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MAGAZINE





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A photograph of a man in a tan coat and yellow scarf pulling a sled with two children in a snowy winter scene. In the background is a modern wooden house. To the right, the Crown Energy Corp. logo and text are displayed.

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## A NEW START AND FRESH BEGINNINGS

Wow, happy 2026 to all of you my friends. Did you speak your wants and wishes into the universe for this year? Did you write down any affirmations or set yourself any New Year's resolutions? I always talk about doing these things, but when it comes down to it, frankly, I forget. I do, however, think about all of these things and therefore in some ways I suppose I do put my hopes out there into the universe, or ether, or whatever you want to call it.

But seriously, 2026! Holy guacamole, how did we get here? Didn't the 2020s just start? And now we're in the second half of them. Just, wow. That just goes to show how time truly does fly by. With that said, maybe that's a good reminder for all of us to enjoy every moment and not to take anything for granted. As my old friend Lucky always says, "yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift." And he couldn't be more correct, because every day is in fact a gift. So then I ask, how are you going to enjoy today's gift?

This month we've got a little bit of everything in this issue. A lot of my writers were thinking about the bigger picture and some life-changing topics, hence the looks at AI and menopause. You read that right: AI and menopause. Bet you never thought you'd see those two things together in a sentence. While Dominique and Whitney were examining those subjects, Jesse dove into local sayings and Regina went on a whole tangent on Mel Robbins. Have you ever heard of Mel Robbins? I had heard of her, and I'd seen some of her clips online, but I'd never put two and two together with who she is. Reading Regina's article though, it connected all of the Mel Robbins dots for me, and I'm picking up one of her books this week; it's going to be the book that I buddy-read with two of my friends in the new year. Why am I going on about Mel Robbins? Because, frankly, I was just so taken and impressed with her story and viewpoint. I hope you too will take something from the article.

Closer to home, Leora shares the story of local artist Susan Rand while Christine introduces us to topiary creator Matthew Larkin. Christine also dove head-first into local school districts as they pertain to real estate values. So as you see, we've got quite a few stories, and there's sure to be something for everyone. Above all though, thank you for reading, and I wish you a very happy 2026!

– Thorunn Kristjansdottir



## JANUARY 2026

Just as the sun rises on a new year, so does the sun over Long Pond in Lakeville, CT. Happy New Year and may it bring you all of the fun and excitement that you hope for..

Photo by  
Olivia Valentine

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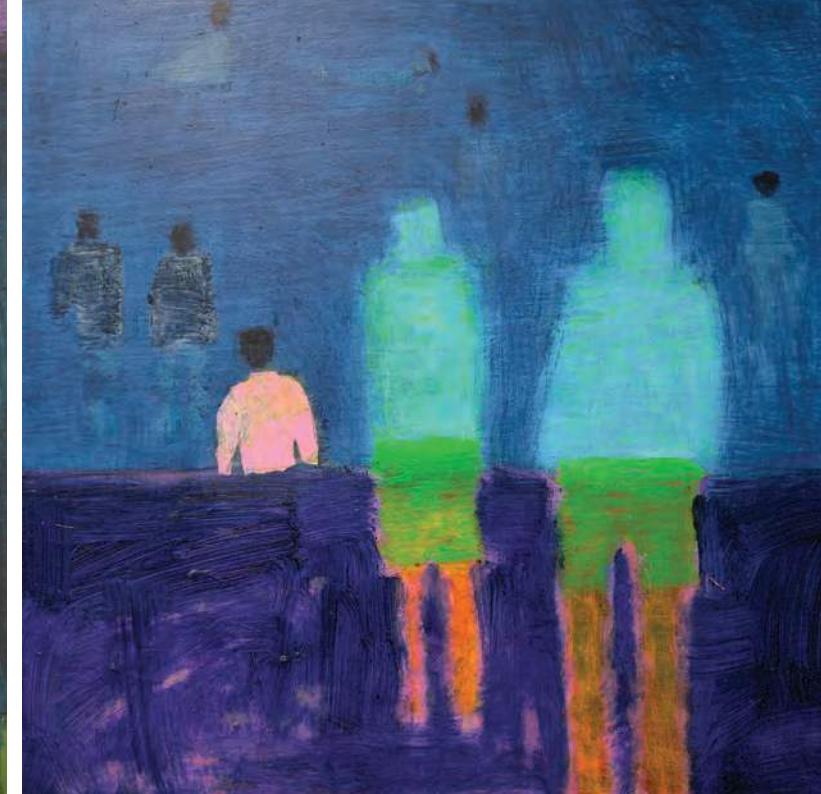
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By Leora Armstrong  
[info@mainsstreetmag.com](mailto:info@mainsstreetmag.com)

*Figurative painter Susan Rand works within a visual language of quiet observation and pause. Her figures, often viewed from behind, invite the viewer to inhabit their vantage point and look outward through their eyes. A subtle hesitancy runs through the work, as though we momentarily step into another's shoes. Her canvases glow with vibrant color, and a sense of joy radiates from the figures larking about in the water. At other moments, a gentle pensiveness emerges as we watch those who themselves are watching, creating a layered sense of curiosity that draws us into the unfolding narrative. We caught up for a studio visit after a snowstorm as we begin to settle into the winter season. Rand had just hung her latest show at Sweet Williams in Salisbury, CT.*

#### **So, what pulled you into painting?**

Well, I've always been creative, but my visual journey really began with photography. In high school, I landed a January-term job shooting for a local newspaper, which was such a fun introduction to working behind the camera. Later, I studied fine art photography at Goddard College, where

I really learned to push myself visually.

#### **Was there a mentor or teacher who inspired you?**

My group was very tight-knit, the critiques were strong, and my teachers pushed us in all the right ways. It was the cohesive group that inspired me. I slowly began drifting toward painting. I started shooting SX-70 Polaroid film and manipulating the images, scratching into them, then coloring over them with oil pastels. They felt like paintings, even though at the time, I knew little about drawing or color, just that I had an instinct for it.

Eventually, I was commissioned to create three paintings for a house that was under construction. However, when on site, I took one wrong step, fell backwards 12 feet, and severely injured my right arm. The healing was a slow process as my wrist needed to be rebuilt. I also worked in real estate because, as you know, it's nearly impossible to live solely off your art; I've been involved in real estate for over 30 years. But I always painted alongside it. I needed painting for my sanity; so many artists have a 'real job' to support the work that feeds their soul.

When I was in the hospital, they gave me morphine, which I couldn't stand, but through the fog I kept hearing this voice shouting in my head: *Quit your job and go paint. Quit*

*your job and go paint.* After surgery and discharge, I couldn't drive, and my arm was terribly painful. But eventually I started studying painting with Joan Griswold in Great Barrington. She ran an open studio every Friday afternoon. It was a wonderful group. I was determined to learn how to paint, but I quickly realized that painting is something you never finish learning.

#### **I'm really interested in the narrative of what pulls you to make work, what art means to you, and what motivates your practice?**

I often feel a strong emotion when I make art. I think that's important, because the emotions that surface aren't always pleasant. We've all had experiences that shape us, and those experiences, especially the difficult ones and the process of working through them, feed the work. The discipline of the practice is a huge motivator too: the daily act of showing up, picking up the brush, and being in the studio, even if all you do is read books. I thrive on the sense of purpose that comes from making work.

**Many artists work in creative fields without fully realizing why they are drawn to them. People who have gone through something emotionally difficult often find a way to express it through their work, without ever having to talk about it directly. When I look at all the great artists, so many of the**

**WATCH**  
**WITH**  
**SUSAN RAND**

truly compelling ones have had arduous journeys. What the artist experiences isn't always visible to the viewer, who doesn't have the same emotional attachment to the narrative. But the energy of the emotion is in the making, and that does come through.

Yes, emotion is an essential component of my work. Sometimes I look at a piece and think, *Wow, that's dark*. I'll show it to a friend in the studio and say, "Don't you think this is dark?" And they'll say, "No, what are you talking about?" They don't have the emotional attachment to it that I do. The energy of the emotion is in the making, even if viewers don't consciously perceive it.

#### Do you photograph images and then work from those?

I spend time at the beach watching people's interactions. I take so many pictures and often think, *Ooh, I'd love to do a painting of that*. For a while, I had a little pochade box I would bring to the beach. I don't like to sit in the sun, and I get bored just lying there, so if we were going for a few hours, I'd bring my little box and paint landscapes right on the beach. I loved doing that. I was always so careful carrying everything back to the car.

Eventually, I decided to leave the paints at home. Instead, I started sketching quickly in pencil – loose figures, fleeting impressions – and later developed paintings from those sketches. That process is what ultimately led me into the swimmer series.

**Yes, you had a show of the swimmer series at Standard Space. The motivation for that show came from those daily trips to the beach.**

Exactly. When I started painting, I focused on getting the perspective and scale right, and I'm terrible at both; I'm not a good renderer. So, I finally decided to let go of that, forcing myself to loosen up, and now I'm much more forgiving of myself. We impose many constraints on our work. After my injury, when I had to write and paint with my other hand, I loved the freedom that gave me. My handwriting looked childlike, but the message felt adult. That looseness opened something up for me.

**Yes, a different part of your brain is working when you're doing that; it brings something else out. When I'm painting, I use both hands, and I switch the brush back and forth. Do you have a favorite time that you work?**

I like to start my day off working because if I don't, I might have a harder time getting into the studio later in the day. But that doesn't always happen. There are times when I'll come down and go for two hours, which can easily turn into five hours.

#### What brought you to this part of the world?

When I went to Goddard College, I met Curtis in the dark room as we both majored in photography. He grew up in this area. We became good friends. I used to visit Salisbury often,



Above: Susan Rand in her studio.

Below, left: *Swim Dream*, 2023. Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48.

Opposite page, L-R: *Let's go see*, 2025. Oil, acrylic and collage on panel, 16 x 20.

*Green Suits*, 2024. Acrylic and collage on wood panel, 24 x 24.

and I took summer jobs through college with him. The friendship morphed into marriage, and we are in our 50th year, living here in the house where Curtis grew up, and where we have raised our family.

#### What artists have inspired your journey?

Yes, so Milton Avery, Pierre Bonnard. I love Richard Diebenkorn, Peter Doig, Edward Hopper, Mark Rothko, and Katherine Bradford. I'm very inspired by her, and David Park is amazing. All these artists have excellent use of color and image making. It's the color that often motivates me.

This fall, we went on a trip to Italy. We don't travel much because we are both busy, and we have land here, which we love working on. However, knowing I wanted to sketch, I brought my iPad and drew with the Procreate app, which is terrific for travel. Curtis also had his own sketchbook and pencils. We had so much fun!

I'm currently working from those pieces. Using this platform feels like letting go completely. When you work with a more limited palette, you have less control over the colors. It's such fun, a great tool. A good use of technology, though much digital production, including AI, consumes enormous energy. People often don't realize that.

**Yes, Hockney has created incredible bodies of work on the iPad. But we must be wary of over-reliance on digital tools. The world needs tangible things. NFTs, for**



Continued on next page ...



Top, L-R: *Untitled*, 2025. Mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 inches.

*I know*, 2025. Oil on panel, 14.5 x 12.

*First Day of Camp*, 2023. Mixed media on canvas, 30 x 50.

Above, center: *Sunburn*, 2023. Oil on panel, 18 x 22.

Above, bottom: *Pink Hair*, 2023. Mixed media on canvas, 36 x 28.

**example, remove that tangibility while consuming massive energy. Have you ever taught, and what advice would you give to an artist today?**

I once helped run a printmaking studio in New Haven, before I had kids. I did many etchings and still have my etching press. My advice? That's a tough one because who can afford to be an artist? No one's ever been able to afford to be an artist; 80% of artists have other jobs. So, make sure you can support yourself, and don't have high expectations for selling your work or making a living from it; you'll get rejections. Rejections are all part of the game. Passion keeps you going.

**Have you done residencies?**

Yes, I've been to the Vermont studio center three times. I stayed at Tyrone Guthrie in Ireland, which was beautiful although the weather was wet and heavy. However, it was good to get away to focus on work. I had three kids, but a month away is a long time for me, and I get homesick. Isn't that ridiculous? But now I feel like I don't need a residency anywhere. I have this place; it is my private domain. Now you can do online workshops, which are great as well as in person. The NY Studio School was excellent, a grueling drawing program, but incredible.

**Can you discuss the figures in your work?**

Well, they're mysterious, and they are usually painted from the back, occasionally, from the front; the figure appears to be looking for or at something. One piece came from a

photograph my daughter Lilly sent me; her son's first day of camp. Here you arrive, and you don't know any of those kids who are all together; you are outside the group, but must walk in. That sense of trepidation comes through the work. I had to figure out so much at a young age, and socially, I might have been shy, so that may come through.

**You have recent work at Sweet Williams. Can you talk about that series and what inspired it?**

I installed 13 pieces of a body of figurative work I've been working on for the past few years. Most of the images were seeded by trips to the ocean and by observing daily interactions. Sweet Williams is an excellent local space, and with so many galleries closing, keeping it local feels important. In the current world, we're in this place of flux; keep it local, keep it simple.

**How was making work as a woman and a mother?**

Actually, I used to photograph my children, and I ran a portrait photography business for a while. I knew I had limited time to work when they were little, so this was a good outlet for my creative life for a few years. Later, when they went to school, I returned to the studio to paint.

Historically, male artists received more recognition because they didn't carry the domestic load. Women artists often put their careers on the back burner.

**Yes, domesticity can kill creativity. There are more collaborative couples now, but the imbalance still exists.**

I have other things that distract me from my art, which is healthy. We have land, as we live on an old dairy

farm that my father-in-law ran. A couple of years ago, Curtis gave me my own tractor, so I could mow and manage the fields. There is a Zen to this task, the monotony, the light, the movement. The other day, I was mowing a huge phragmites patch and saw a massive bear rooting in the compost. I filmed it and watched it zoom across the field. It's a whole different experience. Working with the land is essential to my practice.

