend on the way the WNBA will handle the Covid-19 crisis. With only a 34-game regular season, the league could well push the start of its season back and not lose any regular season or playoff games.

A number of WNBA players depart for foreign countries to play off-season basketball, which is a factor in any decision. But the league’s new collective bargaining agreement, which increased player salaries, has made it easier for players to stay at home, attend to other careers or family, and not feel the financial pressure to go overseas to play

for additional money to supplement what many considered inadequate WNBA salaries and other compensation.

“It wasn’t just the salaries that were improved,” says Miller, “but taking care of the women in our league with everything from childcare to assisting them with careers outside of basketball. It put our league in a great place, considering we have a high percentage of players who have had to play overseas once our season ends. Now, some players will be happy with the money they make from playing in the WNBA, and may take the six months off to rest their bodies, raise and enjoy their families, and pursue other interests they can get into once the ball stops bouncing.”

Sun fans are hoping the ball indeed keeps bouncing at the Mohegan Sun Arena this summer and into the fall.

John Torsiello is an independent writer and editor living in Torrington, Connecticut and part-time in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. John has written extensively about a wide variety of topics for a number of national, regional and local publications and has won more than two dozen awards for his writing.

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Rock Paper Scissors

The diverse creative visions of six artists contribute to a rich tapestry of Connecticut art

By JOEL SAMBERG / *Photography courtesy of the artists*

My mission was to take readers on an expedition into the special world of local artists – but not just any artists. Those who are making an impact through a striking or unusual interpretation of their artistic vision.

Along the way, I discovered that it's a world of far more than just colors, shapes and interpretations. The Connecticut artists I visited introduced me to a realm of dreams, inspirations, enlightenment, lyricism, memories, experimentation, instinct and, in the words of one of them, even a little mayhem. So forget the *five* senses; these professionals use a few more than those.

This distinctive group, living in different Connecticut towns and creating in distinctly different mediums, proves one other thing: even though they may not be world-famous, they are as unique and noteworthy as the most celebrated artists in the country.

MARK MENNIN

While most artists start with something inanimate – a blank canvas, a can of paint, a piece of wood – Mark Mennin starts with a living organism: stone.

“There is a movement and inner life within a stone,” insists the Bethlehem-based sculptor. “I think about this whenever I see a rock taken out of a quarry. I ask myself, ‘How can I repurpose this rock into a sculptural element? How can we experience an entire evolution of a raw stone into something new?’”

Mennin has been answering his own questions for about 35 years, shaping stone into abstract monoliths that can, with a little resilience and imagination, rep-

resent (and sometimes function as) gigantic pieces of furniture, including beds, pillows and benches, along with other outdoor decor that can appear and function as fountains, sundials, landmarks and other objects, some curious and others even more curious.

“Often the word ‘fabric’ is used as a metaphor, as in the fabric of a person’s soul,” Mennin explains. “Well, stone also has a fabric, which is why a giant piece of furniture made from granite can so easily relate to the human figure – even to the softness of flesh.”

Mennin, raised in a family that revered art and music, was lucky enough to tour Europe as a child, and the majesty and historical significance of much



THE SOFTNESS OF STONE: Mark Mennin creates unexpected pieces from slabs of natural “fabric.”

THE METAL WAY



FORGED IN FIRE:
Sid Werthan's metallic
creations are more than a
little out of the ordinary –
in a word, extraordinary.



DEFYING EXPLANATION: Werthan's work has been called everything from mechanical mayhem to Zen metal mastery.

of what he saw overseas stuck with him. After graduating from Princeton with a degree in history, he returned to Italy, where he began to carve stone. After several solo shows in New York, he moved to Paris, where he had more showings and began to take on commissions.

His installations can be found at New York's Chelsea Market, Stanford University, Penn State, the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Waterbury, and elsewhere. He has also taught at the Parsons School of Design and the New York Academy of Art.

"I had a nice studio in New York City and one in Paris, but both were in urban areas," Mennin says. "When the scale of my projects started to grow, it was impossible to work anywhere in the metro area." Now he does much of his work from a barn studio in Bethlehem, where he resides with his wife, writer Marcia DeSanctis. They have two grown sons, one of whom is a college senior.

Mennin's work has been described by art experts as 'abstract ambiguity,' 'beautiful and elegant,' 'physically appealing,' 'conceptually savvy,' even 'lyrical.' Those are all wonderful testaments to his artistry – though really, the only thing he would like to hear is how his hard work simply conveys the softness of rock.

SID WERTHAN

For a guy who has the word "tradition" wrapped around him in so many ways, Guilford's Sid Werthan is one of the most non-traditional artists I've run across. For one thing, he grew up in a family of traditional landscape and portrait painters; for another, he has worked for years as a traditional karate instructor. And after a few years as an army brat, he settled into a traditional Connecticut childhood. But now, his metal creations – from chairs and tables to banisters and lighting fixtures – almost defy any sort of tradition because of how, in his words, they mesh "sculpture with found objects, digital photography with sound technology, Eastern aesthetics with Japanese Zen Buddhism, and martial arts with motorcycles."

Werthan's work has been called everything from mechanical mayhem to Zen metal mastery.

He attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and Maine College of Art in Portland, where he graduated with an MFA in conceptual theory and studio art. At the beginning of his career, he devoted his activity to what he defined as "pop surrealism," using mostly paint as well as pen and ink. Slowly, he transitioned into metal-based conceptualizing. "I like to make things!" he states. "I also did a lot of traveling, so the artistic ideas inside of me are definitely a reflection of my being out in the world."

Early on, the travel was related to his father's army career. Later, it had to do with his work as a karate instructor and travels as a biker. While on the road, he also put into serious play his love of photography. "It helped me collect memories, so anything I saw could be used as an inspiration."

Today, Werthan has a studio called The Metal Way in Branford. For years, his work had been given gallery showings several times a year, from Boston to upstate New York and elsewhere, and then word of mouth compelled many people to request his work for themselves. That kept him busy in the studio with commissions. Much of his work these days involves custom-crafting furniture, and he continues to explore landscapes and the countryside for objects to use for new works. He also still teaches karate, as does his partner, Noelle Talmon, a martial artist.

One of his best and most important students is 87 years old. That by itself is a bit usual, but what's even more intriguing is the fact that the student is his father, George Benson Werthan, the former lieutenant colonel who settled his family in Connecticut when Sid was seven. Fate being unpredictable, had the elder Werthan made other plans, the younger Werthan may have grown up to be a more conventional artist. Good thing that never happened, because then his customers might have had to settle for traditional chairs instead of inspired metal mayhem.



WHIMSICAL WONDERS: Ellen Schiffman creates works of art using items as diverse as rusted remnants, cotton twill tape, woodshop shavings, and vintage fabrics. This piece is entitled, "Yet Still A Proud Voice."

ELLEN SCHIFFMAN

Although she doesn't work with chemicals, test tubes or Tesla coils, Weston-based conceptual artist Ellen Schiffman might be mistaken for an experimental scientist, simply because she's known to take objects not associated with art and modify them into what she calls metaphors for tenuous times.

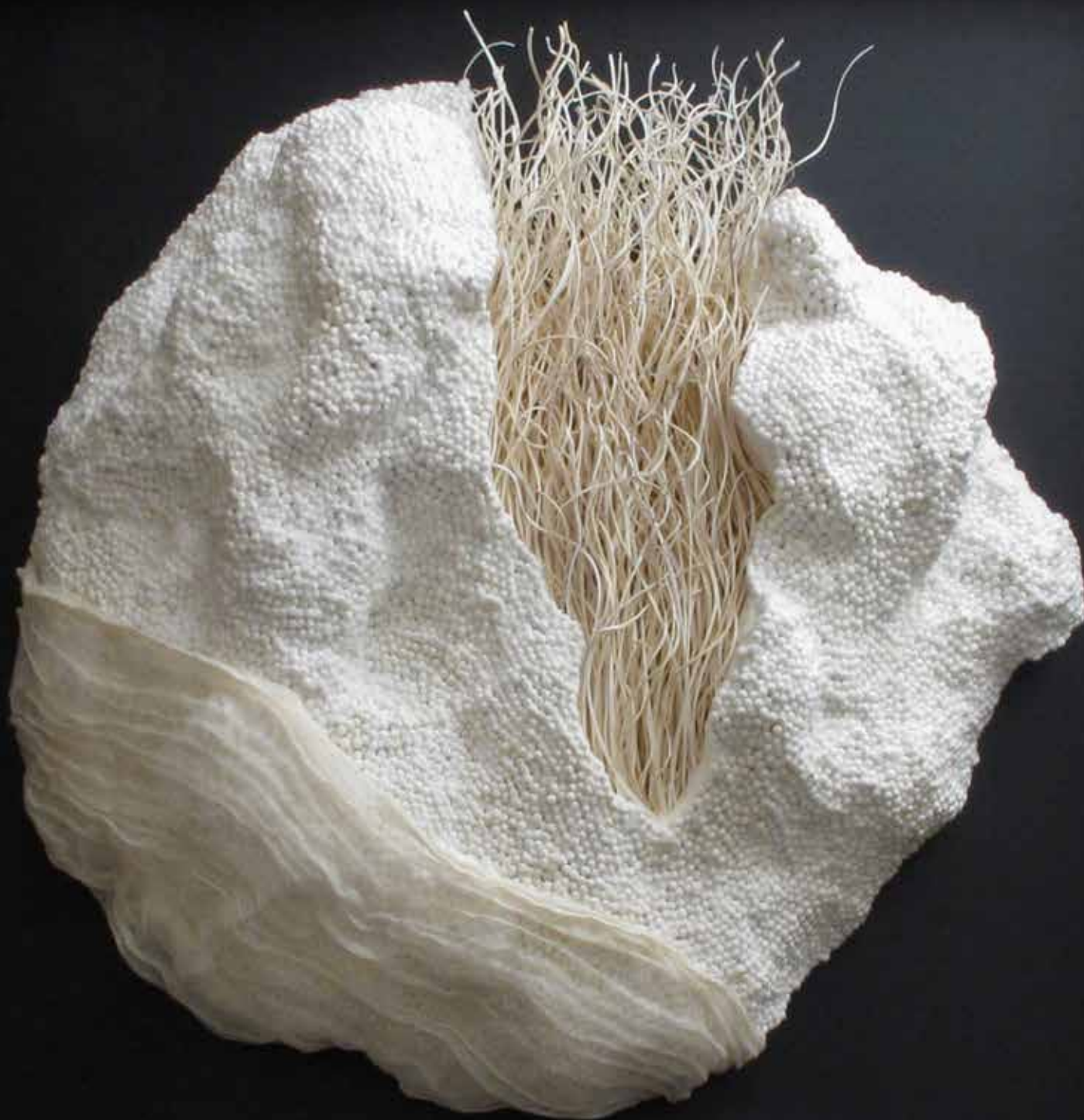
"I don't know of other artists who use some of the materials and techniques I use in my work. For instance, I don't know any artist who works with Q-tips," says Schiffman, whose current body of work includes items from nature, found objects, rusted items, cotton twill tape, toothpicks, woodshop shavings, vintage fabrics, and almost anything else that might cross her path. The materials she finds, combined with the techniques she uses, make for brand new

kinds of artwork.

