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GRATITUDE AND MORE

I am having a real issue with this issue. I cannot believe that it is already August, which also feels like the last hoorah of summer. Say it isn't so! I don't want it to end, and I'm guessing neither do you. Summer always feels like such a rush: we wait all year for it, and then it's seemingly over in a snap. It's sad in a way, but all the more reason to soak it all in, right? Soak up every hot and humid day, every swim in the lake, every barbeque and concert. That's what we've been doing over here at *Main Street*, enjoying every moment and making the precious time count. We hope you've been doing the same.

Now, most often in this editor's note I give you a little glimpse of what you'll be finding on the following pages. But truth be told: I haven't read a single article. I'm actually writing this note to you before I set eyeballs on the articles and start laying them out. Of course I know what each writer has written about, myself included. But I haven't soaked in every word of every story yet. At the time of this writing I haven't even interviewed and written my two stories that are going to be in this issue! So instead of telling you all about the amazing job that my writers have done (because they always do a fabulous job) and giving you a teaser of the subjects of their pieces, I'd like to talk about our advertisers.

We are a free monthly print magazine, and we also offer almost-daily content on our website. And yes, that's free too! All you have to do is follow us on socials and or visit our website to enjoy all of our content. So how do we pay for printing, web servers, insurance, writers, and more? With advertiser support. Every time you read one of our magazines, you're able to enjoy our content thanks to our amazing advertisers! I am so grateful to every single one of them because they allow me and my whole team to share one amazing story after another. And that's all I really care about: sharing good, positive stories that matter to each and every one of us. So the next time you pick up a *Main Street* or click on one of our online stories, please take a moment to look at our advertising partners and consider shopping in their stores, eating at their restaurants, or using their services. I can attest that they are all fabulous people who run amazing businesses, and they are essential to our communities.

To each and every advertiser, thank you for your continued advertising support! To all of our readers, thank you for reading and supporting us. Happy final days of summer everyone!

– Thorunn Kristjansdottir



AUGUST 2026

Rocco Man is a DockDog and here he shows off his skills. Rocco Man (CGC, BCAT, UMJ) is a six year old black lab/golden retriever.

Rocco Man is Maddie's dog. Maddie began DockDogs in 2021 when she was only 12 years old. For the past four years, she and Rocco have been invited to DockDogs World Finals in Iowa. They went in 2024 and competed. In 2025 she was invited to finals in Louisiana for SRS Dock Diving. They have competed in events in New York, Connecticut, Vermont, and Kentucky.

Photo by
Olivia Valentine

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PUBLISHER, EDITOR, WRITER, & DESIGNER: Thorunn Kristjansdottir

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Abby Audenino | Barbara Peduzzi | CB Wismar | Christine Bates | Dominique De Vito | Ian Strever | Jesse DeGroodt | Jim Calvin | Leora Armstrong | Olivia Valentine & Caroline Markonic | Regina Molaro | Whitney Joseph

COPY EDITOR: Viveca Gardiner. **PHOTOGRAPHERS:** Lazlo Gyorsok & Olivia Valentine

ADVERTISING Ashley Kristjansson, 518 592 1135 or info@mainstreetmag.com

CONTACT

Office 135 Rt. 44, Millerton, NY 12546 • Mailing address PO Box 165, Ancramdale, NY 12503
Phone 518 592 1135 • Email info@mainstreetmag.com • Website mainstreetmag.com

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INSIDE THE PAGES

MAY
CASTLEBERRY

By Leora Armstrong
info@mainstreetmag.com

I have had numerous conversations with May Castleberry regarding the importance of books and their tangible nature in an increasingly non-tangible world. Castleberry has been surrounded by books her whole life, from a love of libraries to curating artists' books and exhibitions for both the Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art. She has worked side by side with artists, papermakers, and bookbinders to bring to life pieces of art that live on through both the visual and the written word. Castleberry and her family moved to the Northwest Corner 14 years ago from Sag Harbor. I caught up with her to look at some of her book projects and discuss the complexity involved in making handmade art books, conceived and designed by artists to be seen as artworks.

Can you remember your earliest memories of making art?