*Do drop by Sweet Williams for a delicious cake and a cuppa and take time to look closely at Rand's work. You'll see the brushwork, the palette-knife marks, and the layers of paint, each image capturing a moment suspended in time. Who, then, is doing the watching: the figures on the wall as they engage with one another or the artist herself? In these paintings, everyone is watching something. •*

*Susan Rand Show at Sweet Williams is donating 15% of sales to Corner Food Pantry, [thecornerfoodpantry.org](http://thecornerfoodpantry.org).*

*Sweet Williams is located at 17 Main St, Salisbury, CT. The show runs December 4 through February 27, 2026, visit [sweetwilliams.com](http://sweetwilliams.com).*

*To see more of Susan Rand's work please visit her website and gallery at [susanrand.com](http://susanrand.com). Follow her on Instagram, @susanrand. Email, [susan@susanrand.com](mailto:susan@susanrand.com). Visit the Shamnoski Gallery at [shamnoski.com](http://shamnoski.com).*

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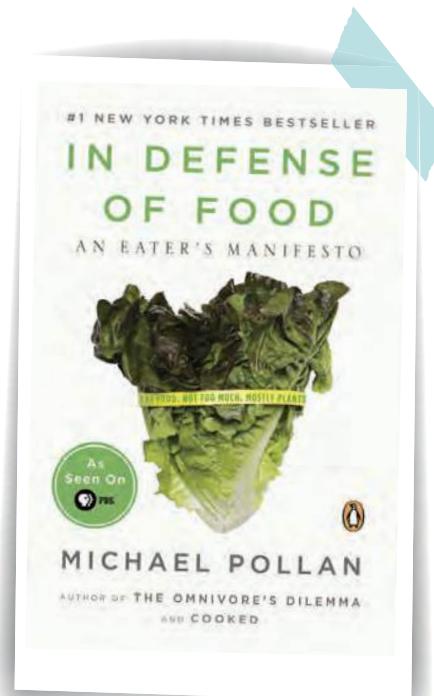
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# JANUARY MUSTS

## to eat



**A healthy treat from BLISS.** While juice is still the heart and soul of BLISS, located on North Broadway in Red Hook, NY, the beloved juice bar has recently expanded into a new space to encompass a cafe as well. Locally sourced and organic, BLISS' extensive menu includes something for everyone: breakfast tacos, porridge of the day, protein waffles, soup, sandwiches, salads, bowls, cold-pressed juices, smoothies, and an organic espresso bar! You can't go wrong with whichever you choose. BLISS' juices are made using a cold-pressed method, which preserves over 99.9% of nutrients of the ingredients, and each bottle contains three to five pounds of fresh greens, fruit, and vegetables. Cold-pressed juice is known to strengthen the immune system, heal the gut, remove toxins from the body, and increase natural energy, among many other benefits. Check out what's on the menu at [blissredhook.com](http://blissredhook.com) or head over to the shop at 7501 North Broadway, Red Hook, NY, open Tuesday through Saturday from 8am-4pm. *Photo: BLISS*



## to watch

**Limitless with Chris Hemsworth.** You're reading "Chris Hemsworth" and probably have visions of him as Thor, but I recently stumbled upon him in a docu-series of sorts. I watched his series, *Limitless*, on Disney+ and was immediately enthralled with Chris's "epic mission to discover how to live better for longer." In this six-part series, Chris works with a number of world-renowned experts as well as his own family and friends while he challenges himself to new limits. Why? Because he's looking to "stop the diseases of old age before they take hold." But what happens is truly enthralling and in some ways eye opening. For me, seeing how he went to extremes to unlock the "potential to stay fitter, healthier, and happier" is something we can all aspire to. *Photo: Disney+*



## To do:



**Take a class at the Danica Center.** If, like many others, one of your New Year's resolutions is centered around being more active and taking better care of your physical health, then look no further than the Danica Center for Physical Therapy & Movement Integration, located in Sharon, CT. The Danica Center offers weekly tai chi balance classes and Pilates mat classes for varying levels. Pilates mat classes include a restorative/level 1 for students who are new to Pilates or who require beginning at a basic level, as well as intermediate/level 2 classes for those who are more familiar with the movement styles. Tai chi chuan and tai chi balance & therapeutic movement classes benefit the whole body and promote mental meditation, physical alignment, posture, strength, coordination, and balance. Classes are kept small, typically between 12 and 15 people per hour-long class, ensuring that each participant gets the attention that they need. Research-based movement principles dominate the classes at Danica, promoting mobility, breathing, and increasing mind-body awareness. Check out Danica Center's full schedule of classes on [danicacenter.com/class-schedules](http://danicacenter.com/class-schedules). *Photo: Lindsey Clark*

## TO READ

***In Defense of Food* by Michael Pollan.** I'm a huge Michael Pollan fan. I've read many of his books and watched his Netflix documentaries. They are truly eye-opening. For this book recommendation, I want to go back to where it started for me, with *In Defense of Food*. The book was originally published in 2008 and Michael's entire point was this: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." That's it! Simple, right? Michael, for me, broke down the grocery store, and I have never looked at the grocery store the same again. Essentially he stated how most of the "real" food is to be found towards a store's exterior, with the more-processed food in the center of the store. Think about that: where do you find the fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy? On the store's perimeter, that's where! When I first read this book, it was the first time that I read such an approachable book that explained so clearly nutrition, good food, and what and how we should be eating. In my opinion, everyone needs to read this book. *Photo: Amazon*

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# HISTORIC LANDSCAPE DESIGNER & TOPIARY CREATOR

*Matthew Larkin of Black Barn Farm and the chairman of the Berkshire Botanical Garden*



**C**hristine recently caught up with the multi-talented Matthew Larkin of Richmond, Massachusetts. She learned all about Matthew's Black Barn Farms, his topiary work, as well as his role as the chairman of the Berkshire Botanical Garden.

By Christine Bates  
info@mainstreetmag.com

#### **What's the Black Barn Farm?**

Black Barn Farm specializes in historical garden design and topiary. Our activity centers in this barn, where we make topiary frames, custom furniture, and lighting for our interior design company, Grantlarkin. My design office and library are upstairs. My wife and I needed workspace. In 1997, we found this 1840 barn in Falls Village, CT; disassembled it; and put it back together with some exterior changes to go with the eyebrow window house that we had finished renovating. Back then it was inexpensive to find an old house to fix up that also had acres of land.

#### **You majored in art history at Skidmore and minored in art. How did topiary enter your life?**

A friend of ours had become the executive director of the Green Animals Topiary Garden in Rhode Island and invited us to come up to visit. The living animal sculptures captivated me, and I decided to learn about topiary

art. I also realized there was no place to purchase large scale topiaries, and I've always enjoyed being outside and making things. Today 35 years later, topiary has taken over our property.

The garden was initially laid out with a 100-foot allée of Donald Wyman crabapples that creates the "spine" of the garden. It terminates in a gate that leads to the pool garden and a bronze fountain. Two other gates form an axially symmetrical cross that leads in two directions, one to the topiary yard, and the other, through the pavilion to a beech tunnel and maze. It's a private garden for our enjoyment although sometimes we open it for a garden conservation tour. Topiary has become my passion.

#### **How do you define topiary?**

Topiary is the art of clipping and refining plants into formal shapes. It may go as far back as ancient Egypt, where tomb walls show depictions of gardens with date trees shaped into cones. Topiary-adorned gardens were a status symbol for wealthy Romans, as evidenced in wall frescoes and mentioned by Pliny. During the Italian Renaissance, with wealth and classical themes, topiary became practiced again and spread across Europe – think of the parterre formal gardens in France and the whimsical designs

of the English. After enthusiasm for romantic, wild natural gardens faded, topiary came back into style again in the 19th century, especially with the Art & Crafts movement. Today topiary gardens remain valued in Europe but never really took hold in the United States.

#### **How did you learn?**

There really wasn't anyone to teach me, so I started out reading and researching. I took a welding class at a local high school to learn how to make frames. We went to England and visited gardens and talked to gardeners. Levens Hall, established in 1697, is the world's oldest topiary garden and where World Topiary Day is celebrated in May.

I created a reference library, and drew my own ideas based on 17th and 18th century designs. I planted 95 hornbeam trees 12" tall 15 years ago and learned by doing – when to clip and how to clip. If you clip a branch two shoots will emerge, if you clip each of those, you'll have another four. Plants respond quite quickly to trimming and clipping.

Above, left: A topiary stag at Black Barn Farm is often a selfie location for deer hunters.

Above, right: Matt Larkin after an afternoon's work before the snow storm.

Photos by Christine Bates.

Continued on next page ...

### What trees do you use for topiary?

Yews (*Taxus*) stay green and grow quickly. Boxwood (*Buxus*) is now surviving warmer New England winters, Arborvitae (*Thuja*) is easy to prune; hornbeam (*Carpinus*) makes a fast growing, easy-to-trim hedge, and beech (*Fagus*) keeps its golden-brown leaves until the spring. Topiary is beautiful in all seasons.

### What sort of location, soil, and light are required for topiary?

The creation of topiary requires the basics that most plants require: good soil, light, and water. The soil at my property is medium clay, which is helpful with retaining moisture, but we add compost and sometimes coarse gravel to add drainage. My philosophy with planting is a bit of tough love; they get plenty of water for about a month, and then they are on their own. It seems to work well.

I feed them with Holly-tone in the spring and fall when I remember to do it. A new product "TOPBUXUS" has been helpful with the boxwood leaf miner, and knock wood we don't have the box blight that has been so devastating in the UK and Europe and has been found in northeast Connecticut. The newly discovered beech leaf disease, caused by a nematoid, is troubling, so we did a soil drench this fall as a precaution and will repeat that twice annually.

### How much does a full-grown topiary cost?

Depending on size and detail, the plant itself costs between \$5,000 and \$15,000, plus the charges for digging it up, burlapping it, and shipping it. Then there's installation on the other end. Lots of people call or visit who are interested, but they back away when they understand the expense.

### How do you sell topiary trees?

Basically, it's word of mouth. Marketing doesn't interest me – I'm not super motivated. There aren't many sources for fully grown topiary trees, so it's easy to find me on Google. I ship my topiaries all over the country.

In 2019 we moved a topiary garden I created from Greenwich, CT, to

the Berkshire Botanical Garden and created Lucy's Garden. A high-end nursery in the Hamptons is trucking large boxwoods up here for me to shape into chickens for a client and then ship them back to Long Island.

### What about maintaining them on an ongoing basis?

That's the labor-intensive part, and it takes time. Just about when I finish clipping in the spring it's time to start the second clip in the fall. The topiary garden that was moved to BBG was donated because the owners Lucy and Nat Day were selling their house and knew that many buyers would not appreciate or maintain the topiaries.

### Is this sort of gardening physically demanding?

Try moving heavy orchard ladders to get to the top of a tree or leaning over a five-foot-wide hedge that is 16 feet high and 153 feet long. Actually, I appeared on a PBS series on gardening fitness called "How to Take Care of Your Body While Taking Care of Your Garden," which was hosted by my friend Madeline Hooper, the creator of Rockland Farm in Canaan, NY. The trainer Jeff Hughes' suggestions really helped me with an achy back.

### What was a surprise?

How quickly plants respond was a wonderful surprise. And then the deer. The first year the deer stripped my newly planted trees down to the stems. So, I put up an electric fence – unsightly but very effective. Years later when a shelter magazine came to take photographs, they insisted on taking down the fence. We didn't put the fence back up, and miraculously the deer never returned. I wonder if the memory of the shocking electric fence was somehow passed on from generation to generation.

A surprising delight is watching the blackness of a mother bear and her cubs strolling slowly through the garden.

### Have you ever thought of writing a book about topiary?

Not really. There are so many images on the Internet, and now there's Topiary Tuesday on Instagram and Pinterest with everyone sharing their own photos of topiary.



Above, left: Hornbeam topiaries created by Matt Larkin hover in the mist at Black Barn Farm. Photo by Matthew Larkin.

Above, right: A fanciful charcoal drawing by Larkin with a sci-fi theme pinned up in Black Barn's library. Photo by Christine Bates.

### What's the most demanding aspect of a topiary business?

Anxiety about time. If clipping isn't done at the right time and in the right way the plant will get out of control. I like things to be in order.

### You play an important role in expanding the Berkshire Botanical Garden. What is happening there?

I have been the chairman of Berkshire Botanical Garden for about 15 years. When I took on that role I knew it was a diamond that just needed to be polished. Over time we have restored the historic Center House, adding a gallery for the presentation of botanical, landscape, and related art works; a botanical library; a teaching kitchen and classroom; and office space for staff. After commissioning a master plan from the landscape architect firm Nelson Byrd Woltz in 2019, we are in the final stages of completing the first phase with the addition of the Glass House, a 5,000-square-foot conservatory to expand our collection and serve the community in various ways. We completed the "Mother Earth Lodge" in '24, a post and beam structure for our popular "Farm in the Garden" camp, and a stone amphitheater in the woods for outdoor programming.

It has been my pleasure to design these new features. Working with the executive director, Michael Beck, a dedicated team has grown that supports the newly "polished" garden, with much more to come. I look forward to seeing our historic garden shine into the future. •

*To learn more about Matthew Larkin and his work, please visit barnfarm.com.*

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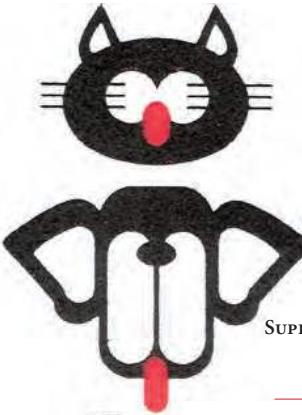
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# Chicken POT PIE SOUP

By Olivia Valentine with  
Caroline Markonic  
[info@mainstreetmag.com](mailto:info@mainstreetmag.com)

Chicken pot pie has always been one of my favorite winter comfort foods, but honestly, I love soup no matter the season. This one has all the cozy, creamy flavors of a homemade chicken pot pie, just without the extra time or fuss. It's the kind of soup that makes you say, Mmmmm sooo good!

One chilly weeknight, I was craving chicken pot pie but didn't have the energy (or time) to make the crust. So I threw everything into a pot, and the result was pure comfort: rich, hearty, and full of flavor.

I invited my oldest daughter to join me for dinner. She was the perfect taste tester. When she was little, she loved soup so much she'd eat it for breakfast before school and constantly asked for it in her lunchbox. That evening, it was flurrying outside, the wind was blowing, and the woodstove was crackling. Because of this soup, the house smelled delicious and our bellies were satisfied and warm.

I served it with a simple green salad and a flaky biscuit that soaked up every last drop. The next day, I had the leftovers for lunch, and honestly it tasted even better than the night before. The flavors had time to marry, and marry they did!

## Ingredients:

4 Tbsps salted butter  
1 medium onion, diced  
4 carrots, diced (about 1½ cups)  
1 cup celery, (about 2 large ribs) diced  
(use the green leafy parts too for extra flavor)  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
¼ cup plus 2 Tbsps all-purpose flour  
5 cups chicken stock  
1 heaping Tbsp Better than Bouillon chicken base  
2 cups Yukon gold potatoes, cut into bite-size pieces  
1 bay leaf  
1–2 tsps fresh thyme, chopped  
2 cups shredded rotisserie chicken  
¾ cup heavy cream  
1 cup frozen peas  
½ cup frozen corn  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Chopped fresh parsley for garnish (optional)

## Instructions:

In a Dutch oven or large stockpot, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the diced onion, carrots, and celery. Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables begin to soften.

Add the minced garlic and cook for about 30 seconds, stirring constantly. Stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute.



Slowly pour in the chicken stock, then add the Better than Bouillon, potatoes, bay leaf, and thyme.

Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 10–15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are fork-tender.

Add the shredded chicken, heavy cream, peas, and corn. Stir to combine and cook for another 5–10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with chopped parsley if desired.

As always, enjoy! •

*Olivia and Caroline are enthusiastic foodies and bakers who are constantly in the kitchen, as well as explorers who create their own adventures in our area – and did we mention they are mother and daughter? Follow Olivia on Instagram to see her many creations at @oliviavvalentine.*

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# What to know in northeast Dutchess County

# DO SCHOOL RANKINGS IMPACT REAL ESTATE VALUE?

By Christine Bates  
info@mainstreetmag.com

When buying real estate, in addition to other considerations, like view, condition, privacy, style, acreage, or a bedroom on the first floor, school district rankings can be a factor in the buying decision, as are property taxes. Both can be important to buyers. But just how important?

## A look at the public school districts

Even if you have no children to send to public school, potential home buyers should identify the property's school district and school. School district boundaries are surprising, illogical, and don't coincide with town, zip code, or even county boundaries. Real estate listings on Realtor.com or real estate brokers' websites may not include correct school district or individual school information. For Dutchess County the most certain answer can be found by inputting the property address on Dutchess Parcel Access ([gis.dutchessny.gov/parcelaccess](http://gis.dutchessny.gov/parcelaccess)). Another source is Niche.com, which not only identifies the school district, but also provides ratings for the relevant elementary, middle, and high schools, and lists real estate for sale in the district.

In northeastern Dutchess County, there are seven school districts that include six towns in the northeast corner stretching north into Columbia County and west to Rhinebeck and

Red Hook on the Hudson River. Each of these districts have very different performance ratings and demographic profiles.

It would be advisable for buyers with school-age children to do their own research on school performance. A realtor isn't permitted to advise them. According to Julie King, who manages the agents of William Pitt Sotheby's in Litchfield County, "Real estate agents can direct buyers to third-party sources of objective data about schools, such as the state's Department of Education website, or sites like Niche or Great Schools to do their own research. Agents should not give their own opinion on a school's quality or make statements about which districts are 'good' or 'bad.' Fair housing laws prohibit agents from engaging in 'steering,' which could lead to discrimination."