"I start with material and experiment with it," she explains. "I may not even have a vision in my mind of what the completed piece will be." Case in point: she broke her ankle, needed to stay off that foot for four months, looked at the ACE bandage she was about to put on, and started stitching into it. That began an entire series centered on ACE bandages.

"When I broke my ankle, there was a dark moment. But as an artist, I had the impetus to keep going and be creative," she says.

Such inspirations have resulted in dozens of exhibitions, including at the Silvermine Arts Center in New Canaan, the Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, Massachusetts, the Flinn Gallery in Greenwich, the Mercy Gallery in Windsor,



TO THE POINT: This 32-inch-square sculpture by Ellen Schiffman, entitled, "A Rift Is Just A Chance To Grow," is fashioned from Q-tips, cheese cloth, and shredded board.



WOODEN YOU KNOW IT: Ben Dworski-Riggs, a self-described “wood artist/mad scientist,” has a unique (and secret) method of mimicking a natural phenomenon on wood-based “slices of life.”

the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury and the River Street Gallery in New Haven, as well as galleries, museums, art centers and creative workshops nationwide.

Schiffman’s material-driven artwork began almost 30 years ago, after the birth of her second child. That was the result of a simple desire to use her hands to create interesting things, which soon developed into a specialty that she traces to a well-developed sense of visual curiosity. Ellen looks at random objects and sees their artistic possibilities. She also endeavors to make each piece speak to hope and resilience. Today, she both displays and sells her metaphoric artwork.

Her support team includes her two grown children and her husband – “my right-hand man” – who handles many technical aspects of her work, including making frames and pedestals. He also takes many photographs which are on her website and in art publications, and which she uses for other promotional purposes.

Before becoming a professional artist, Schiffman had a business that sold the artwork of other artists to architects, designers and corporations. Once she started to create on her own, her work took on a special life that resonated with many people. A native of New York who loved the city but needed a quiet studio, she settled on Weston in Fairfield County for the best of both worlds: the nearby city that never sleeps, and a peaceful little hamlet in which to create brand new kinds of art.

BEN DWORSKI-RIGGS

If you ask him to, the only thing Durham-based wood artist Ben Dworski-Riggs will agree to teach you is how to challenge your ideas of what art is and what art can be – simply by looking at it. He’ll avoid committing to actually teaching you how to do his particular kind of art – the Lichtenberg method of electrical sculpting – because it uses high volts of electricity, which is far too dangerous for the average person to work with. Using the Lichtenberg method, Dworski-Riggs creates gorgeous wooden figures, furniture, vases, pendants, and dozens of other objects.

Nor can he really teach you how to decide just what to create in the first place, since it’s difficult even for him to put his finger on it. “I just go where my imagination takes me. I think of something and look around to see if there’s anything out there like it,” he muses. “If there is, great, but if there’s not, I try to create it.”

It’s instinctual, and often, instinct cannot be taught.

The Lichtenberg method is named after German physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who identified the patterns of leaf-like figures created by electrical discharges on the surfaces or interiors of insulating material. That’s what Dworski-Riggs creates on hardwoods. There is no staining involved. The creations are the natural result of the electricity and his skill in controlling it. Often, it combines metalwork, and lately it has included the use of phosphorescent and LED lighting, magnetism, and combining wood with



PAPER TRAIL: West Hartford artist Amy Genser creates massive, vibrant masterpieces out of cut, rolled, shaped, patterned, and tinted paper.

glass, stone and resin. In many ways, his art is still evolving.

There is no one style on which he concentrates. A recent series of pieces has a wizard feel to it. “It just came out of my imagination,” he explains. “I wanted to see if I could create some kind of ‘Lord of the Rings’-style decor. That seemed like something that hadn’t been created yet.”

So he created it.

In addition to his own Lichtenberg designs, Dworski-Riggs – who describes himself as a “wood artist/mad scientist” on his website – also works for a custom cabinet shop where, without the electricity, he enjoys expressing himself through woodworking.

His Lichtenberg pieces have shown up in several galleries and art shows, and lately he’s been doing quite a number of more conventional furniture commissions. He does most of his work out of his home garage studio in Durham, where he and his wife Camilla Zamboni, a professor at Wesleyan University, reside.

Zamboni is very supportive of all he does as an artist and craftsman. Like his customers and fans, she learns a lot about the Lichtenberg method just by looking. Then again, that’s all she can do, since Dworski-Riggs will never teach her or anyone else. He doesn’t have to. Looking at it is enough.



AMY GENSER

While many artists express their visions through paint or other mediums, Amy Genser, a resident of West Hartford, fashions large canvases entirely with paper. That paper is cut, rolled, shaped, patterned, tinted, colored, and manipulated in ways to make it emotionally representative of such pensive panoramas as oceans, galaxies, coastlines, islands, horizons, and more.

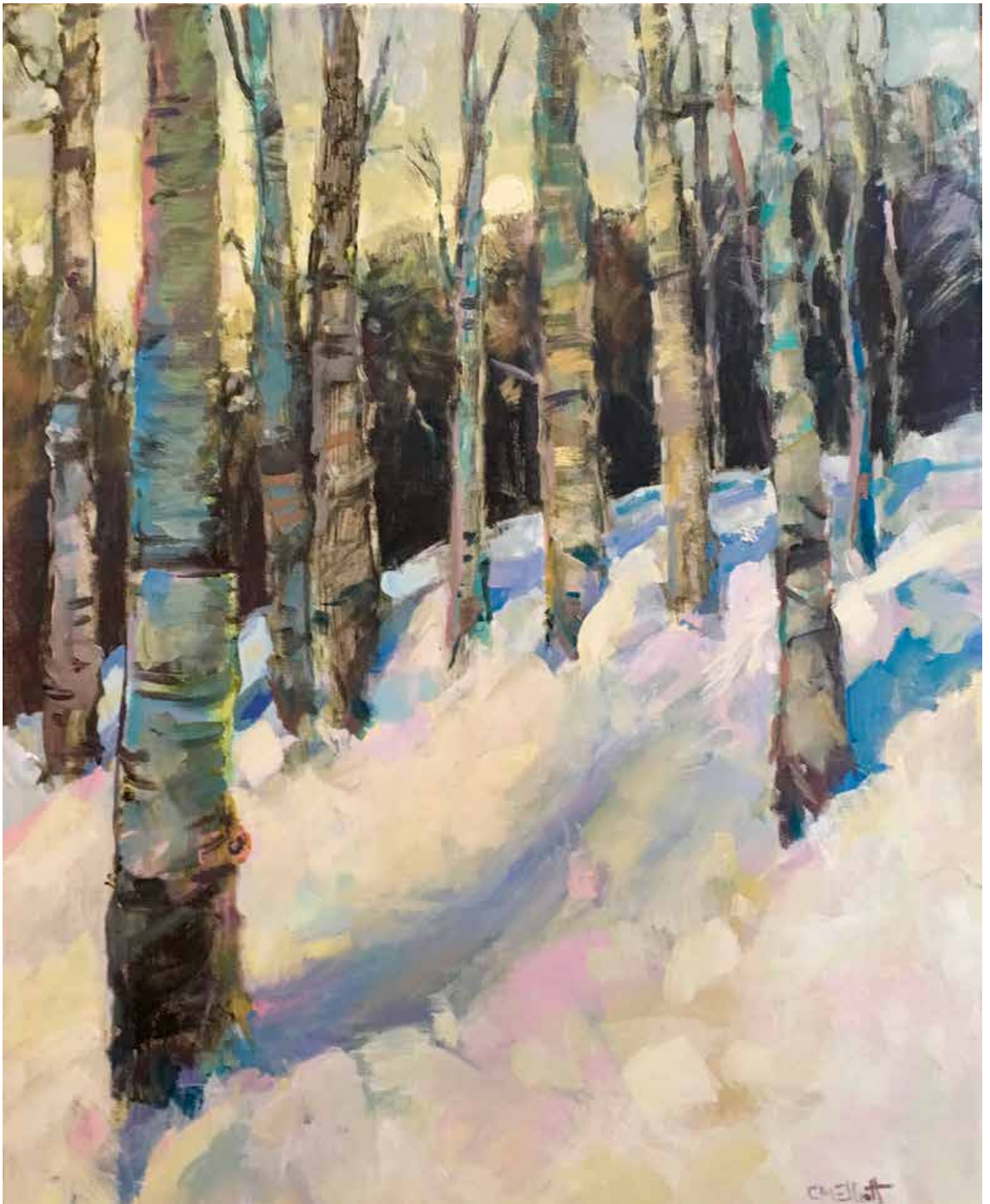
Until she was 11, Genser's family moved from state to state several times, mostly down south. Her father was a neonatologist and pediatrician, and Genser still recalls with clarity some of the biological images from his medical books, which she suspects was one of many visual elements that fed into her artistic sensibilities. There is even a touch of that imagery in her art today. Interestingly, many of her commissioned pieces hang in hospitals across the country.

When her family finally made it to West Hartford, Genser found a hometown she loved, which is why it's no surprise that she never left. Nor will she, especially since she adores her studio in the Capital City, in the Parkville neighborhood. "It has big windows, a tremendous amount of natural light, high ceilings – it's just awesome," she says enthusiastically. "I love it here!"

That's where she assembles the magnificent building blocks that make up her paper-based masterpieces – which, in addition to the commissions she receives, are sold to discriminating art lovers and displayed at select galleries.



MICROCOSMS OF BEAUTY:
Genser's creations are fashioned
from tiny "cells" of paper.



WHITE ON WHITE: Birch trees are a favorite subject for Simsbury artist Catherine Elliott.

PASTORAL PLEASURES: Elliott draws inspiration from the beauty of her peaceful community.



The way she arrived at her special brand of art is a complex one. Mixed into the equation are a first career as a graphic artist that made her question her profession, a tragic family event that made her question life itself, and an artistic awakening at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she received a Masters of Fine Arts degree. But no matter how it all came together, she's happy it did – as are her private and commission customers.

