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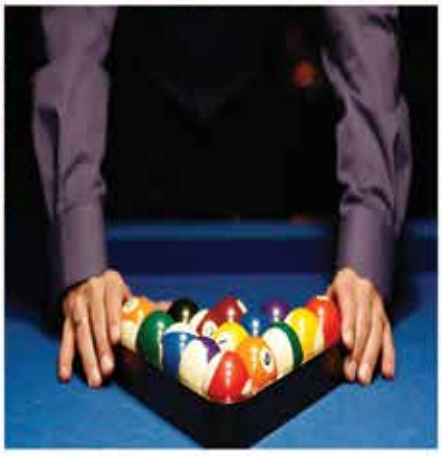

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Seasons' Greetings

After one of the coldest winters seen in recent years, spring is in the air. Trees are budding, the green shoots of perennial bulbs are pushing through the ground, and birdsong is everywhere.

For many, the arrival of spring means the chance to spend more time outdoors. But as humorist Matt Dicks explains, others are tied to the age-old ritual of annual cleaning – spending sunny weekends in a gloomy basement, tossing or reorganizing things they haven't used in a decade.

For those with no such deep-cleaning guilt, the wide world beckons. In this issue, we catch up with some people who view bicycling not simply as a pleasant way to while away a sunny afternoon, but as a passion that is fulfilling, exhilarating and, at times, grueling. Each year, these cyclists cover thousands of miles of open road, enjoying spectacular scenery while pushing themselves to their limits.

We also introduce you to folks who have pushed beyond their safe zones in a different way – coming from all walks of life, and many different countries, to find a new and brighter future in America. From a young man who left his native India and became a Superior Court judge, to a woman who crisscrossed the country to build a career and a family, these immigrants have created new lives built on faith, commitment and hard work.

We also introduce you to people who have made the country music scene their home – both rising stars and artists who have truly "made it" on the national stage. While Connecticut hasn't traditionally been known for its country music vibe, that is changing in a big way.

We hope you truly enjoy these and the other interesting stories found in these pages. As always, thank you for reading.

Carol Latter, Editorial Director

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SEASONS *of West Hartford*™

Spring 2018

"No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn."
– Hal Borland

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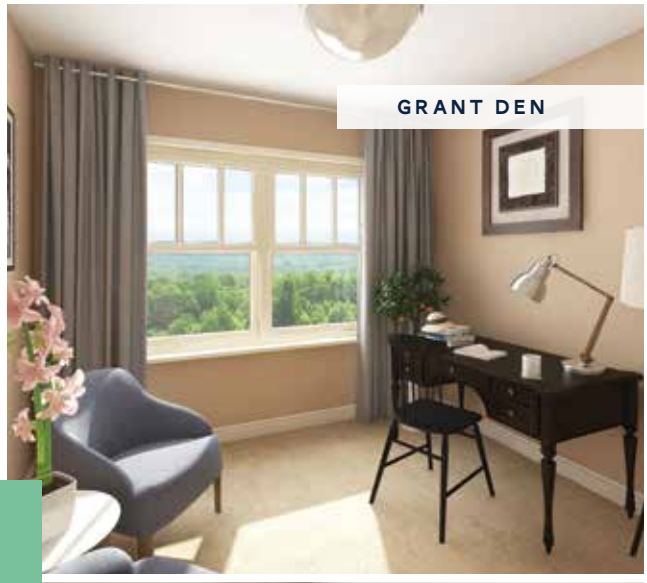

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PLAYING FOR THE CROWD: Connecticut's own Rich Redmond holds down the groove for a country music superstar. Photo by **Sayre Berman**

Nashville *in the* Nutmeg State

Country music has a new following in Connecticut

by **MIKE BRIOTTA**

A few decades ago, the word "country" didn't enter into many Connecticut music conversations. When it was uttered here, it would no doubt be followed by the word "club." But now, country music has crossed the Mason-Dixon Line. You no longer need to drive a pickup – or a tractor – to jump on this bandwagon.

Country music fans regularly pack concerts at Mohegan Sun. One of the newest eateries in Stamford is called Rascal Flatts, after the famous country trio that also started a restaurant chain. It's a musical genre that is fast becoming the soundtrack for mainstream America. There's even a crossover style called "bro-country" infused with hip-hop and rock elements.

How did a genre with its heart firmly planted in the South develop a following in our neck of the woods? The answer is a surprising connection between homegrown talent and the Music City of Nashville, Tennessee.

DIXIE DJ

John "Cadillac" Saville has seen a massive increase in demand for country music throughout his radio career. He started spinning country records with an AM radio station in Hamden in the early 1980s.

Cashing in on the Urban Cowboy trend of that era, the small station called its market "Suburban Country Radio." He broadcast a lot of Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, and other established stars. Saville certainly heard pushback from rock and pop fans at the time. He persevered, though, and his voice would later grace the airwaves at WWYZ Country 92.5.

"I remember when we switched to country at 12 noon in 1988. It was a whole culture shock," he says of changes at WWYZ. "When they heard about the new format, people said, 'This is Connecticut, country music will never make it.'" Of course, it's now one of the top three radio stations statewide. It's still the only FM country music station serving Hartford and New Haven.

"Modern country musicians are influenced by the music they grew up listening to, which was old-school hip-hop on MTV in the '90s. They fused the music together, opening it to a whole new generation of fans."

– John Saville

John "Cadillac" Seville. Photo by **Seshu Photography**

CHANGE OF SCENE: A Norwich native, Redmond has acclimated well to Southern living in the "Music City." Photo by **Alex Solca**

Saville left the station last summer and continues to DJ events, including weddings and parties. He sees a strong future in modern country as it becomes more hybridized with hip-hop.

"There's been a lot of hip-hop influence lately," Saville says. "Modern country musicians are influenced by the music they grew up listening to, which was old-school hip-hop on MTV in the '90s. They fused the music together, opening it to a whole new generation of fans."

ROCKING ROOTS

Connecticut native Rich Redmond moved to Nashville in the late 1990s, where he met a country singer named Jason Aldean. The singer would later ascend to national fame with a slew of hits in the 2000s.

Redmond – voted "Best Country Drummer" by Modern Drummer magazine in 2016 – is now a touring drummer, with major arenas booked around the world. He's traveled many miles from a humble start on his blue sparkle snare drum, hoping to someday play in the rock band KISS.

"You'd have to look pretty hard to find country music in Connecticut at that time," Redmond says of his early days in Milford. For the rock protégé, it was all about listening to Boston and Foreigner back then. "It was when I transcribed the drum parts from Van Halen's '1984' and 'Synchronicity' by the Police that I really caught the bug."

His parents eventually moved the family to Texas. Redmond says he was blessed because Texas has a great music education program where he was slightly ahead of the percussive pack, having already taken lessons in Connecticut. Redmond would later study at University of North Texas, which is known for producing top drummers.

After graduation, it was all about breaking into the music business. "I put in my 10,000 hours and honed my skill set," Redmond says. "I had a high-sodium diet: Ramen noodles are very salty! I maxed out my credit cards, drove old jalopies, and worked odd jobs when I had to."

Redmond is continually impressed by the growth of country music today. "Classic rock is in a creative slump," he says. "With country, you still have the storytelling with

COUNTRY-WIDE APPEAL: Jason Aldean and Rich Redmond's stage performances light up the country music scene. Photo courtesy of an enthusiastic fan.

big drums and big guitars. The lyrics are relatable to people, and country music has hummable melodies."

He continues to appreciate all musical styles, but he's acquired a special fondness for the genre, and spends hours listening to country acts including Gene Watson, Tammy Wynette, and Vince Gill.

Although Redmond tours globally with Aldean, some of his favorite venues are back in his old stomping grounds. "My roots are in Connecticut," he says. "It will always have a homey feel to me. I love playing Mohegan whenever we can, which is usually once or twice a year."

SOUTHERN-FRIED SOUTHINGTON

Few venues in Connecticut are more emblematic of country music than Cadillac Ranch in Southington. It's essentially a country music and line dancing hotspot: a Western-style saloon featuring a mechanical bull and pub food.

Graham Nicholson and his wife, Bonnie, realized in the early '90s that it was their dream to open a country bar. The couple found a 5,000-square-foot property in Plainville that was unused for years. Their goal wasn't to turn a profit, but just to pay the rent. The business became so successful, they moved to their current digs in Southington in 1997 – tripling in size.

Cadillac Ranch is "now the largest country dance club on the East Coast of the United States. Why did it happen here? I really can't explain it."

– Graham Nicholson

"We've booked 185 major country acts," Nicholson says. "Some names that you might recognize include Alabama, Rascal Flatts, Miranda Lambert, and Brad Paisley. We're now the largest country dance club on the East Coast of the United States. Why did it happen here? I really can't explain it."

Part of that success came from a change in country's musical direction. Groups like Alabama shifted the music from traditional to contemporary, by adding heavy electric bass sounds and moving it toward the domain of classic rock.

He vividly recalls a moment when Alabama played a gig at Cadillac Ranch and the guitarist blasted out a Metallica riff, right in the middle of a country set. People stood up on their chairs, screaming. Not because they hated the reference, but because they loved it. Everyone in the audience immediately recognized the nod to heavy metal.

Cadillac Ranch features a full slate of major country acts year-round. In April, it celebrates its 25th anniversary with a to-be-determined marquee performance. Nicholson hints that the headliner could be The Marshall Tucker Band or Travis Tritt, but he's still ironing out the details.

"We have a big parking lot, and we're right off 84," he says of the Ranch. "And it's safe. We've never had any kind of problems with country fans. People are just so into the music."

TRAVELING TROUBADOURS

Jay Wood's drum studio called The Woodshed is located, appropriately, near the Danny's Little Taste of Texas restaurant in South Windsor. Tucked inside the sleepy façade of the building is a multi-room music facility. Half a dozen drum sets are typically set up for lessons, which can quickly be cleared away to create space when big-name country drummers come to town.

Wood hosts drumming workshops for people like Rascal Flatts drummer Jim Riley, and Sean Fuller of Florida Georgia Line. Others notables include Kent Slucher, who backs country singer Luke Bryan.

"Country music is definitely becoming more popular here in Connecticut," Wood says. "The music has changed. People still associate this music only with Willie Nelson and Kenny Rogers. Because of that, I've had people come up and tell me they don't like country music, but they like what our band is doing. That's because country is now more rock-based."