Across Dutchess County, school performance as gauged by New York State varies widely. In Webutuck, only 26% of students in third to eighth grade are deemed proficient in English, whereas 71% of students in Rhinebeck make that rank. Many factors contribute to this disparity among schools, with a high percentage of English language learners and an economically disadvantaged student population responsible for much of the difference. For the curious, the New York State Education Depart-



ment website ([data.NYSED.gov](http://data.NYSED.gov)) provides granular details by individual school, including performance by grade and gender, AP courses, school spending, and composition of the student body.

Every institution gets graded these days. The chart on page 22 shows the online rankings of area high schools from three different sources. *US World News & Report* publishes national ratings that list Rhinebeck's High School at number 1,211 in the nation and Webutuck at 13,427. These grading systems are subjective and not totally consistent. For example, Webutuck High School receives a B- from Niche but only a three out of ten from Great Schools.

One young couple with a newborn that I know wanted to move out of New York City and researched schools in our region. They decided to build a house in Milan partly because the property is included in the Rhinebeck School District. To get a personal feeling for a school and whether it might be right for you, one can check out the school's website and calendar, attend a PTA meeting, talk to parents, go to a basketball game, or attend a school board meeting.

Above: Rhinebeck's Central High School, home of the Hawks, receives high ratings in Dutchess County.

Left: Stissing Mountain High School in Pine Plains, NY, home of the Bombers, has a graduation rate of 82%.

Photos by Christine Bates.



Continued on page 21 ...



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## Private schools might be an option for some

Proximity to private pre-K and prep schools is an alternative for some parents who buy a great house in a challenged school district. Across the border in Connecticut, The Hotchkiss School has been selected as the Number #1 Prep School in the nation by Niche, which gives high marks to all of the area prep and day schools.

Talented local students can receive substantial financial aid from these institutions. According to Niche, 36% of Hotchkiss students receive financial aid averaging \$56,854. Also, under New York State law, school districts are required to provide bus transportation to independent and religious schools for students who live in their school district. For example, students that live in Pine Plains may request free bus transportation from the district to take them to private schools like Dutchess Day in Millbrook. For families moving from New York City, the availability of good public and comparatively inexpensive private schools with free transportation makes real estate in Dutchess County attractive.

## Buyers without children still pay school taxes

New York State school taxes, which typically comprise more than half of the local property tax bill, by them-

selves can be an important consideration when buying. The tax on a \$500,000 house ranges from a high in Red Hook of \$8,050 to a low of \$3,385 for Taconic Hills in adjacent Columbia County. Compared to Westchester County, our region's school taxes are lower, but so is the ranking of many of our public school districts.

## The big question: Do public school ratings affect real estate prices?

Numerous news articles have appeared stating that excellent school districts raise real estate values by anywhere from 10% to 20% over similar homes in average districts because of higher demand from families and greater resale value. Other sources claim that 40% of all buyers with children under 18 are influenced by the quality of the school district when selecting a home.

Is that true in our real estate market, where national trends don't necessarily apply because of lack of new housing developments, varied housing choices from estates to mobile homes, slim inventory, and a predominance of wealthy second home and empty nest buyers not interested in school ratings?

Gauging the impact of area school district performance and tax rates on real estate prices is difficult given the complex Venn diagram of overlapping town, school, zip code, and county



Above: New York State law requires school districts to provide bus transportation for students living in their district including to private schools. Photo by Christine Bates.

boundaries. To attempt to determine whether school performance has impacted real estate prices in northeast Dutchess County, ten years of real estate sales of single residence homes were analyzed for Milan, Washington, Stanford, and North East from New York State Sales Web – the only source that captures both town and school district information.

In rural northeast Dutchess County, most towns send their students to at least two school districts and sometimes as many as four. Children from the Town of Milan may attend the highly rated Rhinebeck or Red Hook School Districts or the Pine Plains School District, which also extends into adjacent Columbia County.

Continued on next page ...

## School district profiles

	Webutuck	Millbrook	Pine Plains	Dover	Rhinebeck	Red Hook	Taconic Hills	NYS avg
Enrollment '23-'24	637	750	750	1,302	911	1,555	981	
Per student expenditure	\$36,966	\$40,924	\$41,984	\$30,766	\$39,290	\$35,475	\$31,007	\$30,472
School tax rate	9.08 Mills	11.84 Mills	10.05 Mills	13.16 Mills	10.58 Mills	16.1 Mills	6.77 Mills	
School tax \$500,000 house	\$4,540.00	\$5,920.00	\$5,025.00	\$6,580.00	\$5,290	\$8,050	\$3,385.00	

## NYS assessment

Grades 3-8 '23-'24	Webutuck	Millbrook	Pine Plains	Dover	Rhinebeck	Red Hook	Taconic Hills	NYS avg
English proficiency	26%	56%	41%	36%	71%	56%	41%	46%
Math proficiency	36%	46%	59%	38%	74%	54%	46%	54%

## Student profile

High School graduation rate	70%	88%	82%	85%	89%	94%	82%	86%
English language learners	22%	3%	4%	11%	3%	4%	5%	
Economically disadvantaged	49%	34%	44%	74%	22%	29%	58%	

All school district information from New York State Education Department 2023-2024 - <http://data.nysed.gov>.  
Property tax in effect for 2024/2025 from Dutchess County Real Property Tax Service.

## Rankings of NYS public high schools in northeast Dutchess County

	Niche grade	Great Schools	Nat'l ranking
Webutuck	B-	3 of 10	#13,427
Millbrook	B-	8 of 10	#4,789
Pine Plains	C+	6 of 10	#5,023
Taconic Hills*	B-	3 of 10	#6,975
Dover	B	6 of 10	#6,392
Rhinebeck	A	7 of 10	#1,211
Red Hook	A-	5 of 10	#3,248

\*Taconic Hills is located in Columbia County but includes students from the Town of North East. National Ranking from US News & World Report 2025.

## Dutchess County, Columbia County and NW CT private schools

	Location	Niche grade	Tuition*
Prep schools			
Millbrook School 9-12	Amenia, NY	A+	\$81,500
Hotchkiss 9-12	Lakeville, CT	#1 in US	\$71,700
Trinity Pawling 9-12, all boys	Pawling, NY	A+	\$76,500
Kent School 9-12	Kent, CT	A+	\$73,450
Salisbury School 9-12, all boys	Salisbury, CT	A+	\$75,450
Pre-K to 8th grade day schools			
Dutchess Day PK-8	Washington, NY	A	\$30,000
Indian Mountain PK-8	Lakeville, CT	A	\$45,182
Hawthorne Valley Waldorf	Ghent, NY	A-	\$24,100

\*Prep school tuition and boarding expense and Pre-K - 12 day tuition from Niche.

## 10 year median single family house sales 4 towns & 7 school districts\*

	Washington	Stanford	Milan	North East
Millbrook	\$375,000	\$325,000		
Webutuck	\$300,000	\$765,000		\$240,000
Pine Plains		\$375,000	\$375,000	\$320,000
Dover	\$110,000			
Rhinebeck		\$379,000	\$416,000	
Red Hook			\$410,000	
Taconic Hills				\$465,000
Town median sale	<b>\$625.00</b>	<b>\$675.00</b>	<b>\$650.00</b>	<b>\$430.000</b>

\* NYS Sales Web all sales of single family residences in last ten years by town and school district. Excludes land, commercial, and estate properties. Median single family home prices from MLS InfoSparks for 12 months ending in 11/1/2025.

Right: The campus of the Webutuck School District has the fewest students in the northwest corner of Dutchess County. Photo by Christine Bates.

Comparing the median price of real estate purchases in the four school districts in the Town of Stanford, for example, is surprising. Millbrook, the highest rated district for Stanford property owners, had the lowest median home price of \$325,000. Webutuck was the highest at \$765,000. Not what would be predicted based solely on school rankings. These are ten-year sales numbers and do not reflect median price levels today; however, results are generally consistent with the current median price levels. One conclusion is that the town and tax rate may be more relevant to housing value than the school district.

### What is different about the towns in northeast Dutchess County?

While families do relocate to our area and adjoining Connecticut, northeastern Dutchess County is an active second home market and attractive to retiring empty nesters. This is especially true at the higher end of the market, where a million-dollar house seems like a bargain compared to a similarly priced one-bedroom Manhattan apartment.

Doug Maxwell, partner at Upstate Modern, which designs and builds striking contemporary houses in Milan, shared his thoughts on the findings. "I'm not that surprised. Typically, our clients, who are looking at higher-end homes toward the top of the market, are not overly concerned about school district. It doesn't come up as a buying consideration that often. There are certainly exceptions for younger families looking for the Rhinebeck area to be their primary home, but most are purchasing as a second home or have kids out of grade

school. I would expect that mid-market homes might have a stronger price premium by school district, but above a certain price threshold this isn't surprising to me."

### Everyone asks about property taxes in New York

Every buyer, even those of luxury estates, is concerned about how much they will pay in property taxes – again northeastern Dutchess County seems like a bargain compared to northern New Jersey or Westchester. While the quality of the school system may not be relevant to a buyer, school taxes typically comprise over 50% of property taxes.

It's difficult to prove a historic, verifiable connection between school district rankings and single-family home prices, except to suspect that an excellent public school district with low school taxes like Rhinebeck may make a property more attractive to some buyers with school age children.

It's also possible that properties in underperforming school districts with high taxes, like Dover, may adversely affect median home prices. But what is the cause and the effect?

"In southern Westchester, where we've lived for 35 years," said one couple currently selling in Westchester and buying north, "it's generally accepted that the strong public school systems are one of the most important drivers of home prices. Many people are willing to pay exorbitant home prices to gain access to the local public schools. Now that our kids are grown, it's a relief not to have to factor the quality of local schools into our decision process as we hunt for a retirement home." •





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# The pros and cons of distance running vs. sprinting: WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

By Abby Audenino  
abby@mainstreetmag.com

If you're at all like me, then at the start of each new year, you get the grandiose idea that you're going to take up running. Now up to this point – for me – this resolution has never lasted. I consider myself to be a pretty active person; I work out between four to five times per week with a combo of lifting weights, high-intensity interval training, and low-intensity work (usually walking outside with my dog or inside on the treadmill).

Running, however, has just never been my thing. Recently though, I've been wanting to mix up my training a bit and add in some endurance training, so running seemed like the most logical option. In order to make an informed decision as to whether or not running is right for me, I decided to dig into some of the benefits and potential drawbacks of the popular exercise.

## Benefits of running

Healthline reports that running just five to ten minutes each day at a moderate pace, "may help reduce your risk of death from heart attacks, strokes, and other common diseases. But the same research also shows that these benefits top off at 4.5 hours a week, meaning there's no need to run for hours each day." Phew, that's good news if you're not too fond of distance running.

Research suggests that aerobic exercise – or any activity that makes you use large muscle groups and gets your heart rate up – can improve memory, fight cognitive decline, reduce stress, and lower the risk of death. Running, of course, burns calories and therefore can support weight loss efforts.

Running daily – or even just twice a week – can have benefits for your health, including:

- Reduced risk of death from heart attack or stroke
- Reduced risk of cardiovascular disease
- Lower risk of developing cancer
- Lower risk of developing neurological diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease

Many of these benefits can be achieved with a minimal amount of running daily – between 10 and 15 minutes – but a research study from *The American Journal of Epidemiology* recommends running for two and a half hours each week, or 30 minutes, five days a week. However, many of these benefits can be found from the same amount of other aerobic activity, including walking, cycling, and swimming.

## Potential drawbacks of running

Because running is a high-intensity exercise, it can make you more susceptible to injury. One of the most common running-related injuries is overuse, which typically causes shin

splints and knee pain. Overuse injuries often occur because someone is pushing themselves too hard too soon.

If you've never ran before, a better way to ease into running is to progress into it slowly, starting with a walking program first and then working your way into jogging and running.

There are a few ways to avoid an overuse injury, including ensuring that you have the appropriate running shoes, warming up before running and stretching after, running with proper form, and mixing up your running days with cross training, such as cycling, lifting, or swimming.

## What about sprints?

As someone who loathes the idea of distance running, I have turned to sprints to serve as my high-intensity exercise.

Sprinting, as opposed to running, is typically completed at a much faster speed for a shorter duration of time. According to Livestrong, "when you begin to sprint, you cross into an anaerobic zone and use glycogen, rather than oxygen, to fuel your muscle cells. The buildup of glycogen produces lactic acid, which makes you quickly feel fatigued and, in some cases, a burning sensation in your muscles. This is why a sprint cannot be held for long distances or durations."

Both running and sprinting offer cardiovascular benefits, but sprinting is considered to be better for building muscle mass and power, increasing speed, and burning more calories in a

shorter amount of time. Running, on the other hand, is more effective for building endurance and burning fat over longer distances.

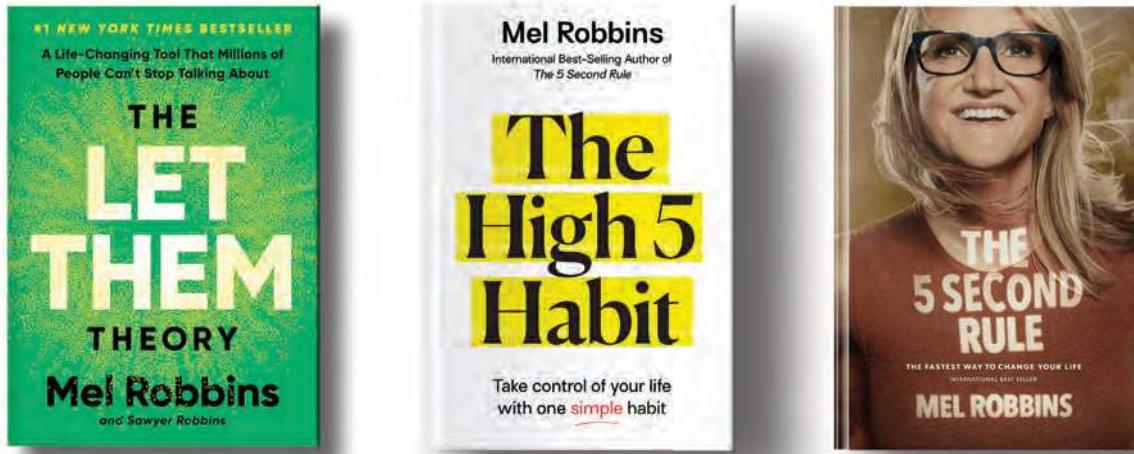
According to an article from *Business Insider*, sprinting primarily utilizes fast-twitch muscle fibers, which leads to rapid muscle recruitment and increased power, while running engages slow-twitch muscle fibers for sustained endurance.

## So, which is right for you?

Deciding whether running or sprinting is right for you is based completely upon your goals. If your goal is to burn calories quickly and build muscle, consider adding sprints into your weekly workout routine. On the other hand, if you're looking to build your endurance, consider making running part of your regular routine. If all of those sound like they're a part of your goals, consider adding a combination of distance running and sprints to your routine.

I will likely continue adding sprints into my weekly routine, as the idea of running long distances just seems so very boring to me. However, I will likely add running a couple of miles each month into my schedule here and there, just for the added benefits that even a little bit of running can provide. That, and for some reason, I have running a 5k on my bucket list. I'd prefer to get that done sooner rather than later. •





# THE LET THEM THEORY

By Regina Molaro  
info@mainstreetmag.com

Marking a time for new beginnings, the new year is always a good time to start over. It's a great time to follow through on ideas and plans. Now is the time to channel some time and energy into your goals, learn a new skill, or perfect a hobby or sport. It's also a good time for self-reflection and taking control of your life.