Genser has been married for 19 years and has three sons between the ages of 16 and 12. “My boys seem to think what I do is cool,” she says, “though the youngest loves to give me business advice!” All in all, Amy Genser is juggling the many building blocks that make for a full and busy artist's life.

CATHERINE ELLIOTT

“I love American impressionism,” says Simsbury oil painter Catherine Elliott. “Connecticut is so rich in the kind of imagery and landscapes that lend themselves so well to this style. When I see something that strikes my impressionistic eye, I'm motivated to paint it.” Which is exactly what she's been doing for 35 years – taking a blank, impassive canvas and turning it into a colorful burst of emotion that is at once soothing and peaceful.

Elliott, who as a young woman had apprenticed to a painter, put the artistic muse on hold while she raised her family. Around the time her third daughter was born, she combined what was then a new hobby as an oil painter with a new habit of regularly visiting museums and galleries. That, in turn, resulted in a few sales and exhibits of her own work. The hobby turned into a profession. One of her first showings was at the PS Gallery in Litchfield.

What followed became a vibrant portfolio that continues

to grow, and one that is always peaceful and soothing. Dozens of her paintings – autumn foliage, rustic lakesides, tree-canopied country paths, and an occasional surprise such as a shooting star, pancakes, or a Greenwich Village street scene – have been sold or have been on display at such venues as the Lyme Art Association in Old Lyme and the Sosebee Studio & Fine Art Gallery in Nantucket. Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center in Hartford has six of her paintings. She also sells prints of some of her work. Though it is the work itself that's most rewarding to Elliott, professional recognition has followed, including prizes from *American Artist* magazine, *Plein Air Magazine* and several others.

In addition to her own home studio in Simsbury, Elliott turned one of her daughter's old bedrooms into a small gallery, which is open by appointment. When weather allows, she goes into the backyard where an old tennis court has been repurposed into a garden studio, complete with perennials, fruit trees and enough natural imagery to inspire year after year. The garden is a tribute to the eldest of her three daughters, whom she lost many years ago in an automobile accident. Naturally, that has affected her life as well as her work.

“At least a hundred paintings have come out of that little Garden of Eden,” she says. Once a year, she holds an oil painting workshop in the garden. Undoubtedly, it provides Elliott with a measure of comfort to know how the inspiration she shares with students is steeped in the love she draws from memories of the past. ■

Connecticut journalist Joel Samberg – who has profiled artists, musicians, actors, and comedians for magazines across the country – is a frequent contributor to Seasons.

A Better Life

Do you have heartburn? Trouble swallowing?
Non-cardiac chest pain? Help is at hand.

By **CAROL LATTE** / *Photography courtesy of UConn Health*

For patients suffering from heartburn, a burning throat, difficulty swallowing, or asthma related to reflux, some of life's most basic needs and simple pleasures – like eating, breathing, and sleeping – may be anything but pleasurable or simple.

These are all warning signs of esophageal disorders and can be a precursor of something more serious – esophageal cancer. Even for those who are cancer-free, esophageal disease may cause people to experience chest pain, hoarseness, vomiting, sleeplessness, and more.

Fortunately, help for all of these symptoms is readily available.

Houman Rezaizadeh, M.D., director of the Esophageal Disease Center at UConn Health's Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, says when a patient has an issue related to esophageal health, the center's multidisciplinary team of physicians collaborate to diagnose and begin treating that person's condition as quickly as possible. The center, located in Farmington, houses medical professionals and support staff in everything from gastroenterology, medical and surgical oncology, thoracic surgery, and ear, nose and throat to radiology, speech and swallowing therapy, and pathology – all under one roof.

"We meet quarterly to review cases, but we all have each other's numbers. We are in touch constantly, and a lot of us are within the same office space, so we're right next to each other."

And while patients at other healthcare facilities may have to wait up to four months for an initial appointment and assessment – and another three to four months for a procedure – UConn's Esophageal Disease Center has put into place an expedited system of direct referrals that significantly reduces wait times to just weeks, and ensures that patients receive the best possible care.

IMPROVING A POOR QUALITY OF LIFE

Dr. Rezaizadeh says that patients with esophageal and gastrointestinal (GI) issues often experience a poor quality of life. Because of pain or dysfunction, they may have trouble sleeping and may wake up feeling exhausted. They might be unable to swallow easily, or may have asthma and other breathing issues brought on by allergies. Chest and abdominal pain is also common. They might be scared to eat certain foods – or they may be unable to pinpoint their food triggers and



Houman Rezaizadeh, M.D.

suffer needlessly from heartburn or cramps.

"Our big concern is that people either end up buying over-the-counter antacids for their reflux, or are repeatedly prescribed antacids by their primary care doctor," he says. "And so you have these patients who have had reflux for 10 or 20 years. They've just been self-medicating. And what they don't realize is that they're at increased risk of developing Barrett's esophagus and esophageal adenocarcinoma – they end up getting esophageal cancer because nobody ever decided to look or do an endoscopy. These patients need to be screened."

Barrett's esophagus is a condition in which the lining of the lower esophagus – the tube connecting the mouth to the stomach – is damaged by acid reflux, becoming thicker and inflamed. While patients with gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) often have heartburn or regurgitation of food due to the deterioration of a valve between the esophagus and stomach, those who go on to develop Barrett's may also experience difficulty swallowing food and, less commonly, non-cardiac chest pain.

Left untreated, Barrett's can lead to esophageal adenocarcinoma, a type of esophageal cancer. Five-year survival rates for esophageal adenocarcinoma range from 5% to 47% – depending on whether the cancer is localized when it's diagnosed, or has already spread to other parts of the body – so early detection is critical. It's important to have regular checkups if you have these symptoms. Dr. Rezaizadeh says while most other cancers are on the decline in the United States, the incidence of esophageal adenocarcinoma is "dramatically rising."

The good news? He notes that if precancerous cells are discovered early, through screening, they can be treated to prevent esophageal adenocarcinoma.

"Ten years ago, when people had Barrett's esophagus, they would often wait until they got the subsequent cancer and then we would send them to surgery," he says. "But now we test them in the earlier phases of that disease and we do what's called 'radio frequency ablation.' We burn the lesions and actually return the esophagus to normal, which prevents these patients from getting cancer. That's a major advance."

He says a new technology coming up in the next couple of years will allow for an easy method of screening in a primary care physician's office. The "Cytosponge" is a small capsule – essentially, a little pill – attached to a long string. The patient

UConn HEALTH



TEAM-BASED CARE: At the Esophageal Disease Center at UConn Health's Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, physicians from a variety of disciplines collaborate to diagnose and treat patients as quickly as possible.



Esophageal Disease Center
UConn Health Outpatient Pavilion, 6 East
135 Dowling Way, Farmington, CT
860-679-3040
<https://health.uconn.edu/esophageal-disease/>

Diseases treated at UConn Health's Esophageal Disease Center include:

- Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
- Barrett's Esophagus
- Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EoE)
- Motility Disorders/Achalasia
- Esophageal Strictures
- Esophageal Cancer
- Laryngopharyngeal Reflux (LPR)
- Oropharyngeal Dysphagia and Aerophagia
- Non-Cardiac Chest Pain
- Esophageal Squamous Papilloma's
- Hiatal Hernias & Paraesophageal Hernias
- Esophageal diverticula

swallows the capsule, which then dissolves and “opens into a little ball resembling a sponge. The primary care provider will pull out the capsule quickly and it scrapes the inside of the esophagus.” The procedure is painless but allows a pathologist to examine those cells and find any evidence of Barrett’s or esophageal adenocarcinoma at an early stage – before they can develop into something more serious. Tested in clinical studies, the device was found to be accurate, safe, and acceptable to patients.

SEEKING NEW THERAPIES FOR EOE

New treatment approaches are also on the horizon for a condition called eosinophilic esophagitis. EoE is an allergic swallowing disorder that doesn’t respond to the usual reflux therapies. Because it’s a newer entity, not much is known about it, and symptoms can vary from one patient to the next.

Young children can experience eating problems and fail to gain weight. Older children and adults may have abdominal or chest pain, reflux, insomnia, and malnutrition. Food may sometimes get stuck in the throat. Symptoms may disappear for a while, then return, and can show up days or weeks after patients eat a food they’re allergic to. This makes it more difficult to treat than many other esophageal conditions.

EoE is diagnosed through an upper endoscopy and biopsy of the esophagus.

Dr. Rezaizadeh says he has seen numerous patients who have had this condition for years. “Many patients have tried everything and are not improving. I work closely with them to try to figure out what their food allergies and food triggers are, to try to get them back to normal life and normal eating habits.”

He says most EoE patients end up on an elimination diet to identify the foods that trigger their symptoms. “The large majority of EOE patients in the western world are allergic to foods that fall into six food groups, and so we work with them to try to figure out what their triggers are. If they avoid those foods, their EOE can become a non-issue.”

Dr. Rezaizadeh says while there is currently no FDA-approved treatment for EoE, “there are multiple treatments on the horizon. They’re just going through Phase 2 and 3 trials right now.” Clinicians at UConn’s Esophageal Disease Center are starting to enroll these patients in clinical trials, to help them find relief and, potentially, a cure.

HEALING HERNIAS AND DYSPHAGIA

Sometimes, a patient is diagnosed with a paraesophageal hernia – an opening in the diaphragm that can allow the lower part of the esophagus, the stomach, or other abdominal organs to move up into the chest, where they don’t belong. The patient may have mild symptoms – such as indigestion, nausea, or difficulty swallowing – or more obvious signs that something is wrong, like vomiting, or sudden and severe chest or stomach pain.

“If a patient has really severe heartburn or other significant symptoms, I collaborate with our surgical team to determine what kind of surgery is going to be best for that patient. We work together to tailor treatment options for them,” Dr. Rezaizadeh says.

He also sees many patients with a medical condition called dysphagia – difficulty swallowing, with food getting stuck in the throat/esophagus. “It’s a major reason that people come to see us, actually. That could be related to reflux. It could be related to a narrowing in the esophagus, or motility disorder. It could

be related to EoE, caused by food allergies. It could be related to esophageal cancer. So that’s why all of those patients need an adequate workup.”

Other symptoms that he and his medical team would consider “alarming” include persistent reflux that’s not improving with acid-suppression medications; dramatic, unintentional weight loss; and vomiting blood. These signs are especially worrisome in patients over the age of 50, he says, so patients should not hesitate to reach out to their doctor.

However, patients of any age can experience esophageal symptoms. Esophagitis – inflammation or irritation of the esophagus – can be caused by acid reflux, side effects of certain medications, and bacterial or viral infections. Barrett’s esophagus typically affects older males. Reflux is very common, and “kind of covers the gamut of patient populations,” while esophageal adenocarcinoma “is basically seen in all western populations, so it’s across the board.”