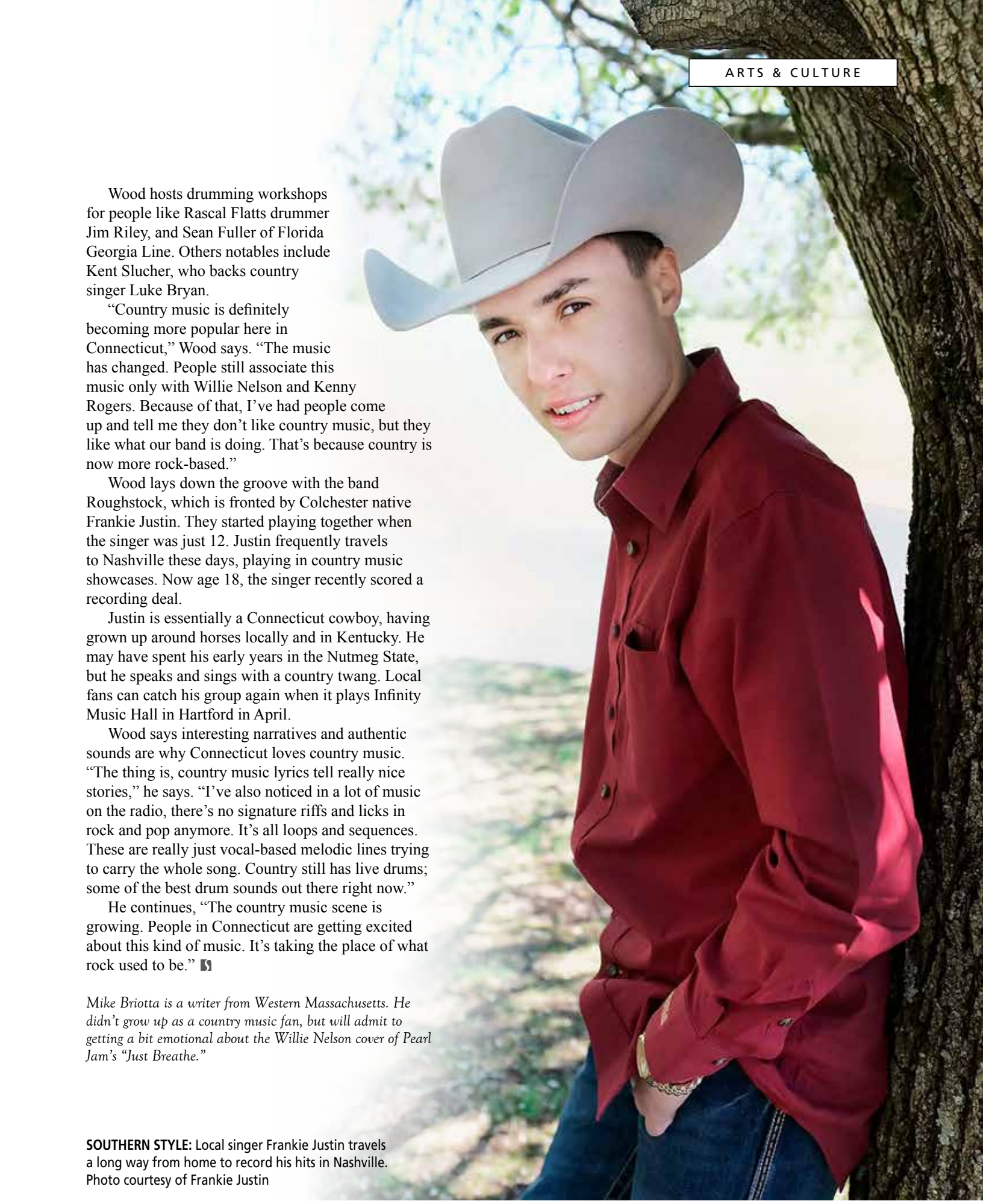
Wood lays down the groove with the band Roughstock, which is fronted by Colchester native Frankie Justin. They started playing together when the singer was just 12. Justin frequently travels to Nashville these days, playing in country music showcases. Now age 18, the singer recently scored a recording deal.

Justin is essentially a Connecticut cowboy, having grown up around horses locally and in Kentucky. He may have spent his early years in the Nutmeg State, but he speaks and sings with a country twang. Local fans can catch his group again when it plays Infinity Music Hall in Hartford in April.

Wood says interesting narratives and authentic sounds are why Connecticut loves country music. "The thing is, country music lyrics tell really nice stories," he says. "I've also noticed in a lot of music on the radio, there's no signature riffs and licks in rock and pop anymore. It's all loops and sequences. These are really just vocal-based melodic lines trying to carry the whole song. Country still has live drums; some of the best drum sounds out there right now."

He continues, "The country music scene is growing. People in Connecticut are getting excited about this kind of music. It's taking the place of what rock used to be."

Mike Briotta is a writer from Western Massachusetts. He didn't grow up as a country music fan, but will admit to getting a bit emotional about the Willie Nelson cover of Pearl Jam's "Just Breathe."



SOUTHERN STYLE: Local singer Frankie Justin travels a long way from home to record his hits in Nashville. Photo courtesy of Frankie Justin

ADVANTAGE WEST HARTFORD

At Hartford Tennis Club, folks have been "taking a swing at it" for more than 80 years.

by **TERESA M. PELHAM**

MAKING A RACQUET: In season, the clubhouse and courts are filled to capacity.
Photo courtesy of the Hartford Tennis Club

A rock and a wooden post are all that indicates there is anything of note down a hidden driveway off Flagg Road in West Hartford. But tucked between busy Bishop's Corner and bucolic Westmoor Park is the Hartford Tennis Club, which last year marked its 80th anniversary.

Much has changed since the club opened in 1937. It's hard to imagine but at the time, membership wasn't open to just anyone. With the growth of the game, the club eventually became completely open.

Today, the seasonal club is as active as ever but for the first time after many years of limiting its membership and using a waiting list, the club is seeking new members.

The member-run club draws its membership from as far east as Bolton and from many Farmington Valley towns. It's a simple facility, unlike others in the region: Just one small clubhouse and 12 Har-Tru courts. While other tennis clubs have expanded to include swimming and paddle over the years, the small property, surrounded by homes, simply does not have room for expansion.

"In season, all 12 courts are in use," says Mike Louis, head pro and manager, who will start his third season at the club this Memorial Day weekend. "It really is a special place to a lot of us."

Louis began playing tennis as a child in New York City and has held several coaching positions, including at the college level.

"What's great about tennis is it doesn't matter what level you are," says Louis. "You can always get out and play, whether you're competing or just playing for fun. The challenge is just to get better. You're just trying to get the ball over the net. There's a simplicity and a joy to it."

Forty-two-year club member Tom Walsh plays nearly every day of the season. The 86-year-old Clinton resident now primarily plays doubles, and his playing partners have come and gone over the years.

AND THE WINNERS ARE: From left, Andy Krugman, Aram Bolduc, Mark Sinatro and Andrew Salak show off their trophies after taking part in the 2017 men's open doubles event. Photo courtesy of Hartford Tennis Club

FUN AND GAMES: Lynn Kaufman (left) and Jen Mazzocca had fun taking part in the ladies' single championship last year. Photo courtesy of Hartford Tennis Club

"A lot of the people I used to play with are either dying or dead," he says. "Sometimes I'm out there and I can't believe I can still do this. I can't beat the young players but I can get on a tennis court and rally and not look like a fool."

Walsh was a teenager the first time he gave tennis a swing. He fell in love with the sport and coached tennis for the University of Saint Joseph for 21 years in West Hartford. "I was the oldest coach in America," he says.

When a group of prominent Hartford banking and insurance executives opened the club, "it was a club for the gentry," says Walsh. "It was a very upscale club. After the 1950s, things started to change and they allowed people of lesser means to join."

"The cameradie in the club is extraordinary," he says. "I have an incredible group of friends here who keep me motivated. I've always thought about the Hartford Tennis Club as a well-kept secret. I'm like a dartboard with surgeries – two shoulder surgeries, five knee surgeries – it's amazing that I've been able to bounce back."

During an off-season tour of the snow-covered club, Louis describes a summer scene, with players young and old enjoying the fresh air, exercising, and having fun with friends.

"Kids sitting on the porch, waiting for a court," he says. "It's what it's all about. They just want to play tennis."

Teresa M. Pelham is a Farmington-based writer. She is the author of three children's books, and frequently visits schools with her therapy dog to share her message about animal rescue. Contact Teresa at tpelham@comcast.net.

SUMMER FUN: Players and onlookers can enjoy shaded tables and chairs, and a fire pit.

A Room of Their Own

A Couple's Efforts Provide Peace and Comfort in Difficult Times.

by **THERESA SULLIVAN BARGER**

After doctors told Gary and Jocelyn Doyens that they wouldn't be able to save the life of their 2-month-old daughter, Caroline, the couple and their 3-year-old son gathered by her bedside to say goodbye.

The wheels squeaked as hospital staff rolled over a cloth partition to separate them from the other families in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) in Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital. Their nurse disconnected their premature baby from the machines that had been keeping her alive.

"What was terrible about the cloth partition, it signaled to all the parents in the room that something was bad. They were asked to leave the room," Jocelyn says. "You wanted to hold onto your baby as long as you could. You knew you had to let go eventually because parents had to come back in the room to see their babies. And so, there was really no place for us to go."

The nurse who had cared for their daughter held her briefly, then gave her back to Jocelyn.

"And then I realized," says Jocelyn, her voice cracking, "that fathers needed to hold their babies too, and I gave her to Gary. She took her last breath in her dad's arms."

Aware that other families wanted to return to their babies, the couple felt rushed packing up and leaving – without their daughter. While the Doyens felt the medical staff took excellent care of their family, the New Haven couple wanted to do something to express their appreciation and protect others from their fate.

"For us, we decided that the one thing we wished we had was a private space, where we didn't feel rushed, where we could cry, where we could take our time," Gary says 20 years later.

They wanted to provide a peaceful, home-like room within the Yale-New Haven Children's NICU where parents could have private conversations with their doctors, caregivers and spiritual advisers. Through donations and a fundraiser, they worked with a designer to outfit a room to comply with hospital regulations while looking and feeling like a living room. Friends suggested calling it Caroline's Room.

Thanks to a federal grant, 11 hospitals in seven states contain Caroline's Rooms, including one at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford.

Nearly 500,000 babies are born prematurely in North America (the U.S. and Canada) annually, according to the March of Dimes. In an average week in Connecticut, 64 babies – or one in 11 – are born prematurely. In 2016, 9.4 percent of babies born in Connecticut were premature, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Nationally, 9.8 percent were premature.

At Connecticut Children's NICU, babies lie in isolates several yards apart, with each baby connected to monitors. Visiting parents hold their babies in their arms or, if infants can't leave the isolate, parents extend a hand through a side opening so their baby can grasp a finger.

Jocelyn and Gary Doyens, of New Haven, wanted to express their gratitude for the care their premature daughter Caroline received while in the Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. They decided to donate a room that would give parents a private space to meet with doctors, to cry and, if their baby passed away the way their daughter did, to say goodbye to their baby – the one thing they had wished they'd had. They're pictured here in the Caroline's Room at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital. Photo by **Tony Bacewicz**

Premature birth is stressful on parents, infants and their siblings. Providing a private room within a hospital's NICU can make a powerful difference in how a family gets through this challenging, often painful experience, says Dr. Marilyn Sanders, shown here in the Caroline's Room at Connecticut Children's Medical Center's NICU, where she is a neonatologist. Photo by **Tony Bacewicz**

Background sounds include babies crying, phones ringing, people talking, loudspeakers calling and monitors beeping.

Premature birth is stressful on parents, infants and their siblings, and a NICU is akin to a trauma center, research shows. Lessening that trauma has long-term benefits for families, says Dr. Marilyn Sanders, a neonatologist at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford and professor, Department of Pediatrics, UConn School of Medicine in Farmington.

> "Caroline's Room can be a bridge for a family. It can be a place where families can go for quiet conversation and to care for a baby while convalescing. There aren't a lot of places in a traditional NICU where parents can go for a quiet place."
>
> – Dr. Marilyn Sanders

In a paper published in the Journal of Perinatology in August 2017, Sanders wrote that the toxic stress babies and their parents experience in the NICU can have lasting negative effects on their health.