I grew up painting alongside my mother, who had been making artworks ever since I could remember. She had a home studio, and sometimes showed in serious exhibitions, despite our living in places that seemed like the edge of nowhere. I grew up in the West, between Texas; Alberta, Canada; and Colorado. My father worked in oil exploration, and we moved frequently. This gave me, for better or worse, a keen sense of changing natural environments and the beauty of an expansive land-

scape. When I complained about, say, moving from the Rocky Mountains to the Texas plains, my mother encouraged me to stay focused on the beauty of the horizon line or to find beauty wherever I could. This stayed with me in unexpected ways in my career. Finding magic in forgotten objects and spaces has been a guiding principle for many of the artists I have worked with.

So, you went to art school to paint?

I received my first formal training in painting in a full-summer program at the Banff School of Fine Arts in Alberta between high school and college. In my college years, studying art history and fine art in Texas, I got involved with printmaking, graphic arts, and book design.

It is so interesting that books have been at the center of your work, but they were always integrated in your life, even when you were young.

Truly! Along with nature, books were my portable home. Throughout my childhood, moving from place to place with little support, the local library was my best friend. My mother had wonderful art books, too, another opportunity for bookish escape. Strangely, it took the most urban place for me to feel at home: I moved to New York City at the age of 21 and instantly loved its cosmopolitanism. I loved that everyone was from every-

where. Also, it was wondrous news to me that one could form deep friendships centered on shared specialized interests.

My first job was as a clerk in the Columbia Library, which allowed me to take free printmaking courses in Columbia's Graduate School of the Arts at night. The best part of my (low-level) clerical job was sorting books in Columbia's Rare Book Library, where I was exposed to daily conversations among much more advanced professionals making special acquisitions decisions. The next year, I enrolled in Columbia's Library School MS program. Studying the history of the book, my focus was on books made by artists. My thesis was on "the artists' book movement" of the 1960s and 70s (best defined by the offset-printed books by artists such as Ed Ruscha and Sol LeWitt.) This led to my job as librarian at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

What happens when you sit down with a new book you're excited about? What is your emotional response?

After all these years, they are almost all still magic. But I confess I can get clinical all too quickly! I instantly look to see who designed and printed it, how well it was sewn. I see details that might be imperceptible to some but have an enormous effect on the book's visual and tactile experience.

So, you're always thinking about

process? I do the same with painting. I look at an image and want to know how it was made, who did it, and what materials they used. Can you share how your job developed?

Yes, I love your deep involvement with materials. I had the privilege of working with artists to explore and use handmade papers, Japanese cloth, silk threads, and more.

When I was first working as a librarian at the Whitney Museum, the museum's director asked me to raise money and grow the collection. I had no real idea how to raise money, but I suggested a kind of book club in which people would support the library: I would produce books with artists, and we would give members a copy. Like many naive ideas undertaken in youth, I had no idea how much work it would be, or if it would succeed. But (longer, generally happy story) it worked out!

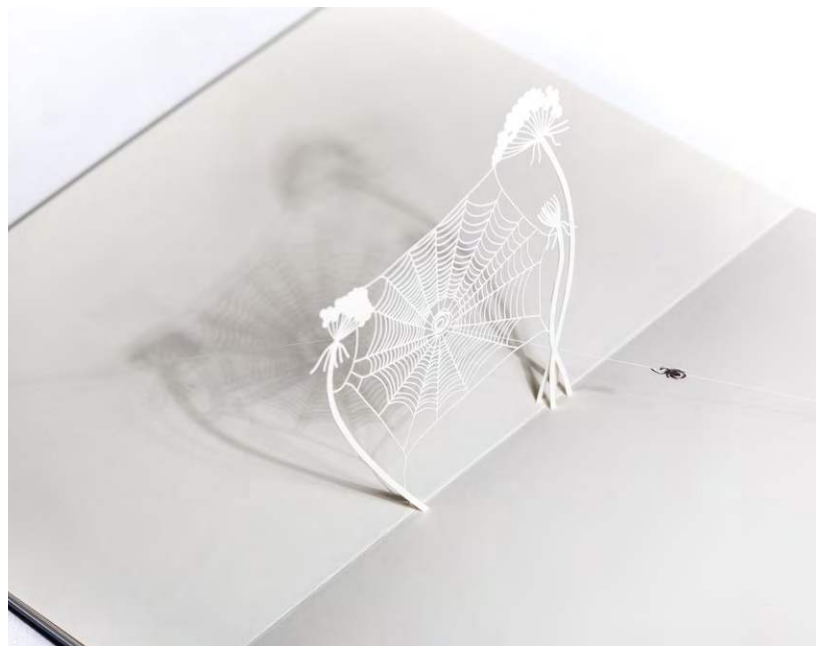
I learned a great deal about publishing by buying and handling historic books and through constant conversations with booksellers while searching for books for the library. I scoured bookstores in New York for books on the history of 20th-century American art, buying and studying illustrated fine-press books and books conceived by artists as works of art. One of the best sources for me at the time was Wittenborn Books, a center of artistic and intellectual life for the Surrealists-in-exile in the 1940s and the Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s. Wittenborn went out of business in the 1990s. Also, Printed Matter, a not-for-profit that focuses on books by artists, had a huge impact. It's still going strong in Chelsea.