Dr. Rezaizadeh says for patients with bothersome reflux, “we really work with them to get them to a point where they’re improved and they’re happy and able to not worry about their reflux, and not worry about their Barrett’s.”

Patients can also do a lot to help themselves. For instance, one of the biggest triggers in esophageal inflammation is eating very late at night, which can also cause significant reflux. “So you want to avoid eating three to four hours before bedtime,” he says. And while studies haven’t identified specific foods that are associated with reflux, “I tell patients that if you find a specific food bothers you and gives you indigestion or reflux, avoid that.” He adds that one study has shown that soda or carbonated beverages can increase reflux in women.

Patients would also be wise to limit alcohol consumption and avoid smoking, since these are associated with esophageal squamous cell carcinoma, a second type of esophageal cancer. Squamous cell carcinoma develops in the cells lining the upper and middle part of the esophagus. Adenocarcinoma – which is related to long-standing reflux, obesity, history of smoking, male gender, age over 50, and people with family history of either Barrett’s Esophagus or esophageal cancer – usually affects the lower part of the esophagus.

A CALL TO SERVE

Dr. Rezaizadeh, who received his medical degree from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (now Rutgers), served his residency in Internal Medicine at University of Rochester Medical Center, and was a Fellow in Gastroenterology at UConn School of Medicine, says he has always found the GI field interesting. His interaction with patients during his training only reinforced his commitment to the field.

“I love the diverse patient population that we take care of, young and old. We also have people with acute problems, where they have a problem for a short period of time, and we have people with chronic problems, an issue that’s lifelong,” he says. “To be able to help them – like somebody who has had trouble swallowing or can’t eat, or constantly has reflux and indigestion and isn’t able to live a normal lifestyle because of that – is really rewarding. I love that.” ■

Carol Latter is Seasons Magazines editor and a freelance writer living in Simsbury.



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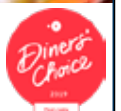
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Life Lessons

Cooking with kids serves up fun and learning opportunities

Written by **AMY S. WHITE** / Photographed by **JOLIE FRECHETTE**

If there is one lesson that parents and teachers have learned in the past few months, it is how to expand our definition of learning. The start of summer wraps up the long months of distance-learning and home-schooling that comprised the end of a very strange 2019-2020 school year, but most parents continue to look for educational opportunities in all seasons, in school and out. As a teacher, I propose that cooking with kids is a practical yet fun way to apply many learning skills right in your own kitchen.

Reading the entire recipe is an important first step and a great way to practice literacy skills. A recipe is a basic “how-to” text, with clear and precise instructions on how to create a desired dish. Make sure everyone involved understands all the vocabulary of the ingredients and the processes of the recipe.

Let the little ones help identify and gather all the necessary ingredients and kitchen equipment. Explain some of the processes involved, like what it means to “preheat” the oven, or “chop” an onion. Hearing and seeing the words in the recipe while gathering and viewing the physical ingredients and kitchen equipment helps improve vocabulary in a real-life application. You might need to explain to a younger child how “flour” isn’t the same as “flower,” but with older ones, you can examine the size differences between a teaspoon and tablespoon, or what it means to “incorporate” butter into flour, for example.

There are many age-appropriate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) skills that can be practiced when cooking as well. Setting the oven temperature, measuring ingredients while using fractions, keeping track of time – these are all ways to practice math in the kitchen. Science concepts are also involved, such as how adding liquid ingredients to dry ingredients creates dough, or how heat from an oven changes how a dish looks and tastes.

Perhaps more importantly, there are plenty of life skills to be learned in the kitchen. Cooking teaches that planning and preparation are the keys to success when starting any project, including a recipe. Parents and children cooking together is a process that requires

collaboration and creativity. More complicated recipes need patience. Failed recipes teach resilience. Helping out with a daily “chore” develops a strong work ethic, while seeing family members enjoy a finished dish builds pride and boosts confidence. Children learn there is a delicious reward at the end of hard work (which of course, needs to include clean-up!). And the more children cook, the more they tend to develop an openness to trying new things.

The recipes I’ve included here come from Connecticut’s own Chef Lise Jaeger (ctchefforhire.com), a personal chef and caterer who has years of experience creating curriculum and teaching cooking classes to children as well as adults. It’s a recipe for empanadas, which are half-moon-shaped hand pies that originated in Spain. The word comes from the Spanish verb “empañar,” which means “to wrap.”

I’ve chosen this particular dish because it is very hands-on to make (and eat!), so kids will enjoy the whole process, but also because it offers a lot of flexibility. It includes times when participating family members can take a break, but also lots of small tasks to divvy up. Chef Jaeger gives us the basic dough recipe (which can be baked or fried), and also offers two different recipes for savory fillings – one meat version, and one vegetarian version. And, although it may not be traditional, these delicious little hand-held snacks can be filled with something sweet as well. Apples and cinnamon. Nutella and strawberries. I’ll bet you and your kids can come up with some great flavors!

Which brings me to my final point. While I, as a teacher, and you, as a parent, may secretly know that cooking is an educational activity in disguise, your children/students will simply spend a day enjoying a fun family experience and creating long-lasting, and hopefully delicious, memories. And when you’re spending a lot of time at home as we all seem to be these days, that’s the most important lesson of all. ■

Amy S. White is a teacher, food writer, and line cook in eastern Connecticut. While she wishes she could invite readers to bring their kids over to cook, this column will have to suffice. For more about Amy, visit amyswhite.com.



Empanada Dough

Makes about 2 dozen empanadas

Ingredients:

1/4 cup cold water
3 egg yolks
1 tsp. vinegar
3 cups flour, sifted
2 tsp. salt
1 Tbsp. shortening
2 sticks (1 cup) cold butter, cut into pieces
4 cups vegetable oil (if frying) OR
1 beaten egg (if baking)

Beat the 1/4 cup of water, egg yolks, and vinegar together in a bowl, then set aside. In a separate bowl, mix together the flour and salt. Add the butter and shortening into the flour mix with your hands, working it into the flour until the mixture resembles coarse, pea-size meal. Make a well in the center of the dry mixture and pour the liquid mixture into the center. Mix with a spoon until it becomes a stiff ball of dough.

Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead it just until all of the flour is incorporated and the dough is smooth, about two minutes. Form the dough into a round disk and cover with plastic wrap. Place dough in the refrigerator for at least one hour, or up to three days.

When ready to assemble and cook empanadas, place dough on a floured surface and cut the dough in half. Return one-half to the refrigerator to keep cold. Shape the dough into a rectangle and sprinkle with flour. Use a rolling pin to roll the dough evenly to a 1/8-inch thickness.

Use a pastry cutter, or upside-down cup or bowl that is three to four inches in diameter,

to cut the dough into circles. Continue with the other half of the dough. Keep in mind, the larger each disk, the more filling you will need. Place the disks of dough on a parchment-covered sheet pan. If layering, place parchment in between as well, so they do not stick together.

This is when you prepare your filling (see other recipes, or use your own), then continue to follow this recipe.

Fill empanadas with a heaping teaspoon of your desired filling, adjusting as needed for the size of your dough disks. Place a bit of water on your finger and run it around the inside edge of the empanada to help seal the package. Fold the dough over the filling to make a half-moon shape, then lightly score or crimp the edges with a fork. You don't want to pierce holes in the dough, but you also don't want your filling to leak out, especially if you are frying them.

Refrigerate empanadas for about an hour before cooking. If frying, preheat vegetable oil to 350F and fry for 5-6 minutes until golden brown. If baking, brush with beaten egg and bake at 400F for 20-30 minutes until golden brown.

Recipes courtesy of Chef Lise Jaeger, ctchefforhire.com

Empanadas are very hands-on to make (and eat!), so kids will enjoy the whole process.

FILLING FOR VEGETARIAN EMPANADAS

Courtesy of Chef Lise Jaeger, ctchefforhire.com

Ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. cumin
- 1/2 tsp. chili powder
- 1/2 tsp. paprika
- 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and finely diced
- 1 14-ounce can black beans, drained
- 1/4 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- Empanada disks from previous recipe, ready to be filled
- Sour cream, salsa and/or chopped fresh cilantro for serving (optional)

Heat olive oil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Add garlic, onion, and spices, and sauté until fragrant, about a minute. Add sweet potato and black beans, and stir to combine. Cover and simmer about 10 minutes or until liquid is mostly absorbed and sweet potato pieces are tender. Allow to cool completely, then fill empanadas with a heaping teaspoon of the mixture and a sprinkle of cheese. Continue to assemble and cook as directed in dough recipe.

FILLING FOR MEAT EMPANADAS

Courtesy of Chef Lise Jaeger, ctchefforhire.com

Ingredients:

- 1/3 lb. cooked meat (Ground chicken, beef or pork can be used. Be sure meat is completely cooked)
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1/2 medium onion, diced finely
- 1/2 red bell pepper, diced finely
- 1/2 cup thawed frozen corn or drained canned corn
- 1/2 jalapeno pepper, minced
- 1/2 tsp. cumin
- 1/2 tsp. chili powder
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup of shredded Mexican-blend cheese
- empanada disks from previous recipe, ready to be filled
- sour cream, salsa and/or chopped fresh cilantro for serving (optional)

Heat olive oil in a frying pan to medium-high heat. Sauté the onion, bell pepper, corn, and jalapeno until soft. Add cumin, chili powder, salt, pepper, and stir together. Add cooked ground meat to the vegetable mixture and stir until mixed well. Allow to cool completely, then fill empanadas with a heaping teaspoon of the mixture and a sprinkle of cheese. Continue to assemble and cook as directed in dough recipe.



LIFE LESSONS: Kids of all ages will have fun learning to cook ... but don't forget to teach them that cleaning up is an important part of the process!



WRAPPING IT UP: Empanadas are easy to make and fun to eat.



Staying the Course

Despite abuse, depression and a life-changing injury, Ken Green keeps on swinging

By JOHN TORSIELLO / *Photography courtesy of Ken Green*

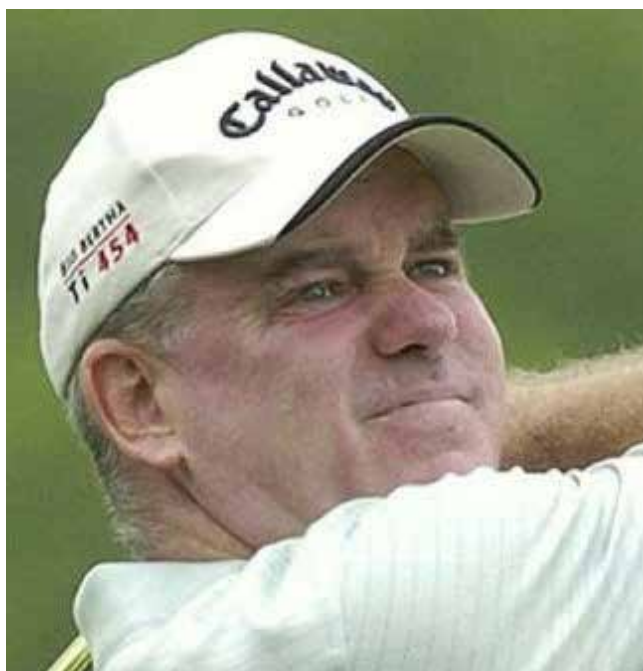
Ken Green chuckles at the possibility of having a movie made out of his life.