All mammal infants need a care provider who is consistently available, who is attuned to the baby's needs and who is in both physical and emotional proximity to the baby, Sanders says.

Can a room with a couch, a couple of comfy chairs, table lamps and artwork make a difference to families grappling with the heart-wrenching experience of having a baby in the NICU? It's an oasis, say mothers and healthcare providers.

"Caroline's Room can be a bridge for a family," Sanders says. "It can be a place where families can go for quiet conversation and to care for a baby while convalescing. There aren't a lot of places in a traditional NICU where parents can go for a quiet place."

At Connecticut Children's, the room includes monitoring equipment and a sleep sofa, so parents can stay with their babies the night before they're scheduled to be discharged. If there is an emergency, the parent just has to pull a cord and a NICU nurse responds immediately.

A Room With Many Uses

Each hospital is encouraged to use the room in a way that works for its patients. At St. Vincent's Women's Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana, the 87-bed NICU reserves

its Caroline's Room for families experiencing a major crisis or loss of their baby, says Debra Beynon, NICU nursing director. Once life-saving care has been removed, families may take as much time as they need in the room to hold their baby and be together as a family in a private, soothing space.

Meanwhile, at Connecticut Children's and Yale-New Haven Children's the room fulfills a host of needs. When Jennifer and Kevin Kugelmas' twins were born prematurely on Feb. 29, 2016, at 26 weeks, the Fairfield couple basically lived out of Caroline's Room at Yale-New Haven Children's. They met with their doctor in that room, slept there when their son Jack's condition deteriorated and waited in the room while their 1-month-old daughter Josie had emergency surgery.

"With Jack and Josie, they were both pretty critical for a little while there. It was scary and we were emotional. We were able to cry in there without strangers looking at us," Jennifer says. "It makes a big difference to have the privacy, with all these scary, awful things you're hearing about your children. I just found it a nice place to take a breath. Hearing the alarms constantly is incredibly stressful. … Not having to hear it for a couple of minutes was very calming. Also, I could be right there if I needed to be."

When their son was about 9 weeks old, their doctor told the couple he wouldn't survive. Jennifer and Kevin took turns alternating between Jack's bedside and sleeping in Caroline's Room, and it served as a waiting room for family members who came to say goodbye to Jack.

"If we didn't have that room, I wouldn't have left the ICU for days on end, because I would not leave him. They had to almost force me to go into the room to sleep," she says.

For other families, the room allows for sibling bonding and provides a haven to parents torn between meeting their infants' needs and their older children's needs.

When Amannda and Ed Ramsdell's third son, Michael, was born June 1, 2015, at 27 weeks, he weighed 2 pounds, 2 ounces. During the 98 days Michael was in the NICU before going home, the South Windsor couple tried to keep the family routine as normal as possible for his brothers Matthew, 4, and Jack, 6.

While her children were in school, Amannda stayed with her baby. She went home to have dinner with her family and put her boys to bed, then returned to the Connecticut Children's NICU for a few hours. She used Caroline's Room to pump her milk, rest, clear her mind, reset emotionally and physically escape the activity and sounds of the NICU, without actually leaving the unit. (Before being admitted into the NICU, everyone must scrub in, a process which takes at least three minutes.)

When Matthew and Jack visited, one boy stayed in Caroline's Room with one parent, while the other visited his baby brother with the other parent. This permitted them to bond with Michael without Amannda worrying about whether they were disturbing other families.

"Having them be part of it allowed them to grow with it and process it rather than not seeing it and fully

While their mom was with their baby brother Michael in the NICU at Connecticut Children's, big brothers Jack, left, and Matthew posed for a selfie with their dad, Ed Ramsdell in Caroline's Room. The private room gave them a place to be themselves so that it would be easier to be quiet for the few minutes they visited with their brother. Photo courtesy of the Ramsdell family.

understanding what happened," she says. "Caroline's Room gave them a place where they could relax and be themselves and we could spend time together as a family."

Earlier, when Michael was 3 days old, Amannda and her visiting parents walked into the NICU and her baby was going into cardiac arrest.

"I didn't know what to do. I stood there crying," she says. "I went to Caroline's Room. I called my husband. We stayed in Caroline's Room until the doctor came."

She was grateful for the privacy the four walls gave them. They discussed whether to get him baptized, and before the priest baptized Michael, he talked with the family in the privacy of that room.

"That room, honestly," Amannda says. "It was a lifesaver."

While most preterm babies eventually go home with their families, some don't make it. Caroline's Room provides a private refuge to say goodbye and grieve.

Mary Diaz Raymond, a nurse manager in Connecticut Children's NICU, helped a family of Mexican heritage fulfill their tradition of bathing their daughter's body in white rose petals. Diaz-Raymond placed a tub on the floor, filled it with petals, and she and the father knelt beside the tub and bathed the infant. Her mother and other family members sat nearby.

"That's an experience I'll never forget," Diaz Raymond says.

Today, Gary and Jocelyn have two children, Jordan, 23, and Campbell, 16. They've launched a line of USA-made luxury pantyhose, called Frangi Pangi, that they hope will help fund more rooms. The Doyens are working to raise $1 million so that at least one hospital in every state will have a Caroline's Room.

The couple never imagined their gift would lead to multiple rooms across the country.

"The stories that come out of this NICU at Yale, they bring tears to your eyes, but also this sense of purpose," says Gary, with a catch in his throat, his eyes moist. "The idea that this little two-pound life could be positively impacting families, and will be impacting families' lives forever, it's just kind of extraordinary."

To learn more, see CarolinesRoom.org.

Theresa Sullivan Barger is a frequent Seasons *contributor who lives in Canton with her husband and two of their three children.*

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photo by **AIREN MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY**

Enjoying the Ride

Long-distance cyclers challenge each other, and themselves, to overcome the physical demands of their sport.

by **MATTHEW BRODERICK**

For Matt Stuart, it all started with a commute. Before the competitive racing, the 470-mile trek to Shenandoah Valley, and the circumnavigation of Virginia on a touring bike – and before the 7,000 miles of cycling that Stuart put on his bike and his body last year alone – there was simply a ride to work.

A firefighter and EMT who served for 28 years in West Hartford, Stuart started pedaling the 12 miles from his Collinsville home to the station for the first time in 1986. "I got tired of sitting in traffic and started biking on fair weather days," says Stuart. Soon after, he decided to commute year-round by bike.

"As a firefighter, you must be in great shape, and cycling helped with my conditioning," says Stuart, who now volunteers with the Farmington Fire Department, works part-time for the Connecticut Fire Academy, and runs his own professional photography business. "All my commuting and racing cardio helps me, as a near 60-year-old guy, keep up with the younger guys."

And Stuart is not alone. From adventure cycling and short-track racing to bike clubs and 100-mile-plus rides, Connecticut – home to more than 500 bike routes – provides a rich tapestry for cycling enthusiasts of all levels.

Patricia Budil of Canton discovered her passion for cycling after an ACL tear from adult soccer at age 31 sidelined her from daily running. "It was devastating at first, but I came to realize that running really beat my body up," Budil says.

She soon started taking spin classes and learned of the long rides her spin instructor, an avid cyclist, completed. "He would talk about doing 100-mile [bike] rides and I thought that was crazy, but my goal became to bike 100 miles too," she says.

Budil started by joining a cycling club operated by Benidorm Bikes in Canton. "The group would go for a 30- or 40-mile ride and I really enjoyed the hills and the scenery along the routes." She bought her first bike in May 2012 and completed her first century – cyclist slang for a hundred-miler – that September. That was just the beginning.

Since 2014, Budil has been riding two centuries a month. Last year, she biked more than 3,700 miles. She is a frequent participant in brevets – a type of non-competitive, long-distance cycling event to be completed within a set time limit. They can range from 200-kilometer distances (124 miles with a 13.5-hour cutoff) to 1,200 kilometers (745 miles with a 90-hour cutoff). Budil's longest trip to date has been a 300-kilometer or 186-mile trek from Westfield, Massachusetts into New York and up through Vermont, which included 13,500-foot elevations, two mountain passes and lots of hills. It took her from 6 a.m. to nearly 10 p.m.

It is the physical and mental challenge of distance cycling that appeals to Budil's goal-oriented approach to the sport. She says she enjoys testing her limits with distance cycling. "There are times [during a race] when it's cold or raining and you're tired or hungry and it becomes more mental than physical," she says, "but I enjoy the sense of accomplishment and the stories I get to tell."

And the photos she gets to take. "One of the things I like more about cycling versus running is that you cover more distances and I'm always on the lookout for pretty scenery," she says. She makes it a point to take one photo on every ride to document her cycling journeys: typically her bike, at rest, framed by a scenic backdrop.

But it's more than the pictures and scenery that fuel her passion for cycling. It's the goal setting. "I try to set goals to push myself, whether it's trying to beat sunset on a certain

LEADING THE PACK: Steve May of West Hartford stays one spin ahead of his fellow riders as he rounds a turn in the Keith Berger Memorial Criterium in New Britain in 2017. Photo by **Matt Stuart**

ride or achieving a certain distance," she says, noting some treks can burn between 4,000 and 5,000 calories. Her goal this year is to complete her first 400-kilometer (roughly 250-mile) race. "It'll be a chance to test myself and see what I can do," she says.

Steve May of West Hartford first discovered cycling in his 30s after a back injury. It was both the camaraderie and competitiveness of the sport that drew him in. Initially, he says, it was a way to keep fit as an alternative to running. It's grown into a lifestyle that crosses multiple styles of cycling, including long-distance excursions, road races, cross-country biking and short-tracking racing, known as criteriums (the NASCAR of cycling, according to May).

Last year, May, who just turned 50, estimates he biked more than 8,000 miles, the equivalent of nearly 22 miles every day of the year. "I cycle at least six days a week," May says, noting he'll hit the roads even as the temperatures drop to the high teens. "It's anywhere from 10 hours a week [during the winter] to 24 hours a week in summer."

Whether it's a 100-mile ride with friends to Vermont, a morning pre-work ride with a cycling club or a ride on the training bike at home, much of May's time is designed to train for USA Cycling-sponsored racing events, which run across the northeast region from April through November.

"I started competitive racing about 10 years ago," says May, who participates in some 15 to 20 races a year. He says the connections and the social aspect of racing are what he enjoys the most. "It's great talking to people from across New England before a race or while warming up; it's a very social sport," he says. "You meet different personalities."

And different bikes. In fact, May's favorite annual event is D2R2, a cyclocross cross-country event that draws riders from across the country to bike one of several courses across Franklin County, Massachusetts every August. "There are thousands of people and it's a celebration of bike culture with hand-made custom bikes, special bikes," he says. "It has a race feel to it, but everyone is there to have a good time."

Beyond the sheer enjoyment of it, participants benefit a good cause. The event serves as a fundraiser for the Franklin Land Trust, a local nonprofit that collaborates with landowners to protect forests, farms and other natural resources in the region. During D2R2, riders also gain a better appreciation for the importance of land conservation as they traverse some of the most historic and scenic landscapes in the area.