I think books are fascinating objects. Like you, I fell into books young because they were something to get lost in, though the books you work with are quite different.

While I love many kinds of books, my sweet spot as a publisher seems to lie in uniting artists with specialty printers and binders to make books in unusual, even sculptural formats, and in tactile materials. I invite artists to work in a variety of print media (from traditional etching and engraving to silkscreen to the most advanced offset printing). And to work closely with a wonderful hand binder.

The first book I was fully in charge of for the Whitney program, published in 1985 was by Vija Celmins. This book, called *The View*, included the artist's mezzotints made especially for the project, handmade paper we commissioned to complement the etchings, and a new text by the poet Czeslaw Milosz. (A set of artist's proofs of mezzotints originally published in *The View* was recently displayed in Matthew Marks' exhibition focused on Vija's work from the 1980s.) Celmins's work is demanding to design around and print (every millimeter matters). It was a pleasure to watch her precision and find ways to support it throughout the publication.

Around that time, I traveled to New Mexico with my husband, and sometimes with Celmins. Flora Biddle, a trustee at the Whitney (who now lives in New Preston, CT), a guiding light, had a house in Taos and regularly invited my husband and me there, along with Vija Celmins and artist Agnes Martin, a mutual friend of Vija and Flora. Martin, by the



Above and opposite page: Tomás Saraceno. *From Arachnophobia to Arachnophilia*. 2022. MoMA Library Council The atlas-sized book contains five artist-designed, hand-cut, hand-printed pop-up scenes creating a small theater of marvels.

way, was extraordinary, unafraid to be completely in her own world.

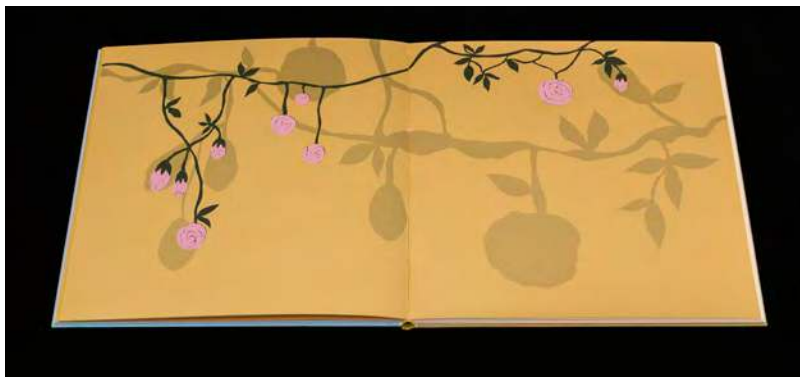
It took five years to sell out the book, and then, in the 1990s, it became almost impossible to buy. Vija, though noted for her contributions to California Pop in the sixties, was somewhat overlooked at the time of the book's publication in the mid 1980s. Her reputation (like Martin's) expanded with a renewed appreciation for minimalism and an exquisite "hand."

Were you painting through that time? You were making books. When did you get into curation?