"I don't think anyone would believe it," he quips.

Indeed, the Connecticut native and part-time resident has led, let's just say, one heck of a tumultuous life. As colorful a character on the golf course as his last name, he ran afoul of the lords of golf more times than one can count on two hands and both feet. Yet, he was a five-time winner on the PGA Tour, capturing 11 tournaments worldwide, and played for the United States in the 1989 Ryder Cup. He reportedly jumped into a canal near his home in Florida to save his dog, Nip, from an alligator that was looking to make the canine his dinner.

And Green's life has been filled with tragedy and pain: a childhood he says was marred by sexual abuse by his father's friends; a nasty divorce as an adult; money problems; gambling; battles with alcohol abuse; thoughts of suicide; the death of one of his sons from a drug overdose; and a horrific traffic accident that took the lives of three people, including his brother and girlfriend, and cost Green his right leg.

But Green is alive and standing tall, thanks to the use of a prosthetic right leg. He vowed after the accident, which occurred in Mississippi in 2009 while he was travelling to and from golf tournaments, that he would once again swing a golf club in earnest, even as he lay in a hospital bed after doctors had removed the lower portion of his right leg. He made good on that vow and built him-



GREEN ON THE GREEN: Connecticut's well-known golf champ keeps his eye on the ball.

self physically and mentally to return to competitive golf, playing in Champions Tour (for players over the age of 50), as well as regional and state tournaments. And, playing well, we might add, with his low score being a 69 on the Champions Tour – a laudable score for any golfer, let alone one playing with a prosthetic leg – to go along with the physical and emotional scars that Green carries with him every day.

"I've have had so many crazy things happen to me," says Green, who splits his time between West Palm Beach, Florida and New Fairfield. "I guess it's the Ken Green reverse one percent law. I don't think many people have had things happen to them, good and bad, like I have."

Green was born in Danbury and later moved with his family to Honduras, where his father Martin, who Green claims was an alcoholic, was principal of the American School in that country. Forced to choose between soccer and golf, young Green chose the latter and wound up quitting school at age 16, telling his mother he wanted to pursue his dream of playing professionally.

It seemed a long shot at the time, but he wound up finishing his high school education and attending Palm Beach Junior College in Florida for a year before he was recruited to play for the University of Florida, earning second team All-Southern Conference honors in 1979. Green turned professional in 1979 and joined the PGA Tour the following year.

He became a proficient player, known for his all-out style of play and fierce competitiveness. He had five wins on the PGA Tour, lost two tournaments in playoffs, and captured five international events. His selection to the U.S. Ryder Cup team in 1989 was a highlight of his career. Even after his

life and golf game began to break down in the late '80s and '90s, Green could occasionally rise up. He posted a seventh-place tie at the 1996 U.S. Open.

"I had a great run during the 1980s and I felt like I was getting better every year," says Green, now 61. "I was winning tournaments on the PGA Tour, was on the Ryder Cup team, and winning overseas, which I am equally as proud of as my wins in the States. I would love to have been able to see what I was capable of if I didn't lose my focus. I was still young and probably had another six or seven really good years ahead of me when things broke down." Green's sister, Shelley, caddied for him for several years while on Tour.

"Things broke down," he says, because of a nasty divorce from his first wife and losing custody of his children. He began drinking more than socially, gambling, falling into the deep hole of depression, and started missing cuts and continuing to pile up fines from the PGA Tour. He had more than two dozen fines levied against him, some of them for seemingly rather silly and harmless antics – like sneaking friends into The Masters (of all places) in the trunk of his car, swearing on the course, burying or flinging into the water several putters, and signing autographs for fans while playing.

Perhaps his most famous thumbing of his nose at the PGA



GREEN MACHINE: Despite numerous personal challenges, Ken Green turned in impressive performances throughout his PGA career.

Tour and resulting punishment was when he had a friend grab him a beer during The Masters in Augusta, Georgia in 1997 while playing a tournament round with the legendary Arnold Palmer, his childhood hero.

"I had injured my hand and shot an 87 the first day and knew I wasn't going to make the cut," Green recalls. "Here I was playing with Arnie and I just decided to toast him as we were walking down the 15th fairway. It was a spur of the moment thing. He smiles and said to me that he wished I had brought him one. I knew that he and I would never share a beer together, so I just decided to go with it. All in all, it was a great day." Green missed the cut and was duly fined for his impromptu celebration of the life and career of "The King." But really, what could we all have expected from a man who sometimes played tournament rounds dressed in green from head to toe, shoes included?

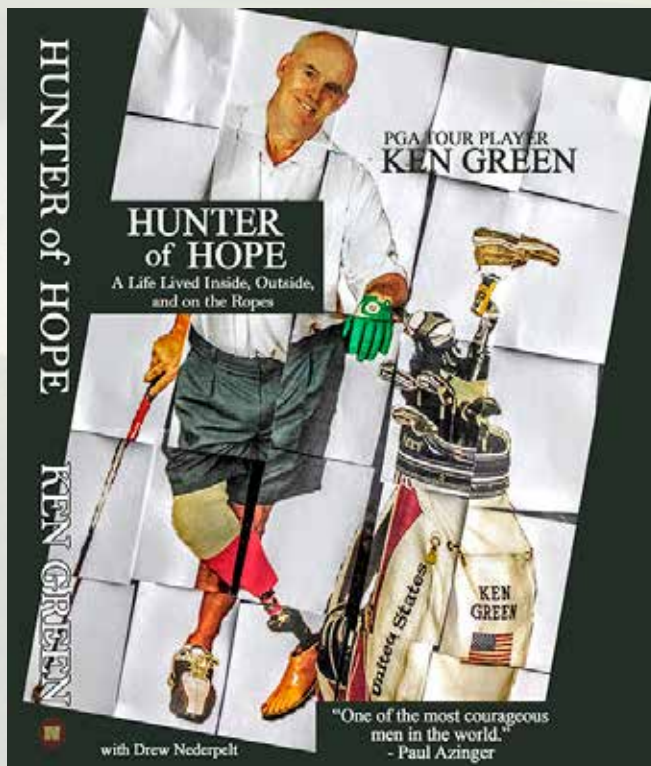
David Barrett, a writer and author and former senior editor at *Golf Magazine*, shared some thoughts on Green. "He was certainly not your typical buttoned-down tour pro. He had no filter when he spoke. At times, he rubbed people the wrong way; then again, at times he was refreshing. He was someone the average Joe could identify with. From what I've read, his attitude and spirit in the wake of losing loved ones and his determination to play golf again are admirable."

Green has been called by former PGA Tour player and Massachusetts native Paul Azinger, "One of the most coura-

geous men in the world." Mark Calcavecchia, a friend, 13-time winner on the PGA Tour and 1989 Open Championship winner, said of Green, "Ken has been dealt some brutal cards over the years. I admire the fight that he continues to show us all every day. Ken will tell you the truth no matter what."

In June 2009, Green was seriously injured in a motor vehicle accident when his motor home left the road. Green was in his RV traveling on Interstate 20 near Meridian, Mississippi when the right front tire blew, causing the vehicle to veer off the road and go down a deep embankment before hitting a tree. The accident killed three passengers: William Green, his brother; Jeanne Hodgins, his girlfriend; and his dog, Nip. The following year his estranged son, Hunter, died of a drug overdose in Dallas.

Stunned from two horrific incidents within a year, Green used golf as a way to keep himself going, although his journey back to the golf course was one filled with pain and long hours of therapy and rehab. But back he came, the guy whose life has had more twists and turns than a double dogleg hole. He was fitted with a prosthetic and basically taught himself how to play the game again. He began hitting balls on the range, playing practice rounds and then got himself fit enough that he was able to play several events on the Champions Tour, as well as local and regional events. He finished fourth at the Connecticut Senior Open at Shennecossett Golf Course in Groton in 2019, and tied for second at



KEN GREEN quit school and turned pro in 1979, joining the PGA Tour in 1980, winning 3-times on Tour. His best year in professional golf was 1988, when he won two events on the PGA Tour, as well as the Dunlop Phoenix in Japan. Green also played for the U.S. team in the 1989 Ryder Cup.

During his time in professional golf Green has had a reputation for rebelliousness and a propensity to pull stunts. He has had over two dozen fines levied by the PGA Tour for his bad-boy antics. Some of his stunts include invading friends into The Masters in the trunk of his car and drinking beer on the course while playing with Arnold Palmer at the 1997 Masters. His personal problems—divorce, child custody fights and clinical depression—led to near financial ruin and affected his playing time and the quality of his play. In 2009, Green jumped into a canal to save his German Shepherd from the jaws of an alligator.

In June 2009, Green was seriously injured in an RV accident when his motor home left the road when the right front tire exploded, causing the vehicle to veer off the road and down a steep embankment before hitting a tree. The accident killed his brother, his wife, and his dog. Even though his lower right leg was amputated as a result of injuries suffered in the accident, Green vowed to return to competitive golf. This is that story, and so much more.

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KEN GREEN is one of the most unique personalities to ever hoist a PGA Tour trophy. Raised in Connecticut and Honduras, Ken Green took the road less traveled to the PGA Tour, announcing to his mother as a that he was going to quit school and play pro golf. Against all odds, he not only did it, he thrived!

But with success came heartbreak and tragedy, as Ken Green details in this strikingly raw, emotional, and uniquely complicated memoir of his ongoing times inside, outside, and on the ropes.