Given the hours and miles that May cycles each year, he admits there are times – at the end of a race or a long distance – that biking has its downside. "It can be very taxing when your muscles are cramping, and you need to grind through it," he says. "But [in life] when I come up against a challenge, I reflect [on overcoming cycling's physical demands] and it can help me get through things."

One challenge that May and his cycling brethren continue to face at times, he says, is the attitude of drivers. "Some drivers see us as a nuisance, like we don't belong on the roads," he says. "But I can't ride on a sidewalk at 20 miles an hour, so we have to use roads; we have the rights of a vehicle."

ADVENTURE AWAITS: Matt Stuart gets ready to head out on his tour from the Shenandoah Valley to Charleston, South Carolina, in the fall of 2017. Photo by **Sharon Stuart**

Matt Stuart agrees. A racing team member of May's, he has had similar experiences with aggressive motorists. "We need to ride like we're driving a car," says Stuart, who now lives in Unionville. "We need to signal our turns, use mirrors and work with cars and other users of the road to stay safe."

In a state with a high populations of cycling enthusiasts, from casual bikers to distance riders to competitive racers, it's good advice, especially for those like Stuart, who are fighting traffic on a morning commute.

Matt Broderick is a Simsbury-based freelance writer. His longest bike trip ever was 50 miles. His shortest was 20 yards, at age 6, when a bumblebee flew up his nose.

Dr. Abigail Tillman

Before Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center family medicine specialist Abigail Tillman, M.D. ever considered becoming a doctor, she worked at a research lab in Boston, where one of her responsibilities was managing a mouse colony. Dr. Tillman had done animal research on multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease as an undergraduate neuroscience major at Colgate University in New York. She continued on a similar track after graduation, doing the kind of bench (or basic science) research that eventually leads to clinical studies, but found that, to her dismay, she was spending most of her time with mice.

"I decided I liked people better than mice," she says, explaining why she ultimately chose to pursue a medical – instead of a research – career. She finished her pre-med requirements while working at the lab. As soon as she completed her medical school applications, she quit her research job and headed to Colorado to work as a ski instructor while awaiting an admissions decision.

Moving from the snow-covered Rockies to the sunbaked Caribbean island of Grenada, where she eventually attended St. George's University School of Medicine, was a big adjustment, she says. "But it was a beautiful place; I loved it down there."

Still, transitioning from living in America to living in a developing country was "very humbling," she says. "I learned a lot of patience, because it's a much slower pace of life down there. And you really are a guest in the country, learning to interact in a meaningful way with the people, but also learning how to navigate this new place." Though it was hard work, she says, the young doctor enjoyed having the opportunity to explore another part of the world.

FAMILY MEDICINE: WILDERNESS AND CITY

Dr. Tillman was born in New Milford but grew up in Greenwich, where she became an avid athlete early on, swimming and playing lacrosse competitively, and skiing in her spare time. She continued to play lacrosse for Colgate, and picked up scuba diving while studying medicine in Grenada.

Family medicine "was a little bit of everything that I liked in medical school – pediatrics, surgery, gynecology and sports medicine."
– Dr. Tillman

She chose to focus on family medicine because, as she puts it, "it was a little bit of everything that I liked in medical school – pediatrics, surgery, gynecology and sports medicine." But she also wanted to combine family medicine with her interests outside of medicine, which at that time were primarily skiing, scuba diving, hiking and other outside activities. That's what led her, while receiving her residency training, to choose a personalized track of study in wilderness medicine, an evolving field focused on providing urgent medical care in remote settings.

"Wilderness medicine addresses the question of, 'How do you practice medicine in an austere environment where you don't have the resources you have in the hospital, or even the office?' " Dr. Tillman explains. "For me, that translated to caring for people who have ski or scuba accidents – and other medical complications of the outdoors." While she concedes that Hartford is not a remote setting, she says her wilderness medicine training has taught her to more effectively utilize the resources available. "Do I order a chest X-ray, or can I use my clinical expertise to figure out if I need to use antibiotics?" she says.

Dr. Tillman was first introduced to wilderness medicine while doing a medical school rotation on the slopes of Stratton Mountain in Vermont, where she treated ski injuries and provided skiers with urgent care. As part of her wilderness medicine track during her residency training, she and a fellow resident developed a curriculum for the

Written by **Lori Miller Kase**
Photography by **Seshu Photography**

NEW ADVENTURES: Dr. Abigail Tillman joined the medical staff of Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center in August of 2017.

simulation lab designed to teach family medicine residents how to manage pediatric, obstetric, and other adult emergencies in the community – whether in the hospital or on the street. The 34-year-old family doctor joined the Trinity Health Of New England Medical Group at Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center in August 2017, but is continuing her specialty training via a virtual fellowship through the Wilderness Medicine Society in her spare time.

A PUSH TOWARD PREVENTIVE CARE

Trinity Health Of New England Medical Group appealed to Dr. Tillman for many reasons. "The scope of medicine is getting more refined, and family physicians are able to do less and less in an urban setting – but at Saint Francis Hospital, family doctors practice the full scope of medicine," says Dr. Tillman, who relishes the variety in patients and problems that she gets to treat in Hartford. In addition, she says, her more seasoned partners, Drs. Paul Sullivan and Alberto Rodriguez, "are great mentors for me."

"You never know what you are going to get in family medicine – there are always new diagnoses and new problems coming up that test your font of knowledge."

– Dr. Tillman

Dr. Tillman also notes that Trinity Health Of New England Medical Group's mission is very much aligned with her own thinking. "I loved that during my residency training, we were encouraged to invest in the patient population and give back to the community. When I went through the interview process with Trinity Health Of New England Medical Group at Saint Francis Hospital, I got the same feeling of a shared vision," she says.

Dr. Tillman says her own mission – and a national trend in family medicine – is to convey to patients the importance of preventive care. "Because of everything that is happening with health care and insurance, there's a big push toward preventive care," she explains.

The United States spends the majority of its health care dollars on treating chronic diseases at the end of life, as opposed to many other industrialized nations, which invest in preventive medicine. "But over the last couple of years," says Dr. Tillman, "the primary emphasis in family medicine here has been more on preventive medicine and diet and exercise."

According to Dr. Tillman, pediatrics is primarily preventive in nature, but adults tend to have the mindset that they only need to see a doctor when they are sick. "We do well with preventive medicine in the pediatric population because we see them so often when they are little, but the idea of prevention starts to fall off when you get to teenagers and 20-year-olds – and that perpetuates into adulthood," she says. "The biggest thing that adults can do to help prevent chronic disease, is to focus on diet and exercise and living a healthy lifestyle."

The most rewarding part of her job, Dr. Tillman says, is "when you are able to form a connection with somebody and help them with either a big change they want to make (something preventive, for example, like losing weight), or through a devastating and life-changing diagnosis."

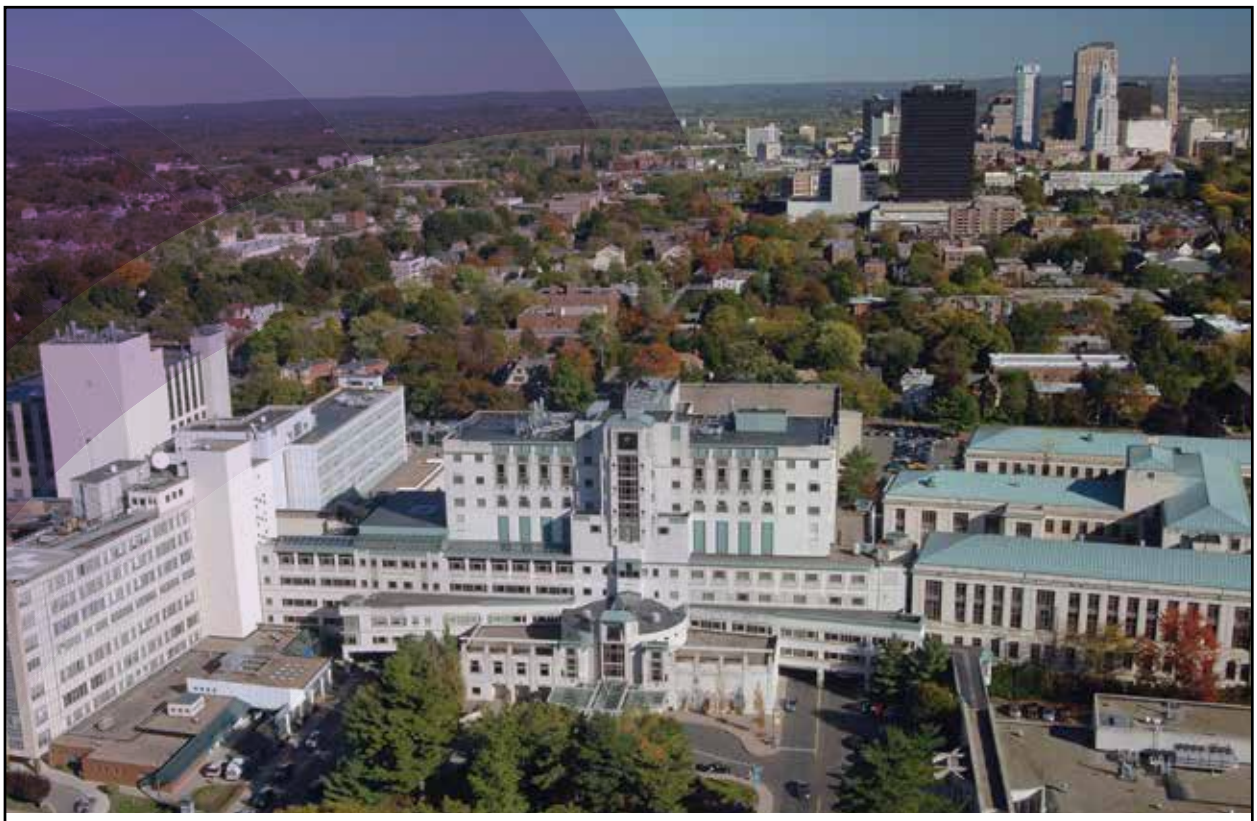
She adds that the variety in patients and breadth of pathology that makes family medicine so exciting is also the most challenging part of the specialty: "You never know what you are going to get in family medicine – there are always new diagnoses and new problems coming up that test your font of knowledge."

Dr. Tillman, who works with University of Connecticut family medicine residents at the hospital, says the most important lesson she tries to pass on to her students is that their education does not end with their residency.

"You are never going to know everything and that's OK," she says. "Be humble, and you can always learn something new from your peers and your patients."

Lori Miller Kase is a freelance writer living in Simsbury.

Photographer Seshu Badrinath of Avon specializes in intimate, natural portraits of families and children. For more information, visit seshuphotography.com



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SEEKING STABILITY: Andrei Brel brought his family to America after the fall of Communism, trading Belarus for the safety of West Hartford. Photo by **Todd Fairchild**

Coming to America

by **SARAH WESLEY LEMIRE**

America, the world's melting pot, has been welcoming immigrants since the Puritans landed at Plymouth Rock. Woven into the fabric of our nation's history, their stories and ancestry help paint a picture of who we are as a country, where we came from, and why.

Seeking ideals like religious freedom and political asylum, their reasons for coming to America are as multifaceted as they are. But most share a single, common thread – the dream of a better life.

ANDREI BREL *of* WEST HARTFORD

Born and raised in Belarus, an eastern-European country bordered by Russia, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, Andrei Brel decided to emigrate to Connecticut when he was in his early 30s.