While the weather is still cold and you're spending more time indoors at home, take some time to reflect on yourself. This can include taking note of your reactions (*why do I get so frustrated when my technology doesn't work?*), dropping in on your thoughts through practicing mindfulness (*why do I always make a mistake with this? When am I ever going to get it right?*), or breaking patterns (*why is it that I must check two more things off my to-do list right before I walk out the door for work or an important appointment?*).

The new year is also an apropos time to prioritize your own happiness and protect your peace. It's a time to take your power back. Those who are interested in this concept should tune in – via books, podcasts, or videos – to the teachings of Mel Robbins, *The New York Times* number one bestselling author and creator, and host of the award-winning *The Mel Robbins Podcast*.

Robbins has amassed more than 40 million followers online. A renowned expert on mindset, life improvement, and behavior change, her books have been translated into 63 languages.

She is also number one on Amazon and Audible. Her bestselling books include *The Let Them Theory: A Life-Changing Tool That Millions of People Can't Stop Talking About* – a top selling book of 2025 according to *Publisher's Weekly*, with seven million copies sold within nine months of its release. Robbins is also the author of *The 5 Second Rule*, *The High 5 Habit*, and several top audiobook releases on Audible.

## Tune in

*The Mel Robbins Podcast* has won an array of prestigious awards including Webby, Signal Awards, and the iHeart Podcast Award. It was also recognized as one of Apple Podcasts' Top Share and Followed Shows of 2024 and 2023 and a Spotify Top Global Shows of 2024.

Wait, there's more. Robbins was named one of *Time's* 100 Most Influential Digital Voices of 2025, a *Forbes* 50 Over 50 Honoree, *USA Today's* Top 5 Mindset & Performance Coaches in the World, and one of The 50 Most Influential Influencers on *The Hollywood Reporter's* Creator A-List in 2024. She also offers courses, which include Make It Happen and Take Control.

One decade ago, Robbins wasn't in this successful space. At age 41, she

was unemployed, drowning in debt, and so overwhelmed that she could barely get out of bed. Everything changed with one simple tool: The 5 Second Rule, a simple tool to stop overthinking and start taking action by counting backward 5-4-3-2-1 the moment you have an impulse to do something important. "It got me moving, one small step at a time, and led me here," said Mel Robbins.

## Let's explore ... The Let Them Theory

One of her more recent concepts is The Let Them Theory. It is a step-by-step guide on how to stop letting other people's opinions, drama, and judgement impact your life. Two simple words, "Let Them" will set you free from the exhausting cycle of trying to manage everything and everyone around you. It's time to build a life where you come first: your dreams, your goals, your happiness.

The book will help you manage stress, stop fearing other people's opinion, deal with someone's negative reactions, overcome chronic comparison, master adult friendships, motivate other people to change, help someone who is struggling, and choose the love you deserve.

## Four Let Them's in Mel's Words

Robbins believes that you will never prioritize your own happiness until

you learn how to let other people be unhappy. The Let Them Theory offers four specific ways to protect your peace, take your power back, and enjoy freedom.

**1. You are not responsible for other people's happiness. You are only responsible for your own happiness. That doesn't make you selfish. It helps you make better choices. It helps you own what you're doing, and it helps you prioritize yourself. Let them be unhappy.**

Your attempt to constantly try to make other people happy is making you miserable. In life, there's one thing that you will never be able to control ever, and that's other people – what other people do, what they say, what they believe and expect, and whether they're happy or satisfied.

Robbins has the research to prove that the more you make it your responsibility to be sure everyone around you is happy, the worse you're going to feel.

Instead, focus on doing things that make you happy. You must learn how to let others be unhappy or disappointed. If their happiness always comes before yours, you never have the time and energy to make yourself happy or to make better decisions. Let them be unhappy.

Research proves when you do that you anchor down into what makes you happy and truly choose it and happiness becomes more contagious.

throughout your whole life.

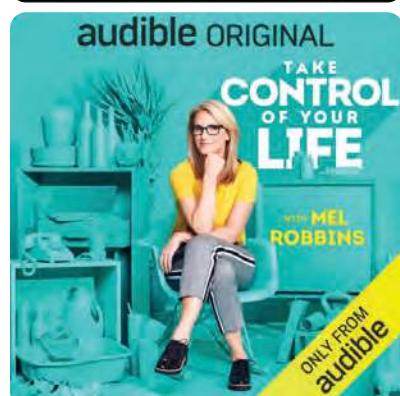
Stop wasting your life on things you can't control.

**2. You are not responsible for rescuing people from their problems. Let them learn from life. Trying to solve everyone else's problems is creating major problems for you and you are important too. There's a different way to approach these very difficult situations.**

This one hits hard especially if you're a parent, partner, or a friend. If you care about somebody else, it's hard to accept that this is true. You are not responsible for rescuing people from their problems.

Who hasn't tried to clear all the obstacles out of the way to help somebody they love. You can support someone, you can offer advice, you can pay for things, and throw down a dozen lifelines, but at the end of the day, people only change when they are ready to do the work to change for themselves.

If you're not careful, your love, concern, and worry will turn into enabling people who are struggling; that happens when you assume responsibility for solving their problems.



There are two reasons why it is important for you to understand that you are not responsible for solving someone's problems or rescuing them from their problems. Every single expert says that rescuing people doesn't work and that attempting to do so backfires and makes situations worse. Trying to solve everyone else's problems is creating major problems for you. You're important too.

Robbins dedicates an entire section of the book to using The Let Them Theory when somebody is struggling. Stop assuming responsibility for everybody's problems and solving them. Keep yourself in a role of supporting them from the sidelines.

Watching someone you love struggle with their mental health, crippling grief, or an addiction is one of the hardest experiences you will face in life. An even harder truth is that not everyone is ready to get better, be sober, do the work, use their tools, or face their issues. Not everybody can.

I learned that truth from clinical psychologist Dr. Nicole LePera. She's known online as The Holistic Psychologist and has millions of followers. Every day her work reminds me that healing is a deeply personal journey. As much as you may love someone, believe in them, and would do everything in the world to make their pain go away, you cannot want someone else's sobriety, healing, or health more than they do.

The more you try to rescue someone from their problems, the more likely they will continue to drown in them. Allowing someone to face the natural consequences of their actions is a necessary part of healing, growing, and getting better. At some point the person must step up and do the work. If you step up to help, you are making the situation worse. The more you rescue, the more they sink. Don't shield them from the consequences they choose. Check out the book for more details.

**3. You are not responsible for making people understand your choices. Harvard University's Dr. Nicholas Epley did research on how people**



Above: Background image: istockphoto.com contributor Phira Phonuewiangphing. Mel Robbins podcast image: Apple Podcasts  
Opposite: Mel Robbins' cover images courtesy of Oblong Books.

**understand each other. His findings: They don't. Stop seeking validation from people who don't even understand what you're trying to do. Stop overexplaining yourself and let them misunderstand.**

Learn how to let people think what they think and misunderstand you. In her podcast, Robbins shares a story about witnessing somebody riding a unicycle on the side of a highway. She wondered why but then realized that she didn't need to understand. That person was doing what they felt like doing. Robbins says, "Let them." The only person your decisions need to make sense to is you. Your dreams are for you.

Think about something that you want to do right now. Robbins said she bets you're not doing it because you are afraid other people won't understand or support your decision. Let them misunderstand you. Let them be confused. You're responsible for knowing what's right for you and making decisions that you can live with. You're responsible for trusting that someone's confusion won't shake your clarity. No one will ever fully get you.

Robbins also believes that when you're changing in life, it's the people closest to you who are often the least supportive. She says that people understand you from their own experiences. Let them question you. Stop explaining yourself

**4. You are not responsible for proving your worth. Let them underestimate you. Self-worth doesn't come from everyone else liking you but from liking who you already are. That is the real success in life. Liking yourself. Understand that you are not responsible for other people seeing your value or liking you.**

Finally, one of her chapters is: Let them think bad thoughts about you. When you allow your fear of what other people think stop you from doing what you want to do, you become a prisoner to other people's opinions. This fear impacts every aspect of your life. It makes you procrastinate, doubt yourself, and question your worth. It can paralyze you with perfectionism. It's the reason you overthink. This is where it ends. Stop giving people power. •

*The books written by Robbins are available at bookshops throughout the Hudson Valley area. Specifically, Oblong Books in Millerton and Rhinebeck has The Let Them Theory available. Visit them in store or at [oblongbooks.com](http://oblongbooks.com) for more books by Mel Robbins. Oblong Millerton is located at 26 Main St., (518) 789-3797 and the Rhinebeck shop is at 6422 Montgomery St., Suite 6, (845) 876-0500.*

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# MEASURED LIVES, JUST LIKE US

By CB Wismar  
info@mainstreetmag.com

You may have noticed. The proliferation of so-called “celebrity bio pics” continues both in a movie theater near you or, more conveniently, on a streaming service inviting your homebound blitzing evenings and weekends.

When, a few years ago, Timothée Chalamet emerged as Bob Dylan in *A Complete Unknown*, theaters were filled and song downloads of “Tangled Up in Blue” and “Mr. Tambourine Man” skyrocketed. The Nobel Prize-winning poet moved into the spotlight once again, decades after Robert Zimmerman emerged from Hibbing, MN, and became Bob Dylan.

Something of a measured response greeted *Bruce Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere* starring Jeremy Allen White when it got an early start to the year-end blitz of films offered by studios in anticipation of upcoming awards season. Thanks to both hype and a loyal “Boss” fan base, copious amounts of popcorn and giant sodas were sold and downloads of his pivotal album *Nebraska* rose precipitously.

## Side bar: weekend fare

For those who prefer to avoid the weather, the crowds, and the need to warm up the car, Apple TV recently played to the cinematically conversant with a five-part documentary on the career of Martin Scorsese, the brilliant if sometimes controversial film director. If controversy piques your interest, set aside a weekend and cue

up *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Gangs of New York*, and *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Then finish off with *The Age of Innocence* simply to keep your blood pressure within reasonable limits.

If delicately tiptoeing through intense family history is more your “groove,” then keep the set tuned to Apple TV and watch Ben Stiller’s intensely personal and often difficult look at his parents, Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara, their careers, and the impact that celebrity has had on succeeding generations. *Nothing is Lost* is more than simply a clever title, it’s a plausible response to the documentary journey.

And, if you’d prefer reading to watching, we recommend *Bread of Angels*, Patti Smith’s lyrical memoir that allows the singer/poet/artist an invitation to who she is, and how she became that complex person.

## The tape measure effect

The point, however, is less about catching up on some important films and “tell-alls” than it is to become immersed in the hurricane of creativity that inhabits some few ... make that VERY few lives ... and measure them against our own.

True, we may catch a glimpse of a celebrity standing near the deli counter at our local supermarket or buy a ticket for a fundraising evening hosted by someone of note, but for the great majority, lives lived are less likely spent making sure we hit our key light and more closely echoing Thoreau’s observation that “the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

Are the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* (if you recall that painful television series hosted by Robin Leach) merely filled with cascading moments of joy, conspicuous consumption and heady celebrity? Or is it possible that the dark moments of depression, struggling with both care and confusion, and conflicts within families that punctuate our daily lives are theirs as well.

Countless posters, bumper stickers, key chain tags, and desktop signs have purportedly encouraged and celebrated the individual. From “Hang In there” to “Live Your Life Everywhere,” there seems to be no end to the vacuous encouragement. “Be your own best friend.” “I am loved and worthy.” The saccharine sweetness appears without warning. See too many, and we feel like we need either a shower or an injection of insulin.

## Second sidebar: The spot-on sign

One sign we saw sitting on a boss’s desk during our formative “professional” years really hit home. It was not a flowery encouragement or some bromide to read and forget. “Nobody Cares. Work Harder.” Seemed to sum it up. Lesson learned. Words to live by.

## Back to the point

For as much as *Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere* elevates a moment of his towering career, it also shows the Boss to be a fragile, tormented, knowable human being. Just like us.

As jammed with celebrity interactions and towering cinematic achievements as Mr. Scorsese might be, his humanity shines through with the intensity of a 10,000-watt stage light

as he struggles with his faith, his failed relationships, and his all-consuming drive to deliver perfection. Just like us.

Reading biographies of notable world leaders and those who were instrumental in building empires and democracies is often as much about understanding the historic setting as it is about sensing the pulse of the subjects.

Watching feature films or documentary series portraying the personal struggles and occasional triumphs of our pop culture heroes provides almost instant exposure to who these people really are ... real people, with fears and aspirations, close friends and viperous enemies, alienated partners and disaffected children ... all of the nuanced pieces that make up lives that in many ways, hold up a mirror to our own.

As is often the case, there is a soundtrack to this simple discovery. Blues musician Keb’ Mo’ won the first of his five Grammy awards for his 1996 album *Just Like You*. Lyrics from the title song will take us home.

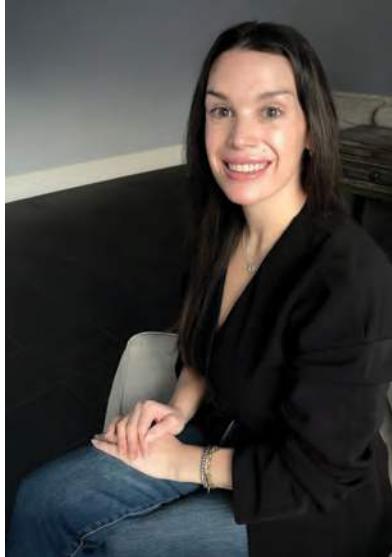
Well I feel just like you  
And I cry just like you  
But I heal just like you  
And under my skin  
I’m just like you

You gave your love and your  
innocence  
And they took away your confidence  
Well I’m not those women  
I’m not those men  
Put your arms around me  
I am your friend •



# ALL ABOUT AESTHETICS:

Kaelan Reynolds of Village Aesthetics & Wellness discusses cosmetic injections, building trust with patients, and how to know if cosmetic injections are right for you



Above: Kaelan Reynolds, co-owner of Village Aesthetics & Wellness in Millerton.

Opposite page, top: Nicole Bajcar injecting.

Bottom: The Village Aesthetics & Wellness space at 1 John Street in Millerton.

By Abby Audenino  
abby@mainstreetmag.com

*Kaelan Reynolds, a Millerton, NY native, has recently opened Village Aesthetics & Wellness at 1 John Street in the heart of Millerton. Below, Reynolds talks about her background in nursing, the cosmetic injections and other services that Village Aesthetics & Wellness offers, and prioritizing patient safety and trust.*

#### **Can you tell us about your path into aesthetic injections?**

I am a registered nurse with ten years of experience, I have my BS in nursing, and am currently working towards my masters at SUNY Polytechnic Institute. I will graduate in 2027 with my family nurse practitioner certification. Before becoming an injector, I was a patient of Elaine Suderio, DNP, FNP-BC, who is co-owner and operator of Vivash Med Spa in Beacon, NY. We became friends quickly, and it was Elaine who really encouraged me to take her Botox and dermal filler injection course.

My previous work in nursing has mainly been with the geriatric population, and end-of-life care is something I am extremely passionate about.

Aesthetic nursing offers me a balance between my regular job – which can be emotionally taxing – and some fun, where I can be creative and help women enhance their natural beauty. Elaine introduced me to Nicole Bajcar, a family nurse practitioner and a young mother of two little girls, who was also interested in learning more about aesthetics and injecting. We immediately hit it off, and the dream of opening something together started to form. This was the beginning of our partnership and the start of Village Aesthetics & Wellness.