Ken has been dealt some brutal cards over the years. I admire the fight that he continues to show us all every day. Ken will tell you the truth no matter what. It's one of his strongest personality traits. Some of it you may want to hear, and some of it you may not. Some of it is just downright funny as hell. Sometimes I wonder what planet he's on. But all in all it's coming from the heart, his heart. - Mark Calcavecchia, 13-time winner on the PGA Tour and the 1989 Open Championship

I first met Ken in the early 80s when I became his golf coach. In our 30-plus year relationship, there are plenty of highs and unfortunately, just as many lows. Ken was never one to be politically correct and could easily infuriate some people. As complicated as his life has been, I can tell you without hesitation, through everything, he has always told the truth and he always had a huge heart. That's why I call him my friend. - Peter Kostis, CBS Golf Analyst

There are probably not a lot of men in this world that would be able to handle all the things that have happened to Ken Green, but with his determination he has fought through them. He is a character with a sense of humor and is not shy about speaking his mind—sometimes saying things that might make some shake their heads, while others just laugh. He's always brutally honest about everything he says, and in what he believes in, and I am perfectly good with that! If I need a truthful opinion on something I always know where to get it! I'm honored to call him my friend! - Larry Walker, 5-time MLB All-Star and MVP

Ken Green unleashed! Raw and unvarnished, Ken gives us a life so brutally honest, funny, and tragic. A page-turner that reaches so many more than just us golfers! - Maury Povich, talk show host and 4-handicap golfer

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HOPING TO HELP OTHERS: Green wrote a book about his life, which he hopes will inspire people who have faced significant personal challenges to overcome them.

both the 2018 and 2016 Connecticut Senior Opens.

“The nerve damage to my right leg was very intense after the operation and I had 11 years of pain. It was constant. It was like the feeling you’d get if you put your finger in a light socket. I had surgery to correct the nerve damage and that has helped alleviate the constant pain. But I still get these tremendous shocks going through my leg to my body, and sometimes it’s so bad it almost knocks me to the ground,” he says. “It’s funny; when it was constant, I almost got used to it. Now, it seems more bothersome at times because it comes and goes and it is really bad sometimes.”

But Green sees his new reality as one more challenge in a life filled with challenges. “I went from a good player to a whole new world. I’m trying to get better at the game and I think I can, which a lot of people can’t say at my age. I still love to play, mainly for social reasons now. I’ll play every day if I can.”

The golf course has, admittedly, always been for Green a refuge from harsh realities, even as a child growing up in Honduras.

Green authored a book released last year, entitled, *Hunter of Hope: A Life Lived Inside, Outside and on the Ropes*, in which he details his life in honest fashion, the good and the bad.

“The book gave me the opportunity to show what I went through and maybe it can help people out there that have gone through, or are going through, similar things as I have – the loss of a son, a nasty marriage and divorce, depression, and the tragic accident. I can give my point of view and maybe help people and get them back on the right track. If I can do it, then people reading the book may say that they can do the same thing,” he says.

He talks openly about sexual assaults he experienced as a pre-teen while in Honduras, abuse that only ended when he was sent to live with his mother in the United States.

He also does a podcast titled “Sportsballs” (of course), during which he dishes on golf and other issues, holding true to his shoot-from-the-hip approach and willingness to tell the



TRIUMPH OVER ADVERSITY: After a childhood that included sexual abuse, and an adult life filled with adversity, Danbury-born Ken Green has focused on building a meaningful and successful life for himself.

truth as he sees it. He also enjoys spending time with his son Ken Jr.’s family, which includes two children.

When at his home in New Fairfield, Green spends much of his golfing time at Danbury’s Richter Park Golf Course and Ridgewood Country Club, “courses that I grew up playing.”

He adds: “The pros around the state are very kind to me, probably because I was a former Tour pro, and I can play pretty much anywhere I’d like.”

He even proposed to the city of Danbury that he be allowed to manage Richter Park Golf Course, considered one of the finest municipal courses in the country but one that has fallen on some hard times in terms of conditioning.

“I had what I thought was a good plan for the course and club that involved improving conditions and the practice

facility, and engaging the community to a great degree,” says Green. “But they turned me down. Maybe because, well, I’m Kenny Green. Who knows?”

Oh yeah, that baggage he carries from being perceived as one of golf’s bad boys for so many years? He’s okay with the way some people still perceive him.

“I think we all have regrets about some of the things we have done, thinking about how we could have handled things better,” he says. “People love me and people think of the stupid things I’ve done and said on the course, and I’m okay with that. But people can change.”

Stunned from two horrific incidents within a year, Green used golf as a way to keep himself going, although his journey back to the golf course was one filled with pain and long hours of therapy and rehab.



"I think we all have regrets about some of the things we have done, thinking about how we could have handled things better."

—Ken Green

“I actually received a letter from a guy after saving my dog in 2003 from an alligator, stating that he never really liked me because he thought I was bad for golf. [But] he said that anyone that would jump into a canal and save his dog from an alligator had to be a good guy.”

Green does other admirable things in his “second life” – for instance, meeting with a young boy suffering from brain cancer to give him a pep talk, to tell him to keep fighting as he has tried to do.

Like the gentleman who wrote to Green after he saved his dog, many people don’t know the real Ken Green – the guy who has faced and battled more than his share of adversity – all the while, as Frank Sinatra sang, doing it his way. 🐾



HAPPIER TIMES: A year after losing his brother, girlfriend, dog – and his leg – in a tragic vehicle accident, Ken Green lost his son Hunter to a drug overdose.



PAR FOR THE COURSE: Green is still working to improve his game.

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Cara McDonough, Stephanie Shames, Carole Kuehl-Mannetho and Camille Konopnicki-Vincent pose at the finish line of a local race.

Friends for Life

**This professional women's support group
has become very personal**

By CARA MCDONOUGH

I wasn't too keen on the idea at first. A few of my husband's female colleagues were starting a professional support group and wondered if I wanted to join. It sounded too self-help-y for my taste, but I liked these women so I figured, why not?

The rules were simple. We'd meet once a month over dinner. Each participant would state how many minutes they'd like to have, to present current challenges, successes and whatever else, followed by feedback from the others, all managed by that month's facilitator.

The concept was based on a book, "Every Other Thursday" by Ellen Daniell, about several female academic scientists who'd formed just this sort of group in the 1970s (which made sense because, besides me – a writer – the other women are biologists and were post-docs at Yale when we began).

I quickly changed my tune. The sessions were a brilliant

manifestation of the best of female friendships, offering a confidential sounding board. Our meetings in the four years since have covered petty and momentous issues, from communicating with coworkers to applying for jobs, and personal subjects, including infertility, divorce, and depression. I've discussed writing woes, but also the challenges of scheduling life with three children and processing grief after my father died in 2017.

As some members have moved and in-person meetings are no longer a reality, our tight group of five has kept up using online conferencing to allow for face time, with plenty of text updates along the way (in the months since writing this story, our needs and work have made meetings less frequent, but we still keep in close contact and lean on each other for support whenever we need it).

Our coterie, which we casually refer to by a few different names – including simply "group" (as Daniell calls it in her



FAST FRIENDS: Camille Konopnicki-Vincent, Cara McDonough, and Carole Kuehl-Mannetho – three of the five members of their professional support group – got together to celebrate the first birthday of Kuehl-Mannetho's son last year.

book) or my favorite, “fight club” – has become incredibly important to us. I wanted to explore the reasons why, and encourage other women to start their own support groups, no matter their line of work.

My friend Stephanie Shames, who started our group and has remained the de facto leader, is a big part of our success: she makes sure the five of us “meet” monthly if possible, by determining dates and sending reminders, and keeps a rotating schedule of facilitators.

“I started this group when I was feeling hopeless about my prospects,” says Shames, now an assistant professor in the Division of Biology at Kansas State University. “I was struggling professionally, felt isolated, and thought that my career goals were unattainable. Starting this group was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I can honestly say that this support gave me the leg-up I needed to get where I am today. Having regular meetings gave me an outlet. Instead of feeling crushed under the weight of negative feelings, I could write them down for discussion in a couple of weeks.”

Looking forward to meetings – knowing I’ll have allotted time to share feelings and receive advice – is undoubtedly helpful. I’m lucky to have a roster of supportive friends and family, but the structure of our group is uniquely comforting. Knowing I can bring up a worrisome issue at our next session often helps me feel better immediately.

Meetings also serve as a motivational goalpost. Sometimes I’ll send out a story pitch by that month’s gathering so I can share the accomplishment.

Camille Konopnicki-Vincent, another friend and group member who works at a clinical-stage biotech company, concurs. “The mantra, ‘I should do this because it terrifies me’ was born out of our meetings!” she says. “It’s been refreshing to so openly discuss things that challenge us, and identify how they will undeniably make us stronger.”

Carolyn Mazure, a professor of psychiatry and psychology, and the director of women’s health research at Yale, says that continuity and trust are probably the most important factors in starting a group. “The concept of professional support groups is terrific. Yet, often, they don’t function well, and then they are not sustained over time, at best.”

Mazure says two points are important. First, members must agree on ground rules and structure. She suggests questions to define both, including: What is the point of meeting? What is our shared understanding of how we will



BABIES ABOARD: Carole Kuehl-Mannetho and Shawna Reed pose at one of the group’s many gatherings through the years. In addition to solving professional issues, the group’s members have welcomed new babies along the way.

conduct ourselves? Can someone attend occasionally, or must it be regularly? Are there topics that cannot be on the agenda? Can we share any content from the group with others? And when I say others, does this include spouses, partners, best friends – with no exceptions?

“Second,” she says, “the process of answering these questions helps bring people together and builds investment in the group as well as trust in the parameters of the group.” Identifying priorities takes a while and goals may evolve over time. That’s OK, she says.

We’ve happily become stronger over the years. Because we were friends already, we never wrote out hard rules, al-

though they're understood: what happens in meetings stays in meetings (unless stated otherwise); we jointly discuss inviting new members before doing so; no topics are forbidden.

Then the basics: we meet monthly – or as often as possible if monthly doesn't work – in the evening, now via Google Hangouts; if someone can't make it, they can catch up next time; each member determines how long they'd like to share (usually between five and 20 minutes), followed by a brief period of feedback. And we aren't sticklers – if a member needs more time than they originally thought, or wants lots of feedback, that's fine. We enjoy a social vibe. We had wine during our in-person meetings, but other groups might find that distracting.

Makeup of a group may also play a role. While women working even in dissimilar fields can find commonality, a group composed solely of coworkers could devolve into office gossip.

As long as the details are worked out mutually, says Mazure, the results can be significant.

"Professional women have had life-long experiences of not being included. Then, after being invited into committee meetings and various groups, having the experience of being invisible," she says. "Now, women are increasingly present, not invisible, but still not entirely recognized or heard. This

group is designed to build an experience that is different."

I've been thinking about our support system following the #MeToo movement. While we have analyzed minor incidences – unwelcome pick-up attempts by men at conferences, for instance – so far, no member has shared an experience as egregious as those popping up regularly in the media. If one did arise, I believe we'd be well-equipped to discuss it, and offer sound advice.