After the fall of communism, Brel was doing well living in the capital city of Minsk, but he had concerns over a newly destabilized Eastern Bloc. "It was so shaky, so unstable, and with two young children, ... I didn't see a future for me and my family."

Following in the footsteps of his father, who'd relocated to the U.S. in the 1970s, Brel – along with his wife, Zhanna, and their children – came to West Hartford in October 1993, leaving behind an established life, family, and friends, to start over from scratch. "I always remember this date, because for me it's very significant," says Brel. "It's almost like the birthday of my new life, my new family here in the United States."

The first year or two was rough. "The language was tough, everything culturally was tough, the food was different, it was tough to adapt and assimilate."

Fortunately, he and his wife both found jobs. Within eight months, Brel was hired by the State of Connecticut, and began working for the Department of Social Services. Taking advantage of a program that allowed him to attend UConn, he got his master's degree in Social Work while simultaneously working his day job, as well as an additional side hustle.

"I was working, plus going to school, and I had another little part-time job; this is how you have to survive," he says. "I was leaving at five o'clock in the morning, and coming home at eleven o'clock at night."

As hard as it was, his hectic schedule left him with little time to dwell on the difficulties of adjusting to his new life. And though he had occasional doubts, he never questioned the decision to come to America. "I know it's not a mistake. It's the right decision; it's absolutely the best decision I ever made in my life."

After years of doing social work, Brel recognized a need in his community for senior home care, and a better method of delivering meals that were culturally suitable to elderly immigrants. "I sensed a niche for myself to open some kind of kitchen, or some kind of service, and this is how I started my business."

Nearly 20 years later, his vision, Juniper Homecare – which provides home and community services to residents in the Greater Hartford area – is thriving, with locations in

Hartford, West Hartford, and New Britain.

He feels his success is proof that the "American Dream" is not just a cliché. "My friends say that I'm a good example of what you can achieve in this country if you really work hard and you have dreams."

He also values the freedom of expression and the ability to speak his mind, something that wasn't permissible in his former country. "I still remember the Soviet Union. I still remember when you have to whisper, when you cannot say something loud because you can be overheard by somebody, they can report it to somebody, and then you can disappear."

While there are things that he misses about his former country, Brel says for the most part, he's now more American than Russian, and he's living nothing short of the best life possible. "It's true, you can do it. When people say you can become anything, I understand that it's true."

More than that, he's proud that he accomplished what he set out to do – to give his children a better life than they might have otherwise had in Belarus.

Grown with jobs and families of their own, they are proof that the decision he made 24 years ago was the right one. "Look at my kids. This is why I'm here. I look at my grandchild, I look around, and I'm so proud, and I'm so happy."

DR. TATIANA MELENDEZ-RHODES *of* SIMSBURY

The desire to become a marriage and family therapist brought Tatiana Melendez-Rhodes to the U.S. in 2003. A clinical psychologist in Lima, Peru, the 26-year-old wanted to work with couples, and the kind of formal training she was seeking wasn't available in her country.

"I researched potential universities in the United States, and I decided that the University of Connecticut was a good place for me to come," she says.

Though Melendez-Rhodes had found the place, getting here was another story. "The tuition was very expensive, especially when you exchange Peruvian currency for American dollars. It meant that what I had was not enough," she says.

Her mother, a single parent, wanted to send her, but told her daughter that even if she worked for the rest of her life, there just wouldn't be enough money for even a single year.

Melendez-Rhodes was a very good student in school, and decided to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship – a competitive, merit-based grant for international students. The application process took nearly a year, but much to her surprise, she was selected. "When I found out, I couldn't believe it," she said. "I was completely speechless."

After considering her options, she decided to come to the University of Connecticut.

While her American cohorts were enormously supportive and provided a much-needed network of friends, Melendez-Rhodes struggled with the language barrier and wasn't prepared for the culture shock of the Storrs rural campus.

"I'm coming from a city, where there were so many things happening at the same time, so many fun things to do, and there was not so much to do in comparison with the city I came from," she recalls. "It was really hard for me being a young woman, being in a place

FULFILLING DREAMS: Dr. Tatiana Melendez-Rhodes sacrificed a lot in her quest to become a marriage and family therapist. Photo by **Tony Reynolds**

that was pretty much very isolated."

But believing in her purpose, she persevered through the homesickness, receiving her master's and doctoral degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy.

A doctoral fellowship offer took her across the country to Portland, Oregon, where Melendez-Rhodes met her husband. But it wasn't long before she was forced to part from him for two years, because of a condition of her grant. "As soon as I graduated, because of my Fulbright Scholarship, I had to go back and contribute to my country," she explains.

Six months pregnant with the couple's first child, she returned to Peru.

Her husband, working in Portland, visited as often as he could. Melendez-Rhodes worked at several local universities, teaching and doing research while raising their son.

"It was really hard for us emotionally," she said. "But we had a plan, we loved each other, and we said that we are going to make it." Once her obligation in Peru was finished, she returned to Portland, and her husband.

Realizing that she wanted to continue teaching, she began seeking academic positions. In 2014, she was hired by Central Connecticut State University as an assistant professor and clinical coordinator of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program. The couple relocated to Simsbury.

While she's pleased with all that she's accomplished, Melendez-Rhodes says there are still things she misses about her home, including Peruvian cuisine and the friends and family she left behind.

"I see pictures on Facebook of everybody getting together, having parties, doing things ... and I'm not there," she says. "When you leave your country, there's always a price you have to pay. You cannot have it all." But she feels fortunate that she's able to visit, and that her family members are able to travel to the U.S. to see her as well.

Overall, Melendez-Rhodes is grateful for the life she has here, the success she's achieved, and the community she lives in. "The U.S. has given me a lot. It has given me the possibility of fulfilling my dreams, and becoming the professional I wanted to become. It has given me the opportunity for me being able to do the kind of job that I love to do."

TEACHING ACCEPTANCE: Since moving to Connecticut from India, Swaranjit Singh Khalsa has worked hard to improve religious tolerance and understanding. Photo courtesy of Swaranjit Singh Khalsa

SWARANJIT SINGH KHALSA *of* NORWICH

Swaranjit Singh Khalsa emigrated from Punjab, India in 2007 after being accepted as a student in the United States. Though he had earned a bachelor's degree in computer science in his native state, he felt that his opportunities there were limited, and was accepted to study for his master's at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

It was daunting here at first.

"How are people going to react? I look different – I wear a turban. In India, you are living in such a comfortable environment where every person has a turban around you, or they already know who you are. And then [in the U.S.], people ... notice you, even if you are walking without bothering anybody."

It took time, but he came to realize that the looks he was getting were less about hostility, and more about a basic lack of understanding of his religion and culture.

"After 9/11, everything changed. Even though people don't intend to be racist, they have some kind of gap between themselves and people who look different, or who have turbans, or who are Muslims, or who are Sikhs."

Instead of being discouraged by it, he did his best to just focus on his studies. While pursuing his degree, he met his

HIGH HONOR: In 2016, Swaranjit Singh Khalsa was one of just 56 people nationwide to receive the FBI's "Director's Community Leadership Award." It was presented by former FBI Director James Comey, left. Photo courtesy of Swaranjit Singh Khalsa

wife, a native of Punjab who'd relocated to Maryland as a child. Upon completing his master's, they returned to India to live, but only stayed for a year. "There were a lot of rules, regulations, plus you don't have that freedom that we have here," he says, explaining that restrictions, corruption, and security concerns, especially for his wife, also factored into their decision to leave.

Upon returning to the States, they explored opportunities in California, Virginia, and Maryland before purchasing a gas station and settling in Norwich.

Initially, business was slow. "People used to look at me, and turn their car and go next door – we have three gas stations in a row – so I said that it's a scare factor that they have."

But confident in his ability to connect with people, he set up a table outside, giving away free water bottles and brochures on his Sikh religion, "just to talk to people, so that they can feel comfortable talking to us."

After that, Khalsa was never met with outward racism again.

"I think that there's a very big communication gap within our nation. We don't have opportunities where people of different faiths and different cultures can get together and talk to each other, [so that] at the end, they end up saying, 'We're all the same; we're all human beings.' "

Hoping to improve communication, he began working with the Department of Justice to educate Connecticut police officers and other first responders about Islam and Sikhism.

Khalsa says with a deeper understanding, first responders can better identify hate crimes and help protect against them – and recognize important cultural artifacts in the event there's a fire or other emergency in a place of worship.

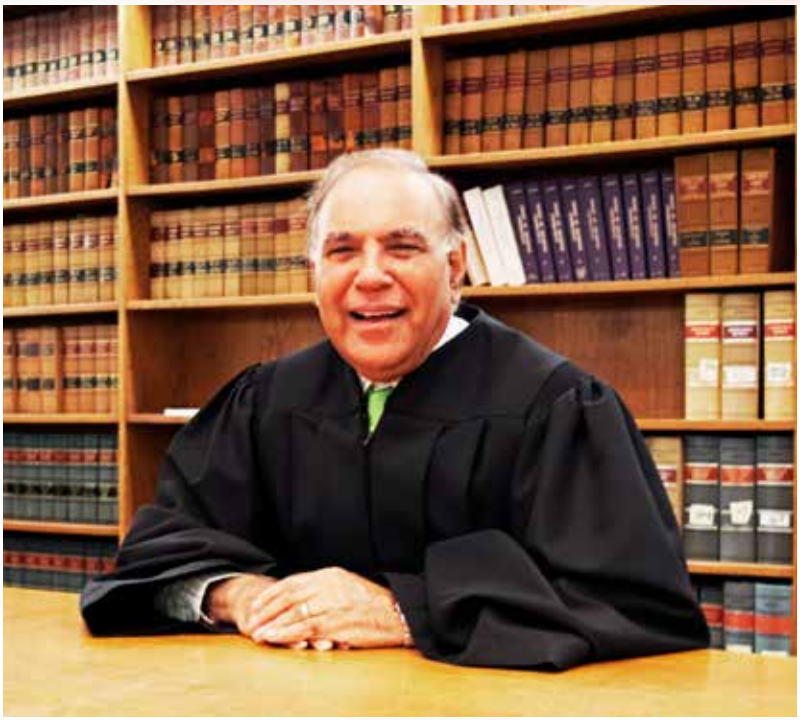
Along with his work to improve religious tolerance and understanding and establishing Norwichtown Shell, his gas station, Khalsa started American Property Group, LLC, a home building and improvement company doing work in New London, Preston, Norwich, and Voluntown.

He started that company in part to help people afford home ownership, and partly to help those affected by the 2008 recession. "After the market crash, I felt bad for people who had to leave their house, so my goal is to help those families as well," he says.

Khalsa's efforts haven't gone unnoticed. In April of 2016, he traveled to Washington, D.C. as one of only 56 people nationwide selected to receive the FBI's "Director's Community Leadership Award." The award was an acknowledgment of all the work he's done in and around his community of Norwich.

In May 2017, he was also recognized by the mayor of Norwich for his contributions.

Though he's pleased by the acknowledgements, he says the true reward is that he's able to continue working for change. He says if the things he does are acknowledged, "that gives me a boost to do more about it, and makes me feel like I'm doing something right."