#### **What services do you offer?**

At Village Aesthetics & Wellness, we currently offer neurotoxin injections to help treat wrinkles, migraines, hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating), and TMJ; dermal fillers and biostimulators help with volume loss as we age and facial balancing; weight management and GLP-1 injections; vitamin IV infusions and vitamin B12 injections; and platelet rich plasma for facials and hair growth. We are happy to share that we also offer Morpheus8, which is an advanced microneedling treatment that uses heat (radiofrequency energy) and tiny needles (trauma) to trigger collagen production, which in turn leads to firmer, smoother, tighter skin all with minimal down time and long-lasting results.

As to our injections, I have been injecting for over three years, Nicole has been injecting for five years, and Elaine, our expert, has over twenty years of experience in the aesthetic industry. This industry is all about collaborating and learning, which is one of the reasons why I have enjoyed it so much. We are constantly attending conferences, seminars, and courses to learn about the newest technology and injecting techniques in order to provide our patients with the latest and greatest care.

#### **Are there any side effects that people should be aware of?**

All medical procedures have risks and side effects. For example, bruising is possible anytime we are using a needle. Redness and swelling are also common side effects after certain procedures, such as dermal filler injections. At Village Aesthetics, we are highly trained in aesthetic procedures. Elaine is not only an expert injector, but also a trainer for many of the brands we inject and on the equipment we use, and she even travels all over the United States to train medical

spas and plastic surgeons on the latest and greatest technology. Nicole and I have been blessed to be able to train under her expertise. We have been to many conferences, training, and even cadaver courses. This training background is vital to minimize risk for adverse muscle reactions. When looking for an injector, the most important part is building trust. Read reviews, speak to others to learn about their experiences, and don't be afraid to ask questions! I love educating my patients on the product that we are using, as well as their facial anatomy. I want my patients to be aware of the reasons we do certain things for them or choose a specific product.

#### **How do you ensure patient safety during the procedure?**

Patient safety is our number one priority. We screen all patients and review medical history and allergies. Consents are signed before treatment, medical emergency policies and protocols are in place with all necessary medications on site, and proper hygiene and sterile techniques are used to promote optimal patient outcomes.

#### **What should people do before an appointment to prepare? What about after to recover?**

Preparing for your appointment is easy! We just ask that you come with a clean, make-up free face. If treatments require any special instructions (for example, not taking a blood thinner prior to your appointment), we will make sure to let you know beforehand. We ask that you see us for treatment at least three to four weeks before a big event in order to give time for the treatment to settle and allow for any adjustments that may need to be made. Consent forms are sent via text prior to appointment as well. Typically, some bruising is

expected following treatments, and slight redness and swelling is common with the Morpheus8 treatment. Everything settles within two weeks and a follow-up appointment is always available if needed.

#### What are the pros and cons of cosmetic injections?

The benefits for cosmetic injections include the creativity and the ability to enhance our appearance with minimal time needed. Potential drawbacks that may be considered are the cost and the maintenance needed to keep up with treatments. For example, for the best long-term results, we advise patients to schedule Botox treatments every three to four months.

#### What is your business model?

Prior to opening our current location, we were renting space out of local salons and treating many of their clients. Thank you to the Hair Lounge by Loren for believing in us, trusting us, and helping us to get here today!

Over time, we gained the trust of many and built up our own clientele. Elaine, Nicole, and myself are very excited to announce we now have a permanent location right in the heart of Millerton at 1 John Street. We share the space with Taylor'd Aesthetics, who is your go-to girl for all your waxing, spray tan, and lash/brow services. We are currently offering services by appointment two days per month and are looking to add a "Walk-In Wednesday" as well. We are able to accommodate and see patients throughout the month if the dates that we have picked do not work for them – just reach out!

#### How has your business changed since first starting? What are some of the biggest lessons that you've learned?

Being in the medical aesthetics business has taught me how important it is to foster trust with our patients. Trust and education will not only make our patients feel comfortable and safe, but in turn, will encourage them to come back time and time again. No two patients are the same and therefore, the same treatment plan won't work for everyone. For us, it's all about really listening to our patients and hearing their concerns, and then giving them multiple treatment options to pick for themselves.

#### How do you know if injections or treatments are right for you?

Patients often ask me when they should begin aesthetic treatments, and that is a question that I cannot answer. Everyone is different, and I am always able to offer a safe solution.

These treatments are not all for vanity; I once saw Elaine treat a woman whose lip was disfigured from a dog bite. Elaine was able to use her skills and artistry to resculpt this woman's lips and smile using dermal filler.

We take pride in offering solutions to many issues that arise with age, but it's important to note that not all treatment is created equal. For patients looking for a non-surgical option, we offer Empower by Inmode, which is a multi-functional platform that uses radiofrequency and electrical muscle stimulation to treat many intimate health issues including pelvic floor weakness and incontinence.

Some people come to Village



Aesthetics & Wellness in the hopes of looking like their best selves as they age, while others come with concerns that have been affecting their mental health. A good example of a patient who left feeling emotional after her results was a woman who disliked the shape of her nose, but could not afford a rhinoplasty. She did not think that there were any other options for her, but we were able to use dermal filler to give her the nose shape she wanted in less than 30 minutes in the office.

#### How much is too much?

We are big believers in looking natural. There is a saying in aesthetics: "The best injectables are undetectable!" There is a science and balance to facial harmony, and that is what we are looking to achieve with each patient. We want them to leave looking like themselves, but perhaps a little more rested and refreshed.

#### What would you say to someone who wants to learn more, but is nervous or scared?

If someone is hesitant or unsure if injections are right for them, I always suggest coming in for a free consultation with myself, Nicole, or Elaine. We are passionate about educating our patients so that they are equipped to make the best decision for themselves.

#### What is the most rewarding part of your work?

The most rewarding part of my work is giving, restoring, or solidifying my patients' confidence in themselves. Many of our patients return, and over time, they become friends too. We often get to be a part of many of their special occasions, whether it's getting ready for a wedding, a high school reunion, or a birthday party. Whatever the special event may be, or even if it's simply to do something to make yourself happy, we are so honored that you trust us to help you achieve it.

#### Do you have any short or long term goals that you'd like to share with our readers?

We look forward to bringing new equipment and technology to help our patients achieve whatever goal they may have. If there is something you are interested in that we do not have, we would be happy to refer you and schedule you at Elaine's Vivash Med Spa in Beacon, NY. •

*Village Aesthetics & Wellness is located at 1 John Street, Millerton, NY. To schedule a consultation or appointment, you can contact Kaelan Reynolds at (845) 532-6313. Follow Kaelan on Instagram at @aesthetics\_by\_kael to stay up-to-date with all of Village Aesthetics & Wellness' upcoming events.*





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# The things you didn't know you needed to know about

# FIBER

By Thorunn Kristjansdottir  
info@mainstreetmag.com

Come to find out, there's more to fiber than I thought. During my daughter's last doctor's visit I asked him specifically about her protein intake because she seldomly eats meat and I wanted to make sure that her diet was, essentially, "doctor approved". His response surprised me. He said that I shouldn't worry so much about the protein, but instead I should focus more on her fiber intake. He then went on to explain the particulars of that as it pertained to her health, but my take-away was that fiber can be more important to our overall health than I had initially thought. And that applies to all of us.

After that doctor's visit, I began digging into fiber further. I mean, frankly, when I thought of fiber I used to think of super hearty (bordering on some cardboard-level) crackers and bread, legumes, and things like prunes. Boy was I wrong!

## What is fiber?

This surprised me, but fiber is technically a carbohydrate. But unlike most other carbs that our bodies break down into sugar (glucose), our bodies are unable to digest fiber. Due to this, fiber passes through our bodies undigested and while it does so, it performs other functions. It helps our bodies regulate sugar and keeps our blood sugar in check while also keeping hunger at bay and making us feel fuller for longer.

According to the Nutrition Source, "Children and adults need at least 25 to 35 grams of fiber per day for good health, but most Americans get only about 15 grams a day. Great sources are whole grains, whole fruits and vegetables, legumes, and nuts."

To paraphrase the Mayo Clinic, they said that even though there's a "recommended" amount of fiber we should consume, that our daily intake is also individualized and is dependent on our age and how many calories you

consume in a day. The Mayo Clinic stated, "Current dietary guidelines for Americans suggests that people age 2 and older get 14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories in the daily diet. For children ages 12 months through 23 months, the guidelines suggest getting 19 grams of fiber a day."

This is a good reminder that as with everything else, remember to do your own research and consult your physician for your own personal health needs and goals.

## There are different types of fiber

Fiber can either be soluble or insoluble, both of which are important.

According to the Nutrition Source, "Soluble fiber, which dissolves in water, can help lower glucose levels as well as help lower blood cholesterol. Foods with soluble fiber include oatmeal, chia seeds, nuts, beans, lentils, apples, and blueberries.

"Insoluble fiber, which does not dissolve in water, can help food move through your digestive system, promoting regularity and helping prevent constipation. Foods with insoluble fibers include whole wheat products (especially wheat bran), quinoa, brown rice, legumes, leafy greens like kale, almonds, walnuts, seeds, and fruits with edible skins like pears and apples."

Besides helping to regulate our blood sugar and to keep us, you know, *regular*, fiber also serves other important functions such as it helps to lower our risk of developing more serious health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and a number of others. Fiber also plays a crucial role in our gut health and is therefore directly linked to anti-inflammation and other inflammation conditions.

In all of the research that I did, and there's a lot of it, just about every source advised that it is best to not over-do it with consuming only one or two kinds of fiber. Instead, it is more beneficial to consume a wide variety of foods, especially your standard plant foods like fruits, vegetables,

legumes, seeds, nuts, beans, lentils, and whole grains.

There are countless resources out there ranging from your primary doctor, a nutritionist, or even the world wide web that has a plethora of information (just be mindful of your sources), and much like me, you can search out as much information as you desire. My research journey began with the above: to understand fiber, its importance and function, and then led me to seek out fiber-rich foods that I could incorporate not just into my daughter's diet, but my family's diet. What was good for her would be good for all of us after all.

## Diving into fiber-rich foods

Before talking about a handful of fiber-rich foods that I want to discuss, the Mayo Clinic pointed this out:

**"Check the label.** When buying packaged foods, check the Nutrition Facts label for fiber content. It can vary among brands.

**Start slow.** Adding too much fiber too quickly can result in intestinal gas, diarrhea, cramping and bloating. Consider increasing your fiber intake gradually over a few weeks.

**Drink fluids.** As you eat more fiber, remember to drink plenty of fluids. Some fibers work best when they absorb water, so being well hydrated can help prevent uncomfortable bowel movements."

I found list after list in my Internet searching, but here are the foods that the folks in my household enjoy as well as some that I have incorporated over the past year.

**Fruits:** Raspberries, pears, bananas, strawberries, apples, oranges. Fruits are an easy one in our household, my kids out-eat me and my husband with their fruit intake so this was the easiest part of all of this!

**Vegetables:** Carrots, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, sweet corn, potatoes. We have always been pretty adamant about incorporating all forms of veg-

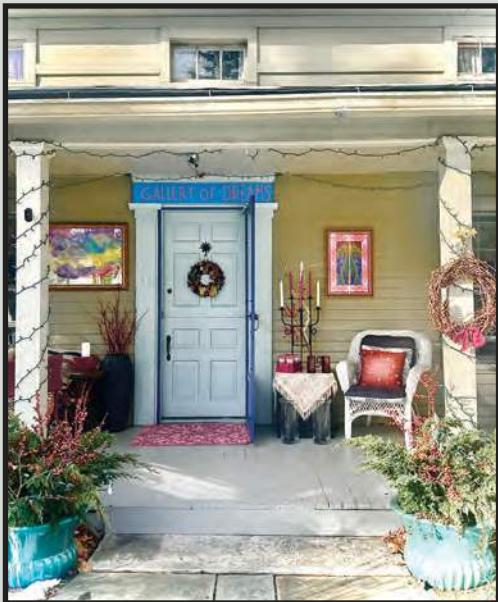
ables into meals whether it be raw, cooked, baked, or pan-fried veggies.

**Grains:** Whole-wheat spaghetti (this one was *not* a big success in my house), oats, brown rice (we haven't made this a full-on transition but we need to work on making it one), rye bread, quinoa (we have this on occasion). There are so many more grain options but, personally, I don't like barley or bran, so that was a little tough. However, I will eat oatmeal for breakfast on occasion, which was a big fat "no" from my daughter. But instead, I was able to add some oats into her smoothies without her detecting it. So get a little imaginative with it!

**Legumes, nuts and seeds:** Black beans, cannellini, chia seeds, sunflower kernels, pistachios. You can really run the gamut in this category, much like the other categories, but for our household, we try to add beans into meals a few times a week. My husband is pretty good about eating nuts, while I often try to add sunflower seeds and other like seeds to my salads. The kids aren't huge on nuts but they love peanut butter. An easy addition for the kids and me was to add chia seeds to our smoothies.

As with everything when it comes to our health, I always advise people to talk to their doctor and do their own research. What may work for me may not work for you, and vice versa. This is just part of my research when it came to fiber and I learned so much from it and wanted to share that experience with you. We should all strive to be healthier and making sure that we get the recommended amount of fiber is very important. And as you see above, there are countless ways for you to incorporate it into your diet, or make some tweaks and additions. The best part? Most of the fiber-rich foods are actually delicious! So it's not like it would be a hardship to eat an apple or carrot or add some chia seeds to a smoothie. Have fun with it and be healthy! •

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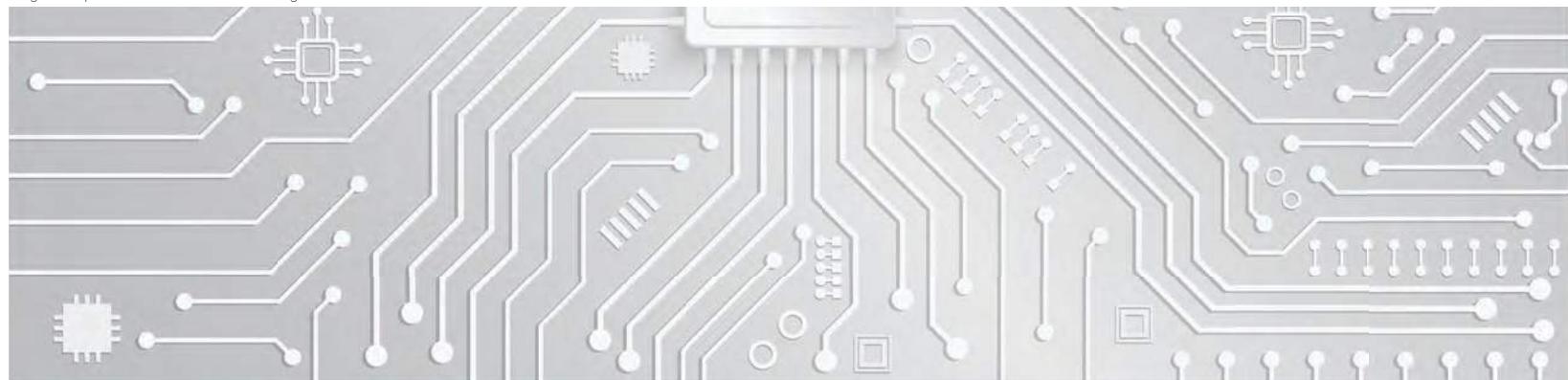
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# Embracing AI in 2026

By Dominique DeVito  
info@mainstreetmag.com

*Disclaimer: We are neither endorsing nor condoning the use of AI. The following is simply Dominique's own experience with researching and using AI. We suggest everyone does their own research to formulate their own opinions on AI.*

In the spring of 2025, an artsy friend of mine told me she finally decided to name her ChatGPT because she was using it so much to help her with things both mundane and complicated. She was enjoying thinking about what name she would assign to the bot; in fact, she was enjoying everything about ChatGPT. Her enthusiasm planted a seed in me.