Whatever the issues, it's my sincere hope that our "fight club" exists for the long haul.

"I love how our professional support group has turned into a supportive friend group!" my friend Shames wrote during one of our texting marathons.

I do, too. It was during one meeting a few years ago when it became abundantly clear that the bonds we've forged seamlessly merge professional support with real friendship – camaraderie at its finest. My friend, and long-term group member, Carole Kuehl-Mannetho, a researcher at Harvard Medical School, asked her husband Pat to join her at the computer in a normally taboo move. The rest of us widened our eyes in anticipation, and they announced she was about three months pregnant with their first child.

We forgot about workplace concerns, and united in a gleeful, long-distance cheer. 🍷



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CONNECTICUT SUN



CELEBRATING THE CARPENTERS

Connecticut natives Karen and Richard Carpenter hit it big 50 years ago

By **JOEL SAMBERG**

Harold Carpenter didn't like the cold New England winters. His wife Agnes feared that living in New Haven could impede her musically talented son from building the career she knew he deserved. So, in 1963, Harold and Agnes sold their little house on Hall Street and took their two children and all their belongings to southern California. Seventeen-year-old Richard was excited. Thirteen-year-old Karen was sad to leave her friends.

Today we can only wonder – though never truly know – whether “Close to You” and “We’ve Only Just Begun” would have been the monster hits they became exactly 50 years ago had the Carpenter family stayed put on Hall Street for a few years longer.

“Close to You,” which debuted at the end of June 1970, and “We’ve Only Just Begun,” released in August of that year, hit #1 and #2 on the charts (respectively) and stayed there for nearly two months each. Millions of copies were sold. Both were certified Gold. The Carpenters became superstars. Idols. Innovators. Millionaires. Their string of follow-up hits included “Rainy Days and Mondays,” “Top of the World,” “Only

Yesterday,” “Superstar,” and several others.

For the most part, fans, critics and industry observers agree that the singularity of Karen’s rich, plaintive contralto singing voice, matched with the distinctiveness of Richard’s lush, layered arrangements, would have found some measure of fame even if Harold and Agnes remained back east. The key was the combination of their skills and their motivation to make a mark – regardless of their zip code.

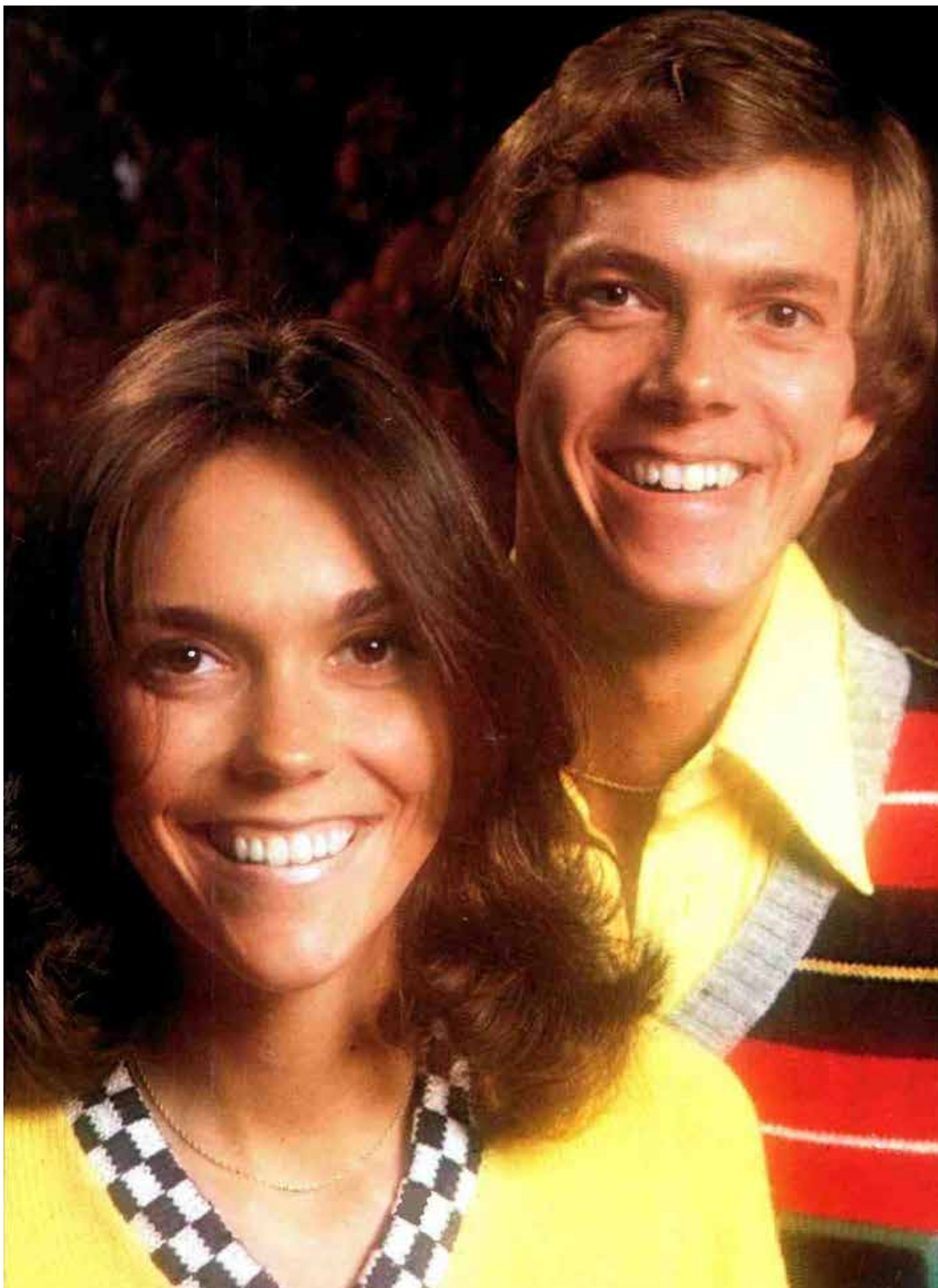
What remains a mystery is why Connecticut in general, and New Haven in particular, does not fully feed its pride by planning various Carpenter tributes, exhibits, and events. It cannot be denied that this is where it all began: Richard’s

earliest lessons were with top pianists from the University of Hartford and the Yale School of Music, and when he was 16, he played on a 45-rpm record cut by the popular New Haven doo-wop group, The Barries. New Haven is where Richard had his debut as a professional musician.

Arguably more than anyone else in the state, retired special education teacher Sam Goldenberg has tried to schedule tribute concerts in New Haven. Each effort, however, has fallen through due to circumstances beyond his control.

“I have to give Richard Carpenter credit, though,” says Goldenberg, who grew up in Hartford, lives in New Haven, and now puts





HITTING IT BIG: Karen and Richard Carpenter released 15 hits in the first five years of their careers as the Carpenters.

on exhibitions in conjunction with special needs students. “He wanted to work with us, but we were unable pull it all together with the commitments of other key participants. Richard is a perfectionist, and when we couldn’t finalize the plans, he felt the need to drop out.” That happened more than once.

Richard is indeed a perfectionist, as anyone who worked with him in the studio, on tour, or on television would attest. And that’s one reason why Goldenberg is among the majority who believe we’d be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of “Close to You” and “We’ve Only Just Begun,” even if Harold and Agnes remained closer to the interstate than the freeway. Richard never gave up.

“Close to You” was written by the famous songwriting team of Burt Bacharach and Hal David. It was first recorded by actor Richard Chamberlain in 1963 and by Dionne Warwick in 1964. Neither version was particularly striking. Herb Alpert was the one who suggested to Richard that he put his own spin on the song. Alpert – the famous trumpeter and front man for the Tijuana Brass – founded the company that signed the Carpenters in 1969, A&M Records. For “Close to You,” the third time was the charm.

While the song played on radios around the world, the group the Carpenters (which included several studio

professionals and highly skilled musician friends of Richard’s) had not yet cut an album on which the hit single was featured. Before they got around to that, Richard heard a commercial on television for Crocker Bank that featured a short jingle written by Paul Williams and Roger Nichols. Something about it made Richard think it would be a perfect follow-up to “Close to You.” That’s how “We’ve Only Just Begun” became the Carpenters’ second smash hit. Thanks to the Carpenters, an incidental TV jingle became one of the most popular wedding songs in the history of matrimony.

As their fame continued to rise, Karen stayed in touch and occasionally visited a few New Haven friends, and the Carpenters played some local concert halls while on tour. But other than having many devoted fans in the state, a more solid Connecticut connection essentially faded out. One musical exception was when Richard decided to perform a song written and recorded by a band based out of Windsor, CT. He heard the tune, “And When She Smiles,” on the radio in 1971, performed by the Wildweeds (whose lead guitarist, Al Anderson, went on to a measure of distinction with the jazz quartet NRBQ). In 1972, the Carpenters recorded the song – renamed “And When He Smiles” – for a television special in England. The video of that live performance remains popular on YouTube. The song was



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**"I always like to remind people that the
Carpenters grew up in New Haven. I'm so proud
to be from the same town as them."**

later included on a Carpenters compilation album released in 2004. Sadly, that was 21 years after Karen passed away, at age 32, from heart failure brought on by her struggle with the eating disorder anorexia nervosa.

"It was a perfect song for Karen because it is so melodic, and she had such a melodious voice," says Ray Zeiner, a Simsbury resident who played keyboards for the Wildweeds. "She projected sheer honesty, which is imperative for the success of any song about love and devotion."

Both Zeiner and Goldenberg believe it was that perfection and honesty that would have enabled Karen and her brother to ultimately sign a record deal, even without the California connection. After all, Herb Alpert first heard the siblings on a demo tape that was handed to him by a friend of a friend. Richard and Karen could have been living anywhere at the time.

"It was the quality and the promotion that were important for their success, more than anything else," Zeiner adds.

Carpenters fan Kevin Forsyth, now of Plainville, vividly remembers meeting Richard and Karen a year before they left for the West Coast. His late sister Jean once played a piano solo at Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven. Jean's schoolmate, Richard Carpenter, turned the sheet music pages for her. "When I met Karen later that day," Forsyth recalls, "she was outgoing, delightful, and simply unforgettable."

Forsyth, a music teacher who became an ordained priest in 1986, first heard "Close to You" when it debuted in 1970 and fell instantly in love. "Oh, that voice..." he reflects. "I always like to remind people that the Carpenters grew up in New Haven. I'm so proud to be from the same town as them."