JUSTICE FOR ALL: In 1988, Nawaz Wahla emigrated from Pakistan to America with his wife and three small children. Today, the Glastonbury resident is a Superior Court judge in New Haven. Photo by **Sarah Wesley Lemire**

JUDGE M. NAWAZ WAHLA *of* GLASTONBURY

From a very young age, Nawaz Wahla had big dreams. Growing up on a farm in a small Pakistan village, he was inspired by his father, who instilled the belief that with hard work and ambition, anything was possible.

"I had a very close connection with my father, who taught me things; he was very wise and he taught me things, all day long, and would say, 'Do this, and do this, but never give up. Ever.' "

With that in mind, Wahla left when he was 17 to attend a local university, before graduating from the prestigious Pakistan Military Academy and becoming an officer in the Pakistani army.

While participating in an operation to prevent smugglers from bringing arms and ammunition over the Iranian border, he was critically injured. "I had lost two of my soldiers, and I was wounded very, very seriously. I was hospitalized for a very long period of time," he recalls.

It was a turning point in his life.

Having worked to obtain his law degree at night while serving, Wahla decided to recalibrate, and applied to law school in Austin, Texas. When he was accepted, he emigrated in 1988 with his wife, an army nurse, and their three small children.

"Why did I choose [America]? The answer is destiny," he says. "I could have never chosen any other country. Even now, never any other country over America. It is one of the best countries on the planet."

When the time came to take the bar exam, a technicality prevented Wahla from taking it in Texas, so he took the test in Connecticut instead, and stayed, making Glastonbury his home.

For 11 years, he practiced as a lawyer before one of his colleagues, a federal judge, sat him down and asked if he'd ever considered becoming a judge.

"That day was September 8, 2008, around 10 o'clock. I will never forget that moment," he says. "He said to me, 'You have all the attributes to be a wonderful judge.' And I just couldn't stop crying."

Two years later, Wahla took the judicial oath.

"This is the amazing strength of my adopted country," he says, "that you can do anything if you have the temperament, if you have the desire to work hard."

For five years, he presided over court in Hartford, before recently becoming a Superior Court judge in New Haven.

He says being a judge is an honor, as it often enables him to help people at a time when they need it most. "You listen to people and try to do the right thing, and you are in

A NEW LIFE: Biende Berroa Sanchez left the Dominican Republic behind at the age of 10. He hopes to one day have a career in law enforcement. Photo by **Tony Reynolds**

position to make a difference in someone's life; that's the beauty."

Though he's accomplished much in the 30 years he's been here, Wahla says his work is far from over. In July, he graduated with a master's degree in Law and Diplomacy from The Fletcher School at Tufts University, a program that routinely sees its graduates continue on to serve as heads of state, diplomats, and political leaders.

While he's more than pleased with where he is in life, he also feels compelled to do more for his birthplace, a country still developing and struggling with shortfalls in education, opportunity, and many other basic necessities.

"My diplomatic dream [is] that I can make a little difference in that realm of affairs," he says. "Will I be able to do that? I don't know. But I also know that if you can dream this, you can do it."

Although he never imagined that he'd end up as a Superior Court judge in America, he vividly recalls his father saying that anything is possible. "I am a living example," he says. "How many countries can you count on to give you [this opportunity], provided you have the ambitions and the desire to become something?"

He says it has taken both passion and perseverance for him – a farm boy from a tiny Pakistani village, whose parents never attended a single day of school – to get to where he is now.

But more than that, he said, it's the opportunities he's been afforded in America that have made all the difference.

"That's the beauty, also, of this country. It gives you those avenues, You don't have to stop. You continue to wherever you want to be."

BIENDE BERROA SANCHEZ *of* TORRINGTON

Biende Berroa Sanchez recalls having a knife held to his stomach during a robbery attempt when he was a young boy in the Dominican Republic.

"It was tough back then. People would rob you for your sneakers or your change. There were a few times that I had to run because people were after me, just to rob me."

Beyond fears of being mugged or assaulted, life on the small Caribbean island was not easy. "Back in 2003, there were always a lot of problems with electricity where it came and went, in and out. Sometimes we'd have to light up a candle to have light in the house."

That same year, Berroa came to America at the age of 10 when his father, who'd previously

emigrated to Connecticut, sent for him and his sister.

Having never been outside of his country, it was a culture shock. "That was my first time over here; everything was different because I came from seeing so little, to seeing so much. It was a whole new, different view," he says.

Fortunately, it didn't take him long to meet and make friends in his Torrington neighborhood, as his dad worked long hours and wasn't often home.

Taking a special interest in him, one of Berroa's elementary school teachers began helping him learn English, and improve upon his native language, Spanish. More than that, however, she took him under her wing.

"[My teacher] always took me to places, things I'd never seen. She took me out to eat. She took me to concerts with her kids. I always went over to their house. She took me to church," he remembers. "She had me involved in things, so I never felt like I was out of place, I never felt like I was alone, or like I was getting bullied by other kids, because I was always doing something, or active."

When he went off to middle school, she introduced him to guidance counselor Elena Sileo, who took over as his mentor.

According to Berroa, times were tough during his adolescence.

"I was involving myself in the streets a lot," he says, explaining that he wasn't involved in anything nefarious, but simply wanted to hang out with his friends all the time, causing friction between him and his father. Their problems escalated, and when his dad took a job in Massachusetts, Berroa, 15, stayed behind.

"I told my counselor [Sileo] that I was going to be moving, and that I didn't really want to. She understood me, and offered me a room in her house," he says.

The room became permanent, and so did their relationship.

Sileo and her husband became his guardians, and according to Berroa, it's because of them that he's the person that he is. "They gave me so much; they just changed my whole point of view of life."

Now, at 25, he shares an apartment with his longtime girlfriend, and works long hours to support himself – along with his birth mother, who recently immigrated to America and lives with him; his grandmother, who lives in a skilled facility in the Dominican Republic; and several other family members who remain there, as well.

"He's such a good person," says Leanne Mailman, Sileo's sister, and Berroa's adopted aunt. "He was faced with so many obstacles that he was able to overcome to now live on his own, work a full-time job, and support his family."

Mailman says Berroa is the definition of success, having made huge strides in search of a better life, and is now working to provide the same for the rest of his family.

"I think of success as someone who's been able to overcome some type of adversity and come out better in the end, and he is that," she says. "Not only is he better, but he's able to help others."

Once his family is settled and he's more financially secure, Berroa dreams of a career in law enforcement, and hopes to return to college, where he can complete his degree.

But for the time being, he's grateful for all he's accomplished so far. "I'm happy that I'm working. I'm happy that I manage to wake up every day to go to work and come home to a home of mine; I pay to live here. And I've got my own car that I bought."

He's also credits the people who've have helped him get here, including his birth father, with whom he's since reconciled, and his adoptive parents.

Had he not come to America, Berroa says, his life would have likely turned out much differently. "One thing I know for sure is that if I had stayed down there, I wouldn't be the person I am today."

Sarah Wesley Lemire is an award-winning writer and humor columnist who lives in Hebron.

FAMILY BONDS: Biende Berroa Sanchez with Elena Sileo, right, and her husband Daren, far left. Photo by **Tony Reynolds**

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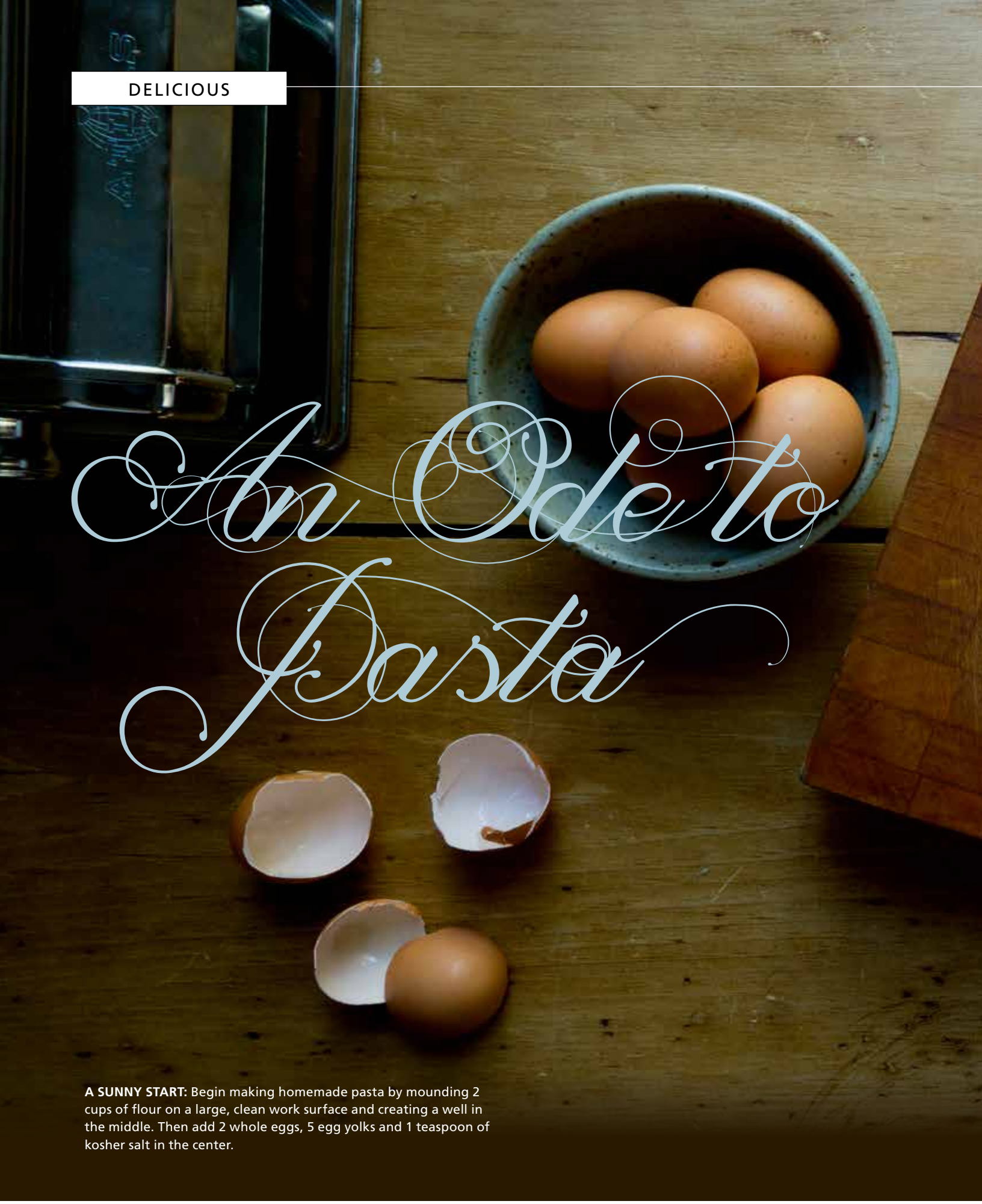
An Ode to Pasta



A SUNNY START: Begin making homemade pasta by mounding 2 cups of flour on a large, clean work surface and creating a well in the middle. Then add 2 whole eggs, 5 egg yolks and 1 teaspoon of kosher salt in the center.