Or maybe the seed was planted way back in 2014 when my family went to the theater to see the movie *Her*, in which the main character develops a romantic relationship with a computer. It seemed like a crazy, futuristic idea, and it was portrayed as such (not crazy, just futuristic), but it made a big impression on all of us. Could this really happen?

Recently, colleagues of mine attended an industry conference where one of the key presentations was on incorporating AI into your business to drive sales. That piqued my curiosity still further. I started digging deeper.

## Getting to know It

I downloaded the ChatGPT app onto my phone. I talked to more people about how – if – they used it. I was

advised to check out Copilot on my computer, too, and compare responses between the two.

I didn't even understand what they were, so I asked Microsoft Edge, the default browser on my desktop computer. I learned, "When comparing ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot, it's important to note their distinct purposes and functionalities. ChatGPT is designed for conversational AI, offering a natural language interface for creative tasks, coding, summarizing, and information retrieval. In contrast, Microsoft Copilot is integrated into Microsoft 365 applications, focusing on productivity and automation within the Microsoft ecosystem. ... Both tools leverage GPT5's language understanding to enhance work and communication, but they cater to different user needs and environments."

What's GPT5? It's the latest multi-modal large language model in what's known as generative pre-trained transformer foundation models. It was launched in August of this year to replace GPT-4. It powers ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and other developers through OpenAI.

That's really all I wanted to know about where this was coming from. I was more interested, at first, in what it could do for me.

## "Ask Anything"

When I became stuck about how to proceed with a particular relationship issue, I thought, "I'll ask ChatGPT." It gave me some good feedback and asked some leading questions. I chose

not to go deeper, as I didn't want to give it too much personal information. Yes, I wanted it to personalize responses for me, but what was it doing with the information?

I didn't go deeper with personal issues, but I did play with ChatGPT, in particular, to give me ideas about lots of things I'm interested in, from wine pairings to understanding cryptocurrency to the insoles that were best for my feet and legs. It's been informative, for sure, and also, I have to admit, not just impressive, but fun.

## Hearing from an expert

And then, an "aha" moment for me. While deciding on a podcast to listen to, I stumbled on one of Mel Robbins's titled, "How to Use AI to Make Money, Save Time, and Be More Productive." In it she interviewed Alie K. Miller, one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in AI, and someone Robbins calls "the AI whisperer."

One of the things Robbins said that really caught my attention was, "[AI] is already here. ... It has exploded, it has accelerated, and I don't want to get left behind. I don't want women in particular to lean back and get left behind."

That's me. I don't want to get left behind. But what am I getting left behind on?

Miller suggests that AI should be considered more of an executive assistant than someone or something that will "replace" you. An example she gave is of not being a good cook. She took a picture of what was in her fridge and pantry and asked AI to give her suggestions about what to make

with those ingredients. If a recipe suggestion had something missing, it gave her info on what it was and where she could get it.

"You're using it to help you be more of yourself," Miller repeats through the podcast as she gives example after example of what's possible, not just now, but going forward. (I highly recommend the podcast on Mel Robbins, Episode 340 from November 6, 2025.)

## Putting it to use

A year ago, if I was writing this article, I would have done Google searches on the pros and cons of artificial intelligence, mulled them over, and written about them. Today, I went straight to ChatGPT and, in the bar that says "Ask Anything," typed in the following:

Give me 10 reasons to embrace AI in 2026.

Here's what I got seconds later (including original formatting):

Here are **10 clear, future-focused reasons to embrace AI by 2026** (tuned to where AI is heading, not just where it is now):

### 1. AI becomes the default layer of productivity

By 2026, nearly every major app – email, browsers, calendars, docs – will have deep AI assistants built in. Using AI won't be "extra"; it'll be how you get things done faster.

Continued on next page

## 2. You'll get personalized coaching in every area of life

AI won't just answer questions – it will coach, giving tailored guidance on finances, health, travel planning, creativity, and career decisions, based on your patterns and preferences.

## 3. Planning anything becomes dramatically easier

From vacations to retirement to meal planning to managing a household, AI will reduce hours of research to minutes, cross-checking options, preferences, budgets, and calendars for you.

## 4. AI becomes a companion for creativity

Writers, artists, photographers, hobbyists, and journalers get brainstorming, editing, idea-generation, and design support on demand. It's like having a creative partner available 24/7.

## 5. It helps you stay informed without overwhelm

By 2026, AI will summarize news, filter noise, and show you only what genuinely matters to you, not what algorithms want you to see.

## 6. AI boosts financial clarity and confidence

Expect improved financial modeling, retirement projections, side-gig analysis, tax planning, and budget tracking – done conversationally, without spreadsheets.

## 7. It improves digital well-being

AI will manage notifications, screen time, and information flow so you spend less time scrolling and more time living.

## 8. AI becomes your personal research analyst

For any decision – big or small – AI will rapidly synthesize reviews, data, trends, and expert perspectives into something understandable and actionable.

## 9. It enhances accessibility and independence

Voice interfaces, real-time translation, and personalized adjustments will make technology easier for everyone, especially as we age.

## 10. AI becomes a partner in critical thinking – not a replacement

The people who thrive will use AI as a sounding board, a second brain, and a way to improve their own reasoning, not outsource it. It sharpens your thinking by providing perspectives, checks, and explanations.

If you want, I can also give you:

- a shorter, punchier list
- a version shaped for an article on "Why 2026 Will Be the Year to Finally Embrace AI"
- a version in your own voice (like your AI journaling article)

I didn't ask it to go further, as I was satisfied with these ten points. But I did ask, "If I use all of this information in an article I'm writing, is it plagiarism?"

To which ChatGPT said, "Great question – and the answer is **no**, it's *not* plagiarism to use this in your article **as long as you're the one shaping the final piece and you're not copying someone else's protected work.**"

### The tippy tippy tip of the iceberg

Streamlined, straightforward, seemingly simple and highly rewarding to embrace, right? Let's all lean in and not get left behind.

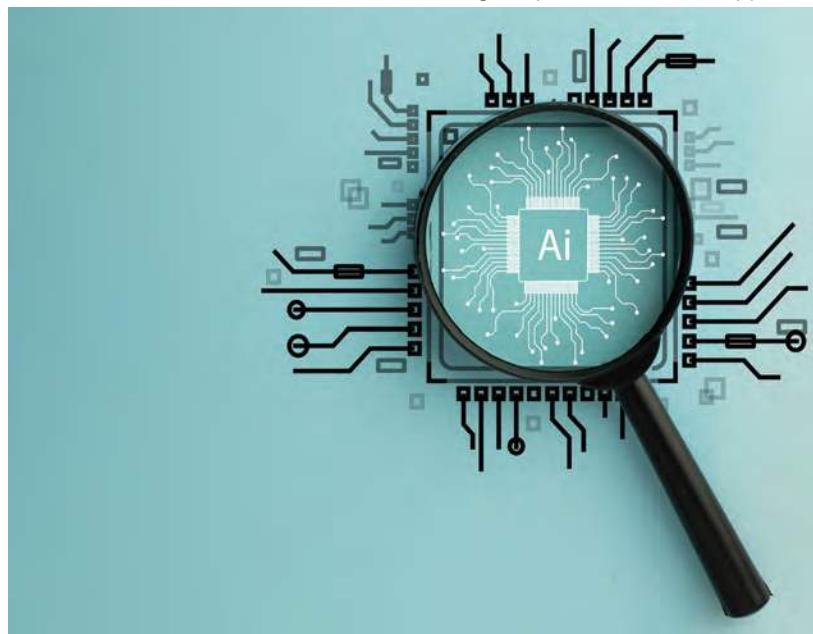
There is a "belly to the beast" here, however, and it's one that's being buried while the potentially life-saving and exciting life-altering possibilities are flashed in front of us.

I asked Copilot, "Will we be able to meet the energy demands of artificial intelligence," and here's part of what it said (again, text in bold is generated that way):

Why AI Energy Demand Is a Big Challenge

### • Explosive growth in electricity use:

Data centers already consume about **4.4% of U.S. electricity**, and this



could rise to **12% by 2028**. Globally, data centers may use **1,050 terawatt-hours by 2026**, making them the **5th largest energy consumer worldwide** – more than Japan.

• **Cooling and water demands:** Up to **40% of data center energy** goes to cooling systems, and water use could reach **6.6 billion cubic meters annually by 2027**.

• **Training large AI models:** Training requires thousands of GPUs running for weeks or months, pushing data centers toward consuming **20% of global electricity by 2030–2035**.

It said, in sum, "We can meet AI's energy demands, but it requires urgent action: scaling renewables, modernizing grids, and designing more efficient AI systems. If the industry and governments fail to act, energy shortages and rising emissions could stall AI's progress."

ChatGPT stated, in part, that "By 2030, data centers could use **6–9% of U.S. electricity** (up from ~3% today), according to multiple energy-systems forecasts."

I posed a question that for me is a huge elephant in the room of AI advancement: "Based on this information, with the current administration in the US leaning away from renewable energy, what is the prognosis that this can succeed?" If you want to know the answer, ask your Copilot or ChatGPT.

### More and more to learn

Another podcast I've really enjoyed about better understanding AI is *The Last Invention*. There are currently eight episodes, with the first one

titled, "Ready or Not." It's a fascinating in-depth exploration of the evolution of multimodal learning and the people who have helped and are currently making it happen, including how they lean relative to the potential dangers of AI.

### Embracing change

A friend of mine is moving into an independent living facility from the place he's called home for more than 50 years. He has made peace with the decision, but it's still a huge, life-altering change. In helping him – embracing him as he goes through this – I've learned that an embrace isn't just a warm, happy hug, it's an acknowledgement of a shared struggle to understand a next step. It's complicated, but necessary.

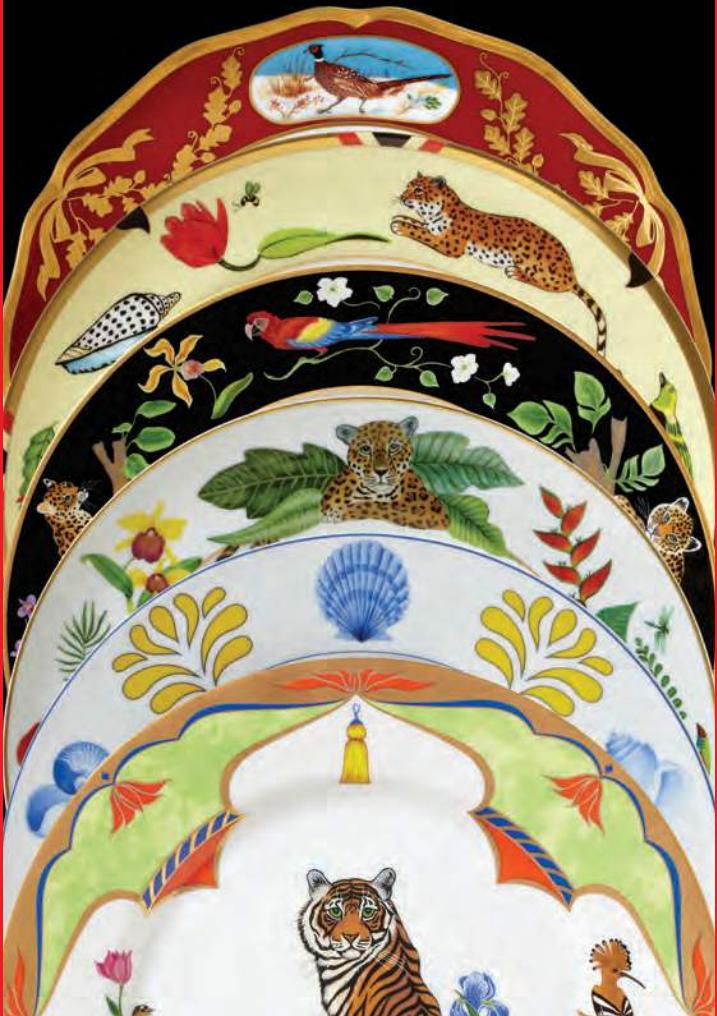
Will I name my ChatGPT in 2026? Will Copilot help me with a retirement plan? How is our area supporting this technology? So many questions and so much change. Whether you're ready or not, it's time to embrace what's unavoidable. •

*Note: I have provided just a couple of resources that have been helpful for me. There are loads of them out there, including books, videos, and online courses to help with understanding AI. I'd love to hear where you find inspiration and what ways you have embraced this new reality of ours. Email me at Dominique.devito@gmail.com. Happy New Year.*

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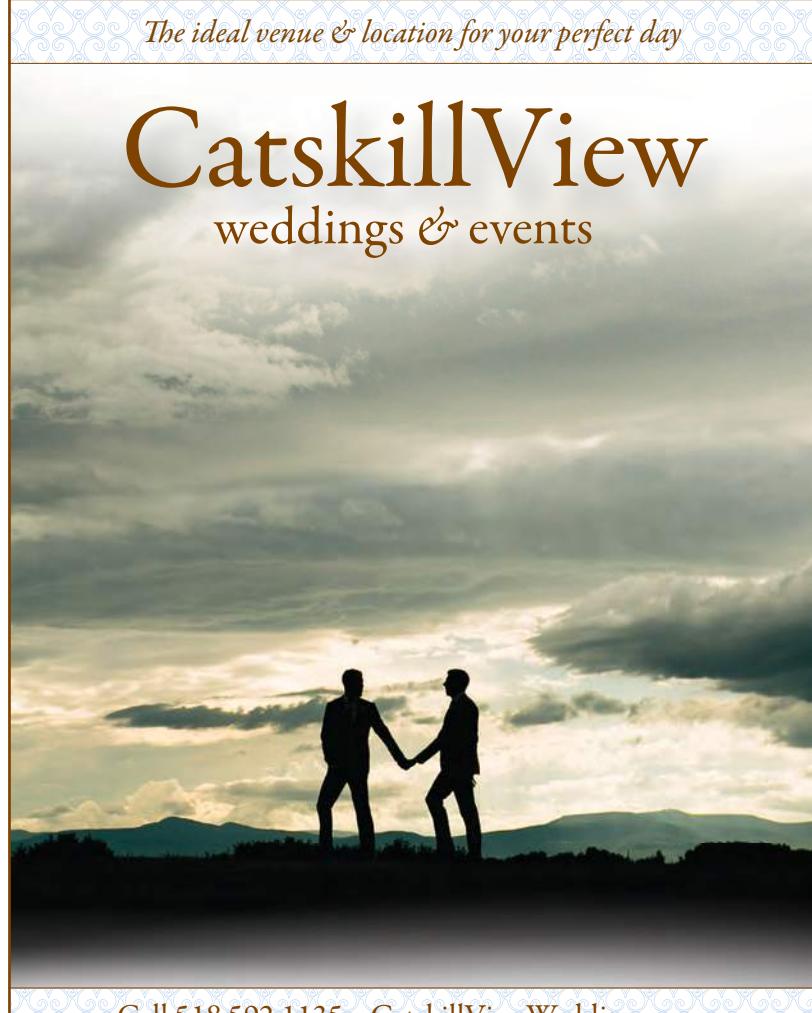
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# KINROVE

IS ROOTED IN HISTORY, MEMORY, AND PLACE

By Abby Audenino  
abby@mainstreetmag.com

“I’ve always been drawn to scent as a form of memory – how a single note can carry you back to a place, a season, or a feeling you forgot you missed,” shared Christina DiBernardo, the creator of Kinrove Fine Fragrance, a signature perfume brand based in the Northeast.

Christina never anticipated being so interested in perfume. She comes from a long career in fashion design, with over 25 years spent shaping collections for brands like Ralph Lauren, Timberland, L.L.Bean, Alo Yoga, Kimes Ranch, and more. Her work has always orbited around materiality, story, and the emotional power of things that are well made. But 12 years ago while living in Los Angeles, Christina had the instinctive urge to take classes and explore the concepts in perfumery more seriously. Christina describes Kinrove’s Original Scent as the “final thesis” of those classes.