I made prints and paintings in my spare time in my 20s and 30s. These were mostly miniature paintings that could sit on a bookshelf (and looked a lot like tiles or books). The artwork slowed down when my job at the Whitney became all-consuming in the early 90s, as I was running a library, publishing books, and curating exhibitions. In 1990, I started curating small exhibitions of books in a first-floor gallery off the lobby and in another space next to the restaurant on the lower floor. The display of publications usually complemented a larger exhibit upstairs. A few years later, I became deeply interested in photo books, especially those that documented the American West's landscape. This led me to curate a full-scale exhibition on the subject at the Whitney in 1996, titled *Perpetual Mirage*. This subject has a deep his-

tory, starting with the photographic albums of the Great Surveys of the American West sponsored by the US government between 1867 and 1879. Prompted by the annexation of Western lands, these surveys were, in ambition and government investment, equivalent to the space program. Photographers like William Henry Jackson and Timothy O'Sullivan hauled their equipment, chemicals, and dark-room boxes into the "Great American Wilderness," traveling alongside scientists, writers, and artists like Thomas Moran, to document a land their sponsors conceived as "a giant strongbox" of minerals and potential wealth to be opened. These photographers also documented extraordinary lands and future national parks that would become essential to American identity. The exhibition, including these early "proto photobooks," focused on generations of photographers whose photobooks shaped perceptions of the American West. Of course, most of the western locations that were photographed in the 19th century were not an unsettled "wilderness." Photographers documented encounters with indigenous structures and entire civilizations, especially in the Southwest. The visible presence of pre-European sites became the subject of another exhibition I curated for the AXA Gallery called *The New World's*

Continued on next page ...



Beatriz Milhazes, *Coisa Linda*. 2002. MoMA Library Council Each book contains more than thirty screen prints in forty colors and an original collage, within a hand-printed cover, all created by Milhazes in collaboration with the printer Jean-Paul Russell.

Old World. This exhibition featured photographs of surviving indigenous sites built and inhabited before and sometimes after European contact in Peru, the American Southwest, and Mesoamerica.

What is the seed that makes you say, "I want to make a book about this artist's work"?

For the projects at the Whitney and MoMA, I looked for artists with a strong sense of narrative and print-making. This could be an artist who is especially interested in working with cinematic sequences of images or the interplay of art and text. For me, each project, involving very different types of artists, meant going out on a limb with someone to explore the book as a sequential, storytelling, interactive medium.

Maybe half of the books I've worked on explore environmental themes. For example, during the pandemic, I worked with the artist and architect Tomás Saraceno, who focuses on spiders and their perceptual and environmental world. I also loved working on a 2010-12 collaboration between Oliver Sacks, Abelardo Morell, and Ted Muehling, centered on the geography, geology, and botany of a specific Pacific island.

Amazing, you are seeing history in place, whilst collecting these books for the Whitney. After the Whitney, where did you go?

I moved from the Whitney to MoMA in 2000. I had just had a baby and wanted to work fewer days, and MoMA made that possible. I was over the moon about the possibility of

working with international artists and the museum's emphasis on the book as an artistic medium. At MoMA, as at the Whitney, I worked with incredible colleagues and trustees who supported the publishing program and the museum's research collections.

What is involved in making an edition?

For MoMA's Library Council, I usually published a book every 18 months. The handmade process is slow, and even slower for international projects made in places like Brazil and India. It may take an artist six months to develop a plan; six months to engage just the right collaboration of designers, printers, binders and authors; and another half year or more to make collaborative production decisions. These books were usually published in editions of 150 to 200 copies. There's a natural limit to how many copies a human hand can sew or a delicate printing plate can reproduce. Handbinding takes the longest, but it gives the artist a number of choices that simply don't exist in standardized, commercial printing.

Is there a project you're most proud of? And what would your dream collaboration be?

They're all my babies, but perhaps the projects that left me with close, continuing friendships remain the most rewarding, as was the case with Celmins and the Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes. Milhazes' book, *Coisa Linda*, focused on the sights and sounds of Rio de Janeiro. One of MoMA's most successful projects was a sculptural book by Ólafur



Above: Sonia Gomez. *Um Poema Desenhado*. 2024. Below: Ólafur Eilíasson. *Your House*. MoMA Library Council. 2006. 454 handbound leaves (or 908 pages) digitally reproduce a series of vertical cross-sections of the house on a scale of 85:1.

Eilíasson titled *Your House*. This large, 800-page, laser-cut book presented a Piranesian "walk-through" of a house in Copenhagen.

About a dream collaboration for the future, I would love to work with the artist-designer Ted Muehling, the printer and designer Leslie Miller, and the bookbinder Mark Tomlinson. For now, I am focused on working in a studio and painting again, picking up new ideas as well as old threads.