Recipes, story and photos by **Alycia Chrosniak**

Pasta is the reason I gained 14 pounds the semester I studied in Florence. That's right, 14. You'd think I might harbor some ill feelings toward it, but no, here I am seven years later publicly declaring my love for it. You see, pasta and I go way back. Like, all the way to the days that I only ate spaghetti with butter, or mac and cheese as a child, back.

In high school, I took the pasta machine my parents had been gifted for their wedding out of its box in the cabinet and entertained myself by learning how to make fresh dough from scratch. Swirling the eggs and the flour together and then kneading away: press, turn, press, turn, press, turn, until the dough was silky beneath my palms and I had simultaneously worked out any impending SAT anxiety.

In college, I conquered my grandmother's famous lasagna recipe – constructing her meatballs with their three types of meat, braising them in a thick, flavorful ragu, and learning that patience is a virtue, because in the world of lasagna, a two-day assembly is truly best. In Italy, I became enamored with the people who made the pasta. Not just chefs, but the families and their traditions, passed down generations between them.

Whether it be the serene yet laborious process of making it from scratch, or the smaller servings in Italy that make one really savor each bite, pasta has always had a way of making me pause. My hope is that you'll make this dough and the apprehension you'll feel on the first attempt will disappear on the second, and that soon, the kneading will feel like an extension of yourself. *S*

Alycia Chrosniak is a freelance food and travel writer, and the human behind CTEatsOut.com, your guide to the best eats in the state.

READY TO COOK: Nests of fettuccine are prepped for the boiling pot.

FRESH PASTA RECIPE

Makes about 1 lb

Ingredients:

2 cups all purpose flour
1 tsp kosher salt
2 whole large eggs
5 large egg yolks
Water, as needed

Equipment Needed:

Pasta machine
Rolling pin
Bench scraper (optional)
Parchment paper
Baking sheet

To Make the Dough:

Mound the flour on a large, clean work surface and create a well in the center large enough to hold all the eggs. Pour the salt, whole eggs, and egg yolks into the well.

Using your fingers, break the eggs up and begin mixing the eggs in a circular motion, gradually pulling in flour from the sides. Continue mixing, slowly incorporating more flour. Occasionally use a bench scraper (or your hands) to tighten the well and push the flour toward the eggs. The mixture will thicken and eventually feel too tight to mix with your fingers.

When the dough thickens, lift the remaining flour up onto the mixture and push together. It should look shaggy at this point. Bring the dough together with your palms and form it into a loose ball.

Knead the dough by pressing it in a forward motion with the heel of your hand. Rotate the dough 45 degrees and repeat. After every four turns, form the dough into a ball again and repeat. Keep kneading in this forward motion until the dough becomes smooth. The process can take 10-15 minutes. If the dough is too dry and won't hold together, you can add one teaspoon of water at a time to hydrate it.

Once your dough is smooth, cover with plastic wrap and let rest for 30 minutes to one hour.

To Form the Pasta:

Cut your dough into four even pieces. Set one aside and wrap up the rest. Using a rolling pin, flatten out your dough to around half an inch thick, trying to keep the thickness uniform.

Next, take out your pasta maker and set it up according to the instructions. If you're using a machine, turn the flat roller portion to the widest setting (usually 0 or 1). If you're using a stand mixer attachment, turn it to a medium-low speed.

Pass the dough through the machine on the lowest setting 2-3 times, until it goes through with little to no resistance. Then turn the dial to the next setting, which is narrower, and run the dough through again 2-3 times. Continue doing this through the third to last setting (usually marked as 6). Repeat with the three other quarters of dough. Then, at this point, congrats! You have a long pasta sheet that can be fashioned into many shapes.

To Make Fettuccine:

Lay your long pasta sheets out in front of you horizontally. Cut the tapered ends off each so that you have four long rectangles. Then cut each sheet into 10-12 inch sections and dust lightly with flour.

Next, pick up a sheet and feed it through the fettuccine setting on the pasta machine. Gently catch it as it comes out and curl it into a nest on a parchment-covered baking sheet. Lightly dust it with flour and repeat with all the remaining sheets of dough. Use immediately or cover the baking sheet tightly with plastic wrap and freeze for use later in the week.

Tip:

If you get any holes in the dough, while rolling the dough out, you can laminate it. Lay the pasta sheet out in front of you horizontally. Fold the right side in to the middle. Then fold the left side in to the middle. Fold the right side all the way over to the left, like you're closing a book. Using a rolling pin, lightly roll the dough together in a vertical motion. Then pass the dough back through the widest setting of the pasta machine, and continue again through the settings.

FETTUCCINE WITH ASPARAGUS AND PROSCIUTTO

Feeds 4-6

Ingredients:

- **1 lb fresh fettuccine**
- **6 oz prosciutto**
- **3 tbsp butter**
- **2 tbsp olive oil**
- **1 cup frozen peas**
- **1 bunch asparagus, chopped into 1- to 2-inch pieces**
- **5 cloves of garlic, minced**
- **Zest of one lemon**
- **½ cup Parmesan cheese**

Instructions:

Cook the pasta in a large pot of salted water until al dente, about 1-2 minutes for fresh pasta. Drain, reserving 1 cup of the pasta water.

Place a large pan over medium heat and lay down a few pieces of prosciutto until they crisp. Remove from pan and place on a paper towel. Repeat with the remaining prosciutto. Set aside.

Using the same pan, melt the butter and olive oil over medium heat. Add the peas and asparagus to the pan and sauté until tender, about 4-5 minutes. Add the garlic, and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the lemon zest and stir.

Add the drained pasta, along with the reserved pasta water and cheese, and stir until a glossy sauce forms, about 2-4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Add the prosciutto, mix and serve. Top with more Parmesan and lemon zest as desired.

FAMILY FAVORITE: Fettuccine with asparagus and prosciutto is as fresh and colorful as it is delicious.

Perfect Pairings

Wines & Pasta

By Scott Clark

Matching wines with pasta immediately makes you think Chianti, Sangiovese and Pinot Grigio, and why not? Italian pasta simply comes to life when paired with its national soul mate, Italian wine. When it comes to choosing the perfect wine and pasta match, your choice in color and weight of the wine should be guided by the flavors and ingredients in the pasta – what's in the sauce, whether the cheese is pungent and rich or mild and sweet, whether the pasta is filled with any ingredients, and what meats are used to accompany the dishes.

Let's start with the most popular, and most common style of pasta – tomato sauce. The combination of tomatoes and complementary ingredients like basil, extra virgin olive oil, parmesan cheese and garlic give you the perfect palette to pair with crisp dry whites like Pinot Grigio or Arneis, or with aromatic, flavorful red wines. The acid in tomatoes pairs well with slightly tangy wines. For reds, try a cherry-scented Nebbiolo or savory Dolcetto. Try to avoid big, ripe reds like Cabernet Sauvignon or Shiraz, as the acid in the sauce may make them taste harsh and could enhance the tannins.

OUR PICKS:
- White: Bollini Pinot Grigio, Bongiovanni Arneis
- Red: Renato Ratti Ochetti Nebbiolo, Luigi Einaudi Dolcetto di Dogliani

Pastas that include the oil, garlic and cheese of pesto combined with fresh basil makes a lovely match with light-bodied, soft reds or crisp dry whites. Try Pinot Grigio, Sangiovese or Barbera.

OUR PICKS:
- White: Ca' Montini Pinot Grigio
- Red: San Crispino Chianti Classico Riserva, Patrizi Barbera d'Alba

For pasta served with rich, creamy sauces like carbonara made with prosciutto, eggs and Parmesan (no cream!), a rich Italian white or buttery Chardonnay from California makes a perfectly complementary match.

OUR PICKS:
- White: Tenuta Rapitala Piano Maltese (Sicily), Belcréme De Lys Chardonnay

Cream sauces with mushrooms make a great match for either rich, full-bodied white wines like Chardonnay, or fresh, vibrant reds like Aglianico or Sangiovese (especially those from Montalcino).

OUR PICKS:
- White: Sonoma-Cutrer Russian River Ranches Chardonnay
- Red: Donnachiara Irpinia Aglianico, Villa Poggio Salvi Brunello di Montalcino

Pasta with cream sauce and seafood is delicious with fruity whites like Pinot Grigio, Prosecco and Vernaccia, or fresh reds like a Valpolicella.

OUR PICKS:
- White: Tommasi Pinot Grigio, Mionetto Prosecco, Fontaleoni Vernaccia di San Gimignano
- Red: Allegrini Valpolicella

Pasta is one of those meals that really loves wine, so take time to experiment with a few different combinations to find your own personal favorites and enjoy the pleasures of a harmonious match of flavors.

Scott Clark is the general manager of Liquor Depot Inc.

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Now joining UConn Health, Dr. Mo Halawi is bringing cutting-edge technologies and new ideas to the field of hip and knee replacement. Forget everything you know about long hospital stays and drawn-out recovery times, he says. Everything is changing.

An American Dream Story

BY **TERESA M. PELHAM**

For a man of just 34 years, Dr. Mo Halawi has seen a lot. Born in war-torn Lebanon, he came to the United States alone at the age of 17, against his parents' wishes. It wasn't an easy journey, but he's now a successful orthopaedic surgeon, proving that hard work and determination truly can lead to the American Dream.

After completing his undergraduate studies with highest honors at the University of Houston, Dr. Halawi was named the International Student Leader of the Year by Golden Key International Honour Society and the Walter and Adelheid Hohenstein Fellow by Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. Dr. Halawi then went on to Duke University School of Medicine, where he was a Jack Kent Cooke Graduate Scholar, Howard Hughes Medical Institute Fellow, Paul and Daisy Soros Fellow, and Merage Foundation for the American Dream Fellow, just to name a few accolades.

After medical school, Dr. Halawi stayed at Duke University Hospital for orthopaedic surgery residency and then completed an adult reconstructive surgery fellowship at the Cleveland Clinic. As a culmination of his training, Dr. Halawi was awarded the prestigious Hip Society Maurice E. Müller Traveling Fellowship to Europe, an opportunity limited to one orthopaedic surgeon from North America every year. To date, Dr. Halawi has authored 31 research papers and book chapters. He's a bit of an overachiever, which is exactly what you want in your orthopaedic surgeon.

Now joining UConn Health, this academic surgeon and assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery is bringing cutting-edge technologies and new ideas to the field of hip and knee replacement. Forget everything you know about long hospital stays and drawn-out recovery times, he says. Everything is changing.

Seasons Magazines: **What's one of your best patient success stories?**

Mo Halawi: Every opportunity to help make a positive difference in someone's life is a success story. The best part of being a joint replacement surgeon is to take a patient with severe pain and poor quality of life and right away, "give them their life back" as some patients say. Today, I saw a young woman who was happy and without pain for the first time since she was a child. Her hip did not develop normally and as a result she had a remarkable limp and was tiptoeing to compensate for her significantly short leg. Her total hip replacement, which required shortening of the thigh bone, is only occasionally performed, as it requires specialized training due to its complexity and high potential for complications. I was very motivated to help this hard-working single mother. This was one of the very first surgeries I performed at UConn.

SM: Tell me about your transition from Lebanon to the U.S.