“I started blending for myself, then for friends’ gifts, namely Melissa Davis of Marton & Davis, and realized that I was building something that felt like home: a small-batch fragrance house shaped by memory, rooted in place, and guided by a sense of modern Americana,” she shares.

#### How and where it started

Christina grew up on a farm that was built in the 1760s in Massachusetts, and her parents were in “restoration mode” throughout most of her childhood. “My father is a very skilled craftsperson and did all of it himself. I was surrounded by that craft and attention to detail, as well as early American art and decor, the scents of an old hearth heated, exposed wood beam house – I think the inspiration was cemented early on.”

Kinrove’s studio is based in Athens, NY, and currently, Kinrove is carried exclusively at Marton & Davis in

Chatham, NY. Melissa, Christina’s friend and Marton & Davis co-owner, was the catalyst for Kinrove officially going public with its Original Scent. “Melissa and Sherri’s shop shares my love for craft, heritage, and objects that touch our soul and give joy,” she says.

Christina doesn’t plan to open a brick and mortar shop or expand into e-commerce until Kinrove’s offerings are broader. For now, she prefers partnering with places whose spirit “naturally aligns with Kinrove,” so she can focus on creating.

#### Creation and process

Speaking of creating, Christina’s process for creating scents is intuitive and rooted in mood. She begins with a feeling – a memory, a piece of folklore, a slant of light – and proceeds to build the scent the way she would a garment: through proportion, layering, and restraint.

Her formulation process typically starts at her kitchen counter, which is stocked with vials, droppers, and a micro-scale. This process, she says, is then followed by a lot of trial and error. “I make small variations, let them rest, and return later with a clearer nose,” she shares. “Some materials blend beautifully, while others resist entirely. Working with them has given me a deep respect for the perfumers who have mastered the more temperamental or demanding ingredients – I am looking at you, tuberose!”

Ultimately, inspiration always comes back to place and people – early American textures like tobacco leaf, warm woods, earth after rain, and sun-dried linen. Christina is inspired by the textures of simple American life, translated through a clean, minimal lens. At its core, Kinrove is a practice of honoring the past, while building something new.



Photos by Isabel Butler

Christina wear-tests each trial on both skin and fabric, paying close attention to how it shifts throughout the day and refining until the scent settles into itself. “The goal is always the same: a scent that feels atmospheric and modern, yet quietly familiar, as if it’s been with you longer than you realize.”

#### A powerful form of kinship

Kinrove’s ingredients are all sourced from trusted global suppliers who prioritize ethical, high-quality raw materials. The ingredients for Kinrove’s Original Scent come from producers in California and France that have been a part of the Kinrove story since the very beginning. Meanwhile, all blending and bottling occurs by hand in small batches at Christina’s Athens studio to ensure consistency and craft.

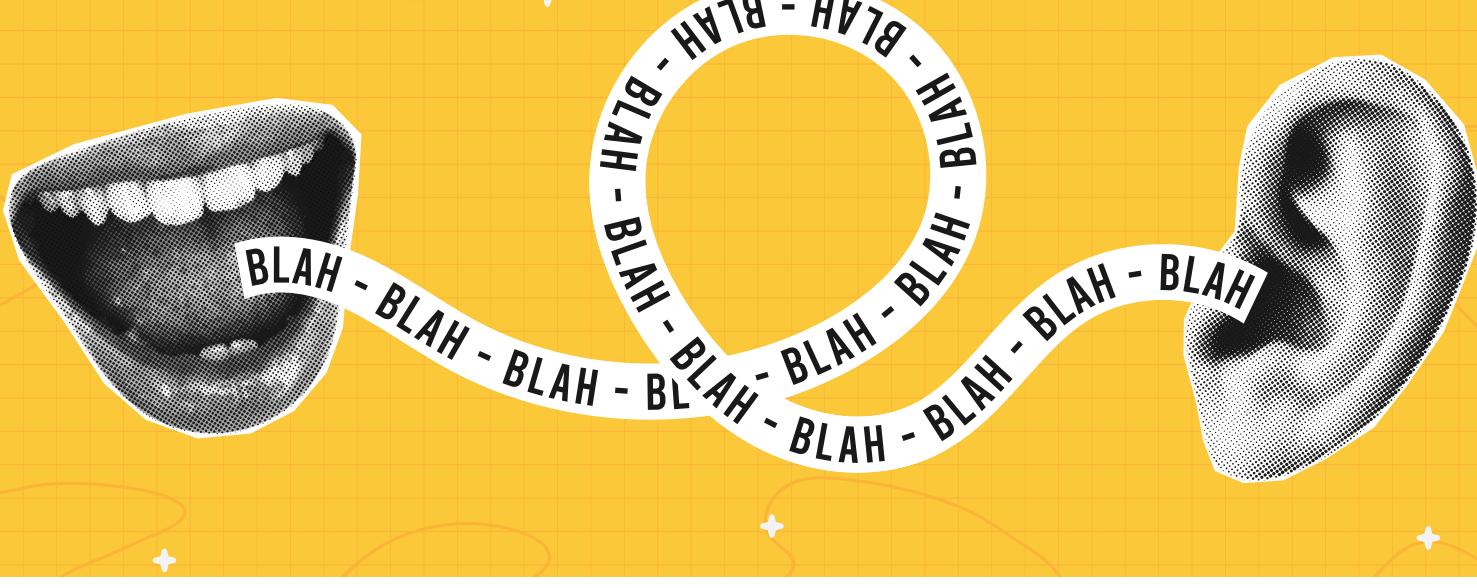
In the near term, Christina is focused on expanding Kinrove’s scent library. A few new fragrances inspired by season shifts and regional stories are currently in development and are slated for an early spring launch. Longer term, she hopes to grow Kinrove into a fuller world that includes

home fragrance, limited-edition collaborations with local makers, and eventually, a small studio or shop that functions as both a blending lab and a gathering space – “something intimate, creative, and rooted in the landscape that inspires the brand.”

“Scent is such a personal language, and watching someone respond to something I created feels like a powerful form of kinship,” she says. “For me, it’s hearing how people connect to a scent – what it evokes for them, what memory or place it stirs up.”

“Kinrove is still unfolding,” she continues. “It’s a young brand, very small, but built with a lot of heart. Every element – from the fragrance notes, to the packaging, to how we tell our story – is chosen with care. I hope people feel that when they wear it: a sense of grounding, of story, of belonging.” •

Learn more about Kinrove at [kinrove.com](http://kinrove.com), find them exclusively on shelves at Marton & Davis, 33 Main Street, Chatham, NY, and follow Kinrove on Instagram @kinrove.co.



# WORDS OF THE VALLEY

By Jesse DeGroodt  
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*Words are stupid, words are fun  
Words can put you on the run  
— “Wordy Rappinghood” by  
Tom Tom Club*

“That man is crazier than bob-tailed chicken on a rickety hen roost,” my born-at-the-turn-of-the-20th-century granddaddy would say to me, or at least in my direction, when I was a wee little fellow several gazillion years ago. I can only guess I might well have looked at him more than once with an expression of, “Huh?”

When I’d grown a bit older and apparently my ever-present self began to allow for more colorful observations, he might be heard to say that so-and-so was, yes, “crazier than a s%#&house rat.” To complete the “crazy trio,” an entity I believe was more happenstance than planned, my granddaddy might be heard to opine, “That boy’s crazier than a hooty owl.”

**Jesse's own scientific “research”**  
For the record, scientific techniques/principles/anything that might resemble a study or survey were not deployed in the making of this story. In a takeoff on the follow-one’s-nose method of tracking something down, in this case, I’ve generally followed my two ears in the attempt to decide

where to properly place sayings and phrasings and, in general, oral utterances that provide clues as to where these things say they belong.

Can I categorically, empirically, swear-on-my-mother’s-grave assert that the articulations to follow are products solely of this area? Soitanly not. Some extend statewide, others nationwide, mayhaps even worldwide, but there are things that place a speaker firmly within the confines of what most of us seem to perceive as the Hudson Valley, not some cockamamie poppycock cooked up in the Tikkity-Tokkity universe.

## Upstate vs. downstate with a side of two-three salt potatoes

Let’s start with the single issue occupying the minds of all New Yorkers, that of establishing where they are, seeing as how no one seems able to settle this oftentimes hotly contested debate, so, the first person to effectively and once and for all provide clarity to the upstate/downstate internecine battle gurgling along barely below the surface will earn a lifetime supply of salt potatoes and a free weekly fish fry, which we’ll get to in a bit.

Personally, I’ve always put the dividing line at I-84, which encompasses such august locales as Fishkill and Shenandoah as it merrily wends its way through our corner of New York State, while for others the Tappan Zee Bridge, or whatever they’re calling it this week, fixes the dividing line.

For my purposes, I’m sticking with phrases, sayings, and words that may not have achieved particular prominence here, or even originated here, but, if not, sure sound as though they should have.

The only places I’ve gorged on enjoyed **salt potatoes** is at sporting events and county fairs occurring in the Hudson Valley and nowhere else, which seems screwy to me. This concoction is practically indecent on the palate-pleasing scale of things. While never much of a potato aficionado, there is no way I can get away with a **couple-three, aka two-three**, of the salt potatoes sitting there in their sexy little former hot dog boat all smoothed in butter on a warm July evening.

I don’t think you could limit yourself to eating only a **couple-three** yourself, given half the chance. The woman with the dubious pleasure of looking after yours truly as a young’un on the days my mom was at work once admonished me for conflating or otherwise ignoring completely the meaning of a “few” vs. a “couple.”

Clearly, I’d yet to encounter the rather nebulous usefulness of a couple-three, something that may have helped me pull myself out of the weeds.

## Hamburg, hamburg and hamburgers

When you overhear someone say they’re off to **The City** for the day, you know it’s not Cincinnati or

Graphic, above: istockphoto.com  
contributor Roman Prysiazniuk

Graphic, right: istockphoto.com  
contributor Ekaterina Bedoeva

Omaha they have in mind, unless by some chance you actually do live within striking distance of either of those locales. "All in one day," my dad would reliably announce as we pulled back into the garage following a pilgrimage to Shea Stadium, or, once, after a trip to the New York World's Fair in 1965.

It was later in life that I stumbled onto the notion that **hamburg** was not only something you eat, but a village and a town in western New York. That revelation came a few years after arriving on the college scene in central New York only to have it dawn on me that most people in the known universe refer to the stuff you eat as hamburger. Who knew? My dad was born in Hamburg. So there.

Likewise, **seckyuhtary**, otherwise known as secretary, regardless of whether we're talking someone who might engage in such activities as

may well not have originated here: **should of**. I should of shot that ill-humored bear when it decided to break into my house and steal back its porridge. I should of taken the Taconic, since it's daylight and I had half a chance of avoiding one of the 37 million deer maliciously eyeing the front of my car as I rolled by. I should of not hit that deer. In an alternate universe, where relatively decent English is spoken, I'm thinking that, all things considered, I should have stayed home and avoided driving that day.

A close cousin to "should of": **seent**. Again, most likely not the sole property of the Hudson Valley, but it seems to have rolled its RV into town and set up shop, cuz the seckyuhtary I don't have wrestles with this one all the time. Once upon a time, in referencing the release of a *Saw* sequel on *Saturday Night Live's* Weekend

about coining a word or phrase that addresses an irritating little problem we've all run across at least once in our lives, that of something that looks exquisitely tasty on the grocery store shelf and turns out to be anything but once unwrapped and consumed. I'd like to propose calling it a **Van Throckmorton**, after Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve from *The Great Gildersleeve* radio show of the 1940s and '50s, a notorious gasbag who sold girdles. Years from now, when someone peers into Wikipedia for a Van Throckmorton reference, or perhaps consults the etymology people, they will know to associate *Main Street Magazine* with a Van Throckmorton, and they'll look twice at that faux delicacy in a shiny box on the supermarket shelf before forking out good, hard-earned dough for the equivalent of a trinket.

If you're in the mood for what



take dictation, type things, file stuff, and the like, or a piece of furniture at which said individual might well post themselves as they ply their trade. At the point in time the realization struck that it was not only my mom, but everybody, that said it, I came to the conclusion that folks up and down the Valley had indeed received the memo.

#### Speaking Hudson Valley

Do you put things in the **drawer** or the **draw**? If you said "drawer," I'm here to tell you that you're not doing it correctly. "Put that spoon back in the draw," which is not exactly like drawing to an inside straight, but does, if you speak Hudson Valley, provide clear instruction as to where the spoon should go. Drawer? Ha! That must be someone who draws things.

Here's a beauty that most certainly doesn't belong exclusively here, and

Update, Michael Che said simply, "seent," and, besides nearly sending me off the sofa in peals of laughter and simultaneously freaking out the little doggy next to me, with that one word exposed one of the darker routes taken by speech in the Hudson Valley. Okay, its use won't start a war, but it does my ears no great favors. Was that something you seent with your own eyes? I doubt it.

#### Creating his own saying, yes-yes

**Yes-yes**. Perhaps a second cousin to the modern proliferation of "wait, what," it seems to me that yes-yes has dwindled in usage over time but once was a popular thing to say on athletic fields and in saloons and wherever else it might come in handy. Strike three! Yes-yes! I'll have another tequila sunrise, yes-yes! Naptime yet? Yes-yes!

It must be time for us to invent our own. For years now, I've thought

pretty much the rest of the world refers to as fish and chips, hereabouts you might find yourself on the receiving end of a blank stare if you request fish and chips from that ever-so-patient person taking your order. On the other hand, if you ask for a **fish fry**, you'll be in business.

Once upon a time, I would be advised to put something in the **cupboard**, at one time universal for the things that would hang above counter space, for instance, but one which now seems to have given way to cabinet, wholly confusing some of us who grew up with cupboards. Again, likely not a Hudson Valley invention, but one that was prevalent at one time. Everybody's gotta be somewhere, my dad would say. And now we all know where that is. •

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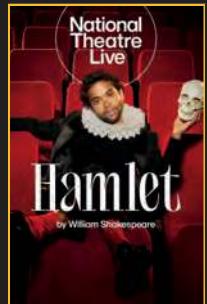
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# giving pause

## to chat about menopause



By Whitney Joseph Shavelson  
info@mainstreetmag.com

Dear Readers,

*Please accept my apologies if this piece offends in any way. I admit there are moments when it leans toward the graphic and, perhaps to some, the gruesome, but it's my fervent desire that by article's end readers – male and female alike – will have a better appreciation for my utter desperation to resolve what's been a lifetime of menstruation misery. Also, this is my personal journey and I am in no way an expert. Always consult your physician about your own health issues and needs.*

With appreciation,  
Whitney Joseph Shavelson

My first period was a messy affair. It was a typically hot and sticky Florida afternoon, and I was in the middle of nowhere – or so it seemed. I was 13, making it 1985. It was summer, and I was at cheerleading camp before eighth grade. While I'm a bit foggy about the exact location, it was either central or northern Florida.

My junior high school wasn't known for its athletics, but the cheerleaders always competed nationally and consistently ranked among the top ten. Despite our short skirts and frilly pom poms, we trained just as fiercely as "traditional" athletes – if not more so – determined to prove

that we, too, were elite competitors. Part of that entailed intensive clinics and camps, including the summer-time adventure that turned out to be rougher than I anticipated in the most unexpected of ways.

### A ghastly memory

I wasn't prepared for that first period – neither in mind nor in practice. I remember we were doing drills when I got awful stomach pains and became rather faint. I suddenly realized my shorts were a bit sticky, though I wasn't sure why. Thankfully, I wasn't wearing white.