One additional reason Father Forsyth appreciates the Carpenters is because they recorded quite a number of religious tunes for their two Christmas albums (Karen was enormously fond of Christmas music), and he always wanted to use several of them at church. He asked for – and received – Richard's permission. Among the recordings he's shared with his congregation are "Ave Maria" for the Feast of Mary, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" during a Christmas homily, and "Little Altar Boy" at a Reconciliation service.

Forsyth appreciated Richard's kindness, and Goldenberg is philosophic about his own attempts at a tribute concert in which Richard would participate. For Goldenberg, it seems to be one of those things for which fate, for some reason, has other plans. One year there were the logistical roadblocks. But even if those roadblocks had been lifted a few seasons later, Richard may have had to postpone anyway because of the wildfires that ravaged his neck of the woods at the time. This summer, he may have had to cancel once more because of the coronavirus pandemic.



CAPITOL MUSIC: They had only just begun, but in 1972, Karen and Richard Carpenter were invited to play at the White House.

If it ever happens, it will be a homecoming 57 years in the making. The Carpenters left Connecticut in 1963. Their first two mega-hits reached the airwaves 50 years ago this summer. It's been almost four decades since Karen died. But as Goldenberg gratefully notes, their music lives on.

"Well, we can't have the concert we want in Connecticut," he says wistfully, "but there's nothing, absolutely nothing, that can ever stop us from playing Carpenters songs whenever we want." ■

*Joel Samberg, a frequent Seasons contributor, is the author of the book *Some Kind of Lonely Clown: The Music, Memory, and Melancholy Lives of Karen Carpenter*.*

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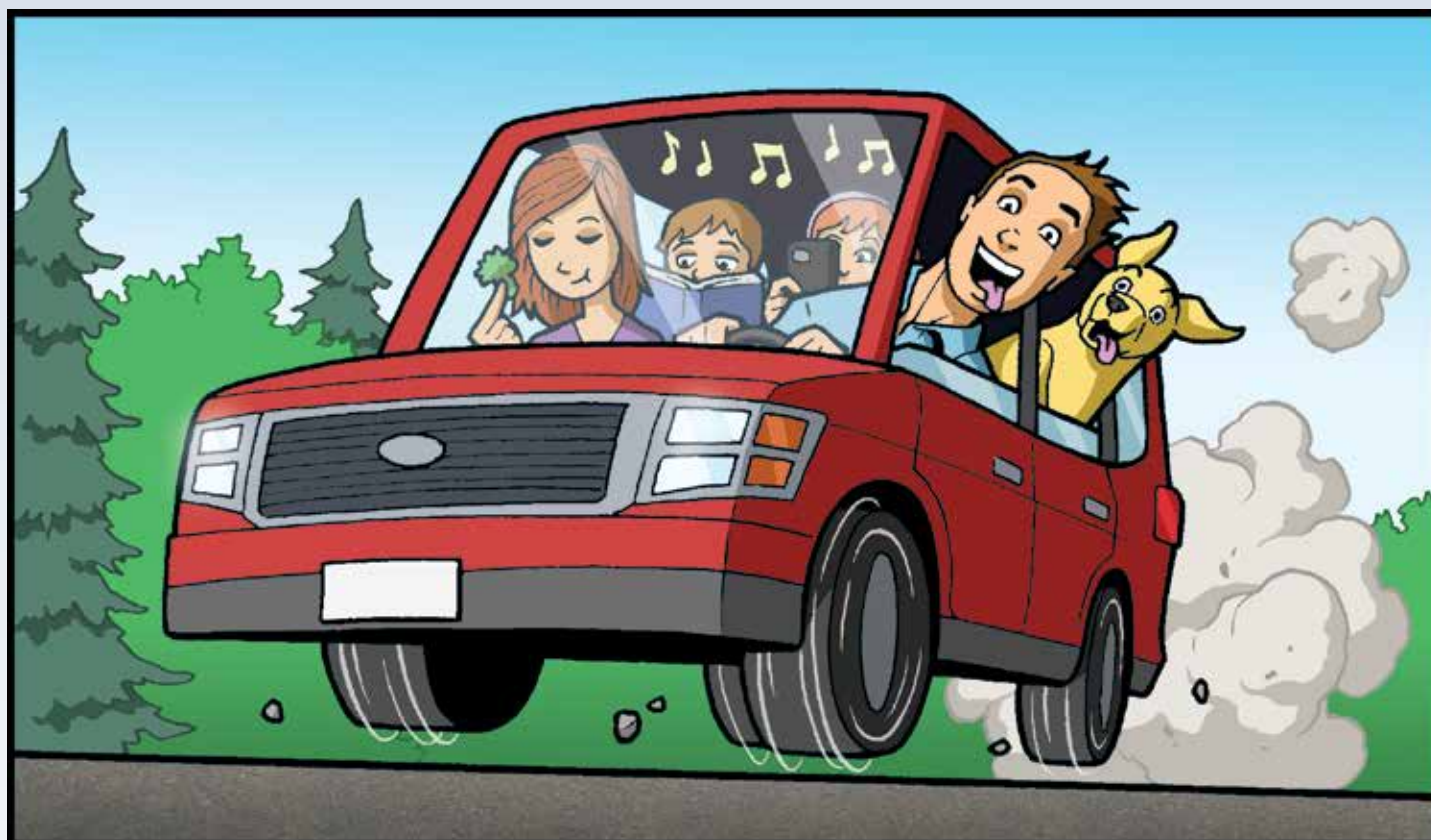
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Let It Ride

When it comes to cars, my wife and children demand a hermetically sealed environment, filled with all of the essentials required to sustain human life.

I'll never understand why.

On a spring day back in 1987, I passed my road test and was awarded my driver's license. A red-letter day in the history of me. After dropping my mother off at home, I drove alone for very first time in my life, two miles down the road to Danny's house, where I picked up my best friend and took my very first joyride as a teenager.

We only nearly died twice that day. The second time, I drove off the road into a forest, knocking down saplings and barely avoiding an ancient oak. Teenage boys shouldn't be allowed to drive until they are at least 35 years old. No joke.

The vehicle I was driving wasn't especially impressive: A 1976 Datsun B210. A car about the size of a box of Pop-Tarts. It was my mother's car, although within the span of a couple months, it would essentially become mine.

I drove that car all summer long, racking up speeding tickets, bending something called tie-rods, and eventually totaling it two days before Christmas in a head-on collision

with Mercedes Benz that left the driver of the Mercedes completely unharmed but resulted in me requiring CPR in the back of an ambulance in order to restore life to my body.

Wear your seatbelts, people.

Also, did I mention that teenage boys shouldn't be permitted behind the wheel of a three-ton death machine until they are old enough to require Viagra?

My cars didn't get any better as I got older.

Once I was discharged from the hospital and able to drive again, I bought a 1978 Chevy Malibu for \$100. Less than a year later, when the car stopped running for the

10,000th time, I simply abandoned it on the side of the highway, hitchhiked home, and upgraded to a 1987 Chrysler LeBaron, purchased from my boss who was desperate to improve my workplace attendance.

But the cars never mattered to me. It was the road that I loved. Windows down, radio blasting – Springsteen or The Eagles or Guns n’ Roses – I would drive without aim or destination, turning wheels just for the sake of turning, exploring every street of every town that I could find. I would pay for gas in fistfuls of change collected from the teenage passengers who joined me for the ride.

It was glorious.

More than 25 years later, things have changed dramatically.

My family and I are leaving for a visit to a farmer’s market half an hour away. It’s early September. The heat of summer has not yet given way to the chill of autumn. As we pile into the Hyundai SUV, my mind wanders to the road ahead. The lure of the pavement. The last great gasp of another bygone summer.

I am excited. Exhilarated.

Then it is ruined. As I back out of the driveway, before I’ve even shifted into drive, my wife asks if I could roll up my window. My daughter immediately concurs. The wind and noise are too much for these Fabergé eggs.

Roll up the window? The days of rolling up windows are long gone. These days, windows are raised and lowered by gently depressing a sad little button on the door, activating an utterly unnecessary motor that raises the glass, creating a vacuum seal inside the car.

“Roll up the window?” I ask. “What about the fresh air? The roar of the wind? That visceral sense of speed and power and life?”

“We don’t want any of that!” my son shouts. “Roll it up!”

When I manage to keep the window down while I’m driving, it’s almost always when it’s just me and a child who lacks the leverage of my wife. I pointedly ignore any whining. I disregard any concerns over the possibility of insects flying into the car or smells that could potentially waft inside, disturbing the delicate equilibrium of the interior. A few weeks ago, I extended my arm out of the car during one of these wife-less drives, allowing my open hand to bounce off the passing air like a wave.

From the back, my son shouted, “Are you crazy! Get your hand in this car now!”

What has happened to the world?

I’m turning off my street onto the main drag when daughter asks if we can replace AC/DC’s “Back in Black” with the Hamilton soundtrack.

My wife and son erupt with approval.

I die a little more inside.

We’re still less than a mile from the house when my son asks for food, because we can’t go anywhere without a bounty of healthy and semi-healthy snacks, topped-off water bottles, and a library of books at the ready. God forbid we travel anywhere without a sufficient number of calories and nutrients to survive. It’s 86 degrees outside in the flatlands of Connecticut, but my family prepares for every trip like the fate of The Donner Party lay ahead.

When I was young, I never grabbed food for the ride. I didn’t bring water. I can remember a day while driving through New Hampshire that my friend and I pulled over and drank from a cold stream.

Today, my children would have

me committed for such an action.

They also won’t allow me to break a single law. They watch my speedometer and demand that I slow down when the needle creeps above the speed limit. They complain when I invent a parking spot in an otherwise filled lot. There’s a patch of grass between the road and parking lot at a local pizza joint that I’ve been dying to drive over for years to cut the corner and save time, but no. My family will not allow this, so I had to wait until they were all out of town to do it on my own.

It was a solitary, joyless moment of indiscretion, further sullied by the wagging fingers of my family after the fact.

It’s not all bad. There are still moments in my life – always when I am alone – when I can barrel down the highway, windows down, music blaring, but even on those glorious days, I find myself looking left and right and am so often shocked by what I see:

Hermetically sealed bubbles of placid humanity. Men and women, couples and families, proceeding down the road at three to five miles above the speed limit, windows up, musical soundtracks or NPR podcasts playing at entirely appropriate levels, forgoing the roar of the wind and the thrill of the road for a gentle, quiet, utterly incomprehensible drive.

I feel sad for these people. They have no idea what they are missing. ■

Matthew Dicks is an elementary school teacher, a bestselling novelist, and a 48-time Moth StorySLAM champion. He is the co-founder and artistic director of Speak Up, a Hartford-based storytelling organization.

Sean Wang, an MIT architecture graduate, is author of the sci-fi graphic novel series, Runners. Learn more at seanwang.com.

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