MH: I grew up in a war. As a child, my mother always had a suitcase packed because we never knew when the shelling was going to start. There was a lot of fear and uncertainty. Lebanon is a beautiful country, but it is one that is cursed by a volatile political climate. The American Dream was my inspiration. When I came to the U.S., I had literally $1,100 and spoke very limited English. For over a year, I worked two full-time jobs and sometimes lived in my car to make ends meet while enrolled as a full-time college student. The nice thing about the United States is that you work hard and you get what you put into it. My life changed when my college physics teacher one day approached me and said,

MAKING LIFE BETTER: Dr. Halawi's goal is to improve his patients' function and quality of life. Photo by **Steve Laschever.** Copyright Mo Halawi, MD.

"I want you to apply for this scholarship." I thought, "Who am I? This is a very competitive national scholarship." I woke up the next morning and decided to give it a shot. I ended up getting a full-ride scholarship to the University of Houston. It was a game-changer. I didn't have to worry about making ends meet. It put me on track.

SM: How will hip and knee replacement be different five years from now?
MH: Just from when I started my training to now, it is so different. When I was a junior resident, the length of stay was three or four days. Patients were on opioid pumps, they had surgical drains, indwelling bladder catheters, their progress was slow, and they were often discharged to rehab or skilled nursing facilities. This was only a few years ago. Now, my patients go home the same or the next day. What I found to be important is to take time to educate and optimize the patient before surgery and to use proven evidence-based pathways that are safer and much more efficient. We will continue to move towards outpatient and rapid recovery surgery as our knowledge and ancillary support improve.

SM: What are some of the lessons you learned visiting surgeons in Europe?
MH: One of my most exciting experiences was the opportunity to travel to Europe and learn from some very skilled orthopaedic surgeons. It was an opportunity to get a worldly perspective, complementing my American training. In England, for example, where the National Health Service is the largest payer for healthcare, most surgeons do not have the leisure of loosely ordering advanced imaging or expensive workup. They have to rely on some of the most basic foundations of medicine: proper physical exam and simple X-rays. In the U.S., we still order expensive studies that are often unnecessary and don't change the course of care. It was also amazing to see the many variations, even when performing a standard surgery, and the rationale for each variation. Ultimately, there is no one surgery, one approach, or one implant that fits all. Instead, the surgeon should be comfortable in many different ways to perform a procedure and to tailor it to each patient's specific needs.

"One of my most exciting experiences was the opportunity to travel to Europe and learn from some very skilled orthopaedic surgeons. It was an opportunity to get a worldly perspective, complementing my American training."

– Dr. Halawi

SM: What are you currently researching?
MH: I am currently the principal investigator for a number of clinical and basic science studies. My clinical research is centered on optimizing perioperative pathways and outcomes for hip and knee replacement. The main question is, how can we make the same surgery safer and more efficient? My basic science research is focused on understanding the biomechanics of the hip joint, with the goal of one day pioneering patient-specific total hip replacement.

SM: Describe a typical surgery morning.
MH: I wake up every day at 4 o'clock in the morning, just out of habit. I catch up on emails and read news. On a surgery day, I'm at work by 6 or 6:30 a.m. I come early because I want to talk to the staff and make sure everything is ready and going to go as planned. I talk to the patient and their family members to see if they have any last-minute questions. Sometimes, I use this as an opportunity for a motivational or cheering talk for an anxious patient or family member. Forming a team with the patient and their loved ones is critical to maximize recovery.

SM: What drives you every day?
MH: I like helping make a difference in the lives of each of my patients, performing complex procedures, and contributing to medical research. The hip and knee are the largest and most complex joints in our body. Arthritis is just one of many possible causes of pain and dysfunction. The success of surgery hinges on making the correct diagnosis and being honest with the patient regarding the expectations. I really cannot imagine anything better than taking a patient with severe pain and poor quality and being able to transform their lives and see them happier and functional again. I get to see results of my work right away. There is also nothing more intellectually satisfying than playing an active role in advancing medicine through research, and training the next generations of orthopaedic surgeons. That's the reward. That's what drives me every day.

Teresa M. Pelham is a writer based in Farmington.

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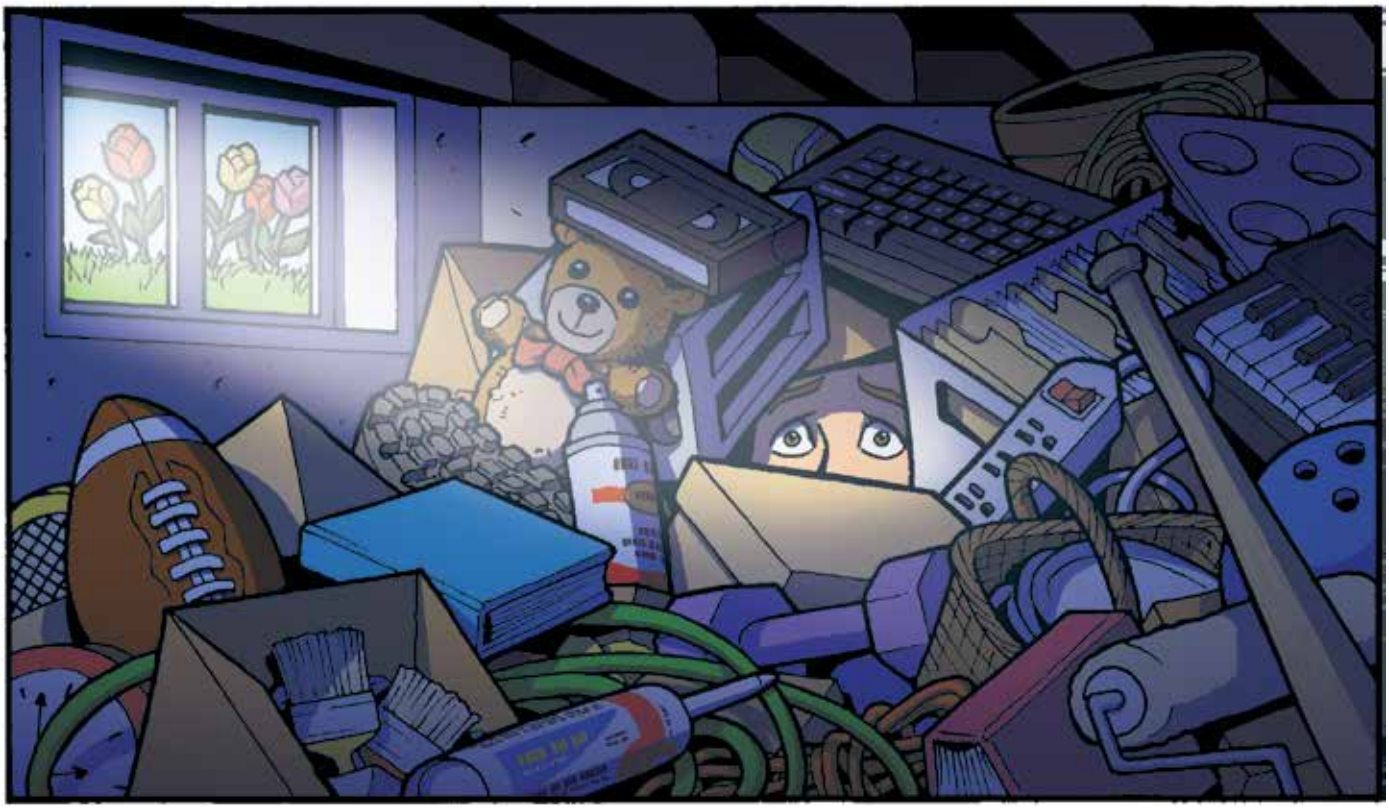
Written by **Matthew Dicks**
Illustrated by **Sean Wang**



A Clean Break

Cleaning? Great. But never in the spring.

The cold has receded. The merciless piles of slush at the foot of our steps have finally melted. The grass, invisible for months under a coat of white, is now reaching, stretching, yearning for the sun. The first flowers of spring have bravely risen from the soil.

I have replaced my winter coat with something light. In the words of my mother-in-law, "The perfect weather is when you can wear your lightweight cashmere."

That time has arrived.

It's spring. It's the season that allows the mole people of the New England states to emerge from their hovels and finally take pleasure in the outdoors again.

Except we can't. Not yet. It's time for spring cleaning.

This might just be one of the stupidest ideas on the planet.

At the very moment that the world has transformed from miserable to hopeful, dismal to delightful, millions of Americans huddle indoors, cleaning their homes of dust and debris. We declutter. Mop and wax. Scrub and scour. We empty pantries and cupboards. Toss away condiments long since expired. Cull our wardrobes of waistlines no longer possible. As the flowers wisely poke their heads above ground and swoon in the warmth of a spring sun, we crouch on our hands and knees, forgoing the beauty of the outside world for the potentially tidy world indoors.

I am not opposed to cleaning. Not at all. Ask my wife. I am tidy and organized to the point of annoyance. I spend my days eyeing piles of papers, folded clothing sitting atop the dryer, and never-to-be-read books in the bookshelf, plotting their eventual exit from our home.

Some are tossed instantly in the dead of night. Others are secreted to offsite locations where they will sit for days, weeks or months, waiting for me to determine if they will be missed.

When it comes to cleaning and decluttering, I am relentless.

But not in spring. Never in spring.

There are times in the year when "spring cleaning" makes sense. February, for example, when the weather outside resembles that of a walk-in freezer. As we go stir crazy in our homes, binge watching Netflix and overeating, why not get off the couch and clean? If you're going to be trapped by negative wind chills and freezing rain, why not be productive?

Or how about in the weeks before Christmas, just before three tons of unneeded merchandise will be added to your collection of stuff you still don't need. Clear out space for this new load of nonsense with a little "spring cleaning."

Or how about one of the dog days of summer when the temperatures exceed 95 degrees, the humidity is 9,000% and you can't imagine going outdoors? Why not descend to the cool of the basement and rid yourself of that ancient baby swing, your box of aspirational college textbooks, and those Halloween decorations you dutifully stored down there 12 years ago with every intention of reusing? Spend a sweltering summer in the cool of your basement, emptying its contents before you die and your children are forced to rent a dumpster and hate you.

But spring? The very moment that the world has invited you back outdoors? As buds burst forth on the ends of tree branches, the warm sun defeats the last of the enormous snow piles in the mall parking lots, and baseball players return to the fields ... at that moment, the very last thing you should be doing is rooting around your basement or attic for stuff you didn't need in the first place.

According to researchers, we can blame the terrible timing of spring cleaning on the Iranians, who celebrate their new year on the first day of spring and practice "khooneh tekouni," which literally means "shaking the house" just before the Persian New Year.

Somehow this tradition has traveled west and become a part of American culture.

So there you have it. We clean out homes at the most inopportune time of the year because the Iranians, who have never experienced a New England winter, choose to clean their homes at the onset of spring.

This might be fine for a people whose average winter temperature never drops below freezing and will never experience the stark contrast between a frigid winter and a lovely spring day. But for New Englanders, who can watch three feet of snow transform into lush, verdant fields in the space of two months, spring is perhaps the worst time to hole oneself up inside the house, cleaning.

Not perhaps. Definitely.

Stop the insanity! No more spring cleaning, I say. At least, not in the spring. Never in the spring.

Matthew Dicks is a West Hartford elementary schoolteacher. He is the author of the new novel, The Perfect Comeback of Caroline Jacobs, *as well as* Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend, Something Missing, *and* Unexpectedly, Milo, *which have been translated into 25 languages worldwide. Learn more at matthewdicks.com.*

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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