I ran to my cabin and straight into the restroom. I wanted to vomit. I nearly passed out. I had none of the accoutrements a young girl should have the first time she "falls off the roof," as the charming Southern euphemism goes. I had no painkillers, no sanitary pads, no heating pad, nothing. Thank goodness my mom was the eternal chaperone and could go get me the essentials.

The camp was in the boondocks, so it took her what seemed like an eternity to return. All the while I hid in a musty bathroom stall, my face an ashen white.

Making matters worse was the chatter from other cheerleaders bunking in our cabin. I didn't catch every word, but I heard some. Words like "period" were muffled by running water from the sink, which nicely quieted my heavy breathing. Another wave of nausea ... I was mortified and feeling oh-so-sick. I hid behind

a graffiti-covered door that blessedly preserved my anonymity.

While waiting for my mom, I wondered why so many girls longed for their periods.

With two older sisters, I knew better. I'd watched them suffer. It wasn't pretty. What scared me most, though, was my mom telling us those painful periods ran in our family. Apples don't fall far from the tree...

Fast forward a generation. My sisters and I proved the pattern, as we all suffered the same fate: unbearable cramps, blinding migraines, menorrhagia (heavy bleeding), mood swings, frequent vomiting, and a sundry of other equally lovely symptoms.

### Possible, perhaps partial, relief?

Fast forward again, this time to college, freshman year. I excitedly walked into the health clinic for birth control. I'd read it could quell those awful periods. The pain. The long, irregular cycles. Soon, they would be a thing of the past.

I was beyond excited – this was the answer to my prayers!

But ... no.

Turns out that birth control pills can exacerbate migraines. The splitting headaches I'd battled since wearing pigtails worsened. My skull exploded as if I'd swallowed a grenade instead of the pill. Stopping was a non-brainer.

My dreams of manageable, painless periods? Gone.

I wasn't even 20. I'd have to play the long game, I realized, to rid myself

of those hellish periods. I'd have to wait until menopause. It would take decades, but it would be worth it.

### Three decades and waiting

Fast forward three decades and three years, and I'm still waiting (for relief, at least). Now 53, I was officially diagnosed as "menopausal" in the spring. Some women might be hesitant to admit they're menopausal in public or memorialize it in print. I don't see why. We all age, and that's worthy of celebrating. To those who grimace and grouse about growing older, getting more wrinkles, or gaining more pounds, I offer you this: Aging is far better than the alternative.

With age also comes wisdom, and ideally, a certain amount of relief. Such was my mindset when I hit menopause.

### The 'H' of HRT – for huzzah or help?

I was feeling optimistic, but HRT hasn't panned out quite yet.

HRT stands for hormone replacement therapy. Before diving into HRT, let's first discuss the basics of menopause, with some guidance from the National Menopause Foundation.

The NMF defines a woman as "menopausal" after 12 consecutive months with no period. All women experience menopause as they age and their reproductive hormone

Continued on next page ...

levels drop. Symptoms vary; the most common are hot flashes/flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, vaginal dryness, incontinence, mood swings, and weight gain (especially around the abdomen).

#### There are three distinct menopausal stages:

- Perimenopause, during which a woman still produces eggs and can thus still become pregnant (even if experiencing menopausal symptoms);
- Menopause, which is technically a single day marking one year since a woman's last period; the ovaries stop releasing eggs, estrogen is no longer produced, and pregnancy is not possible; and
- Postmenopause, the phase entered after menopause; hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms stop, but the NMF notes aging women, no longer fertile, are at higher risk for other health conditions.

Women usually enter menopause between 48 and 52 years old. OB-GYN and author Dr. Heather L. Johnson explains on nationalmenopausefoundation.org that many women experience six months to up to three years of "fanfare" before their last period.

Dr. Johnson's book, *What They Don't Tell You about Menopause: A Gynecologist's Unofficial Guide to Premenopausal, Perimenopausal, and Postmenopausal Life*, prepares women for what's often a dreaded but inevitable part of life.

#### The more you know...

Knowledge is power when it comes to menopause, stresses Dr. Johnson, who emphasizes that estrogen plays a vital role in women's reproductive health as they age. That brings us back to HRT.

"Prior to menopause, estrogen is mainly your friend. Its decrease and subsequent absence after menopause can lead to a number of medical issues such as vaginal dryness, pain with intercourse, and frequent urinary tract infections. More importantly, with the loss of estrogen's protection at menopause, women rapidly catch up to men in numbers when it comes

to high cholesterol and heart disease," explains Johnson.

According to The Mayo Clinic, HRT is now called menopause hormone therapy. Its website, mayoclinic.org, defines MHT as "medicine with female hormones ... taken to replace the estrogen the body stops making after menopause ... to treat common menopause symptoms."

The world-class clinic cites studies showing MHT "prevent[s] bone loss and reduce[s] broken bones after menopause ... but [warns] MHT [has] risks," depending on the type of therapy, whether the medicine is taken orally or topically, the dosage, the length of consumption, the patient's age, and personal health risks.

Yet the US Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Health and Human Services have been spreading the word that HRT is safe and blame an early 2000s study by the Women's Health Initiative linking HRT to increased cases of breast cancer of fear-mongering.

Esteemed periodicals like the Journal of the American Medical Association largely agree. "MHT is broadly considered the most effective treatment for common symptoms of menopause, but its estimated use among postmenopausal women declined from about 27% to about 5% from 1999 to March 2020."

The drop in hormone usage pointed to the WHI study, with the FDA and HHS indicating it did a disservice to women who feared getting breast cancer, leading the agencies to announce on November 10, 2025 that they would drop the "black box" warnings on HRT products for menopause.

"[The study] found a statistically non-significant increase in the risk of breast cancer diagnosis. The average age of women in the study was 63 years – over a decade past the average age of a woman experiencing menopause – and study participants were given a hormone formulation no longer in common use," according to the FDA.

"Tragically, tens of millions of women have been denied the life-changing and long-term health benefits of HRT because of a medical dogma rooted in a distortion of risk," said FDA Commissioner Marty

Makary, MD, MPH, who made the announcement with HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. "For too long, issues of women's health have been underrecognized. Women and their physicians should make decisions based on data, not fear."

#### HRT details

HRT is available as whole-body or systemic hormone therapy in a pill, skin patch, ring, gel, cream, or spray. Systemic HRT provides more estrogen than other HRTs, and when absorbed by the whole body it can treat multiple symptoms. Low-dose vaginal estrogen is available as a cream, tablet, or ring. It offers less estrogen for the body to absorb and therefore usually treats only vaginal and urinary symptoms of menopause.

In addition to relieving the traditional menopausal symptoms (hot flashes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, bone loss, and low libido), HRT with estrogen and progesterone can lower the risk of other ailments for women, including cardiovascular disease, by as much as 50%; Alzheimer's disease, by 35%; and bone fractures, by 50 to 60%.

It's great to see HRT now being considered by women once too scared to even consider taking hormones, myself included. And while my menopause journey has been rocky, I'm hopeful I'll round the corner soon and thrilled others have reaped and are continuing to reap the benefits of HRT with fewer negative effects than formerly believed.

#### Not quite the silver bullet ... yet

My past periods considered, the fact I've struggled with HRT isn't a huge surprise, especially when considering my maternal family hormone history. That said, I'm holding onto hope.

My regular OB-GYN was on maternity leave when I was prescribed HRT, so it's been a bumpy road from the start. Her substitute said I "might have some bleeding" in the beginning but didn't warn me I could get my period again with the same disabling cramps I've battled my whole life.

It's been nearly five months and the intense pain remains. So do the periods. This isn't what I bargained for and certainly not what I expected.

I'm writing this because I don't think many women know this could happen, nor do I think the men in their lives know, either.

My new normal seems to be crampy and cranky, and I feel as if I'm in a permanent state of PMS. I thought menopause was going to end my periods. Period. What the heck happened?

According to my OB-GYN (who's since returned as a new mom!), it can take three to five months for my hormones to regulate. Since we've tweaked my dosage twice, I may have to extend my wait twofold.

#### Anticipation...

By now it should be evident that I'd been eagerly awaiting menopause. Look, did I relish the thought of gaining weight, of losing hair, of swinging moods, or of any of the other horror stories I'd heard through the years from women who dreaded the idea of aging? Heck, no!

But every month for nearly 40 years, in between being doubled over in pain and downing extra strength Ibuprofen every six hours, I continued to cling to my dream of no more nasty little periods once I hit menopause. I believed after I put in my time I would enjoy the reward. And now that I'm in what I'm hoping is the final stretch, I'm willing to face whatever challenges are necessary knowing that at the end of the day I still have a chance of finding calm – and no more period pain.

So, I'm keeping the faith that at some point I'll join millions of women who have found relief with HRT and are enjoying their menopause journey in a peaceful and powerful way as a result.

That's an end goal that I can definitely embrace – even if the journey thus far is proving to be incredibly and excruciatingly painful. I'm a woman; I can take it. What else is new? •

*\*Disclaimer: All medical claims made in this article are information researched and provided by the author. The information is general in nature and not specifically meant for any particular individual. You should always seek out medical assistance from a medical professional based on your individual needs and circumstances.*

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## Feel Good Haus

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Feel Good Haus was born in 2024 from founder Tricia Mackenzie's passion for wellness and community after years of caregiving. What began as a personal vision to create a space for self-care and discovery evolved into a curated retail experience, highlighting local artisans, mindful products, and experiences in the Berkshire community. Feel Good Haus provides a curated wellness experience designed to support self-care, intentional living, and everyday wellbeing. Their modern apothecary retail shop features wellness products, botanicals, aromatherapy, home rituals, and gifts from Berkshire and western Massachusetts makers. "Feel Good Haus stands apart through its highly curated, hyper-local approach to wellness," Tricia explains. "Unlike traditional gift shops or wellness retailers, we blend modern apothecary essentials with artisan-made products, creating a destination that feels both elevated and deeply rooted in place." After years of caregiving and supporting the wellbeing of others, Tricia felt a deep pull to create a career that aligned with that same purpose, but also allowed her to grow in a new way. "I see Feel Good Haus continuing to grow as a destination for wellness, self-care, and community in the Berkshires and beyond," she says. "We aim to expand our curated offerings of locally made and mindful products, host more workshops and experiences that bring people together, and deepen wellness support."



## Larson Architecture Works

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Larson Architecture Works was founded by Doug Larson in 2017. Though he had been in private practice for almost 30 years, Larson started the firm in order to focus on a diverse portfolio of work across residential, retail, and institutional projects. Larson Architecture Works provides a full range of architecture and design services, and is equally comfortable venturing into master planning, site design, interior design, and furniture design. Larson Architecture Works does not have one style, point of view, or approach to design, as each client has a unique set of constraints, budget, and taste preferences. The firm moves fluidly between New York City and Dutchess and Columbia counties, so they are able to service clients who do the same. "The most rewarding part about being in this business is assessing the unmet potential in a site or building, taking advantage of missed opportunities, envisioning what could be, and then watching it come to fruition as the project is realized and finally occupied by the clients," says Larson. Going forward, Larson Architecture Works foresees continuing to build a diverse practice that serves clients across all project types. "Architecture addresses fundamental human needs which remain the same in spite of advances in the digital world around us. We will continue to need shelter and spaces to accommodate the activities of our daily lives." *Photo by Phillip Reed.*



## Intricate Designs

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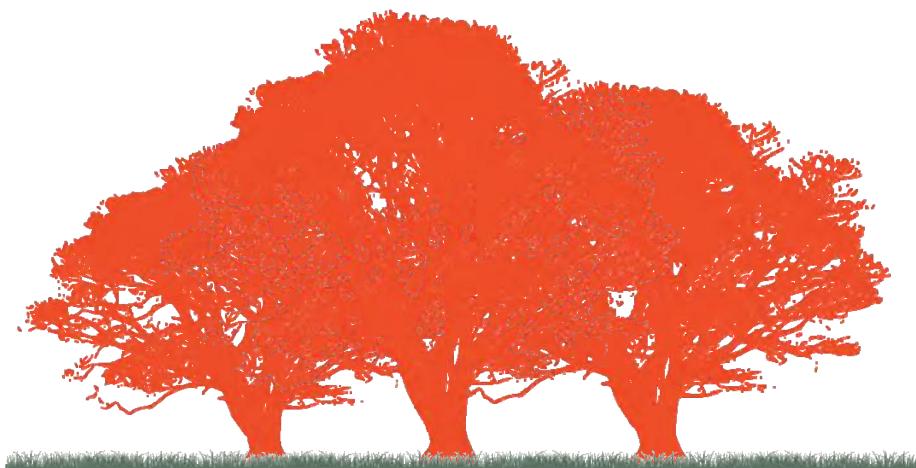
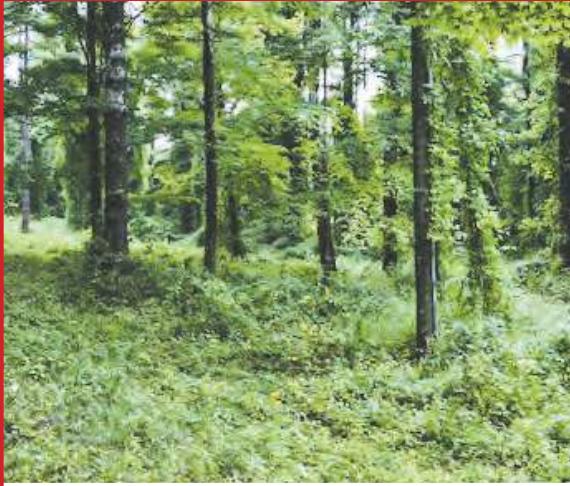
Crystal Smith started Intricate Designs in October of 2025 after discovering her passion for creating apparel and jewelry. Inspired by the talented makers on social media, she decided that it was time for her to pursue her own creative path. Her husband built her a small workshop on their property, and she now spends her evenings designing and crafting unique pieces. Intricate Designs offers handmade clay jewelry, specializing mostly in earrings. Crystal also offers custom apparel and home decor pieces – all designed to add a personal, creative touch to everyday style and home life. What sets Intricate Designs apart? Crystal says it's the "heart, passion, and creativity" that she puts into everything she creates. "I truly enjoy crafting unique pieces and love seeing my customers wear them with a smile, knowing they're enjoying something made just for them." In the new year, Crystal plans to continue growing and evolving Intricate Designs, expanding her product offerings, maintaining creativity and personal touch, and building lasting relationships with her customers. "It's incredibly fulfilling to see my work as a reflection of myself. It's a reminder of what I'm capable of creating and how far I've come doing something I enjoy."



## Whistle Pig Books

62 Main Street, North Canaan, CT. [whistlepigbookslc@gmail.com](mailto:whistlepigbookslc@gmail.com). [whistlepigbooks.com](http://whistlepigbooks.com)

Thom Wilson and Emily Peterson started Whistle Pig Books in October of 2025 when the perfect space opened up in North Canaan, CT. While Thom and Emily hadn't planned on launching a used bookstore for at least a few more years, the right space opened up and they decided to dive in head first. Whistle Pig Books provides a curated selection of second-hand books, offering readers a chance to rescue books and give them new life. Whistle Pig's shelves include a wide range of genres, from fiction, non-fiction, and children's books to romance, science fiction, and comics. "We emphasize sustainability and re-use: Our mission centers on giving 'old pages' new life and keeping books in circulation rather than going into the landfill," Emily explains. "Our shop is cozy and unique – we've rescued and repurposed furniture and designed a space where people feel at home." Ultimately, Whistle Pig Books endeavors to continue growing as a community hub. That means more local events, collaborations, and ways for people to connect over books. They will also continue expanding their collection, so that every visit feels like a new discovery. "Seeing someone light up when they find a book they love or hearing their stories about their favorite authors – that makes all the hard work worthwhile. It's so fulfilling to finally live a dream we've carried for years, sharing our passion for books (and reading) with the community!"



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