You've also taught. What was your approach, and what advice would you offer a young artist?

I taught a history of photography course at the University of Hartford Art School. This covered the history of the photobook from close to the dawn of photography in the mid-19th century through the present day. I loved teaching how different processes, cultural contexts, and storytelling strategies shaped the history of the photobook, from mid-19th century botanical photographer Anna Atkins who created one of the very first phonebooks, through 20th century photographers (including Richard Avedon whose collaboration with James Baldwin, for example, is a gem), to a wide range of contemporary photographers, like Alec Soth, obsessed with the photobook as an artistic medium.

For advice to offer a young person, I have one thing to say to someone who'd like to work for an arts organization: try to start your career at a relatively open-minded, smaller institution that seems to be growing and open to new ideas. There, you may have an easier time finding your own

voice and unexpected opportunities than in more hierarchical institutions, where you might end up in a position close to where you started.

If you could beg, borrow, or steal a work from anywhere in the world, what would it be?

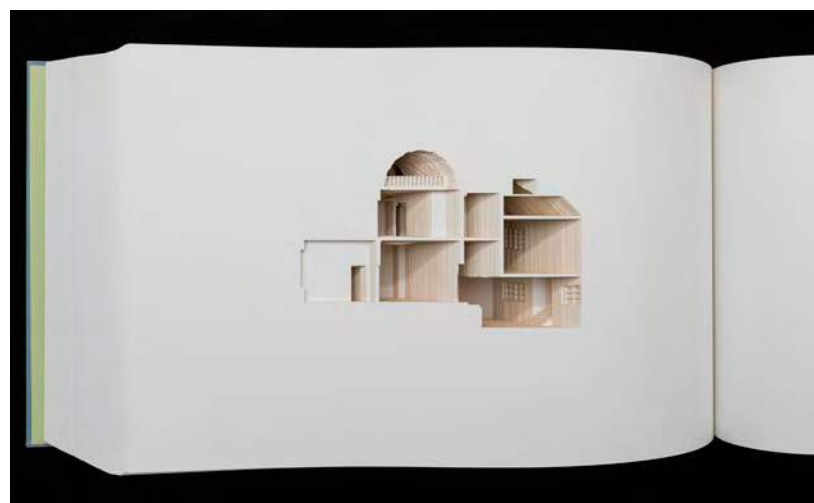
My first choice would be Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine*. But if that were unavailable in this delightful imaginary world, I'd happily take the Augsburg *Book of Miracles* from around 1550, an extremely rare volume filled with illuminated hand-painted comets and constellations. The contemporary publisher Taschen made a very good reproduction some years ago. But as long as we are stealing, I want the original manuscript.

Leafing through a book is a journey. The tactile touch of the page and the smell of the paper are just the beginning of a walk through which we can truly get lost. The sensorial experience of touch is something no screen can replicate. It brings the image and the word literally into our hands. •

To see more of Castleberry's projects online, look below to the MoMA Archives and Library link. The Whitney never documented the books it published online, but descriptions appear on dealer and library sites. You may also be able to see them in person, by appointment at MoMA, at the Whitney Museum, or in the collections of the Beinecke Library, Yale, the Spencer Collection, the New York Public Library, and the Clark Institute Library, Williamstown.

Archive of Castleberry's work: mom.org/research/library/library-council

You can email May Castleberry at maycastleberry@me.com or follow her on Instagram @maycastleberry.



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AUGUST MUSTS

to drink



Millbrook Winery. We recently ventured to Millbrook Winery on a Friday night and what an incredible experience it was. First off, it is absolutely gorgeous! When you enter the property, you literally drive through the heart of the vineyard, only to crest the hill and see the impressive buildings and setup at the top of the hill. And the view? Gorgeous. But the wine? Oh my goodness! It was a beautiful mid-summer evening when we were there and the crisp rosé that we had was quite literally one of the best glasses of rosé that I've ever had. Coupled with the band that was playing, munching on food from the food trucks that were there, it was the most amazing evening. I was truly impressed not just with the winery, but the fact that these delicious wines are created right here, in our backyards. It filled me with a sense of pride for a local business and our area. I became a huge fan at first sip and I cannot wait to go back for another fun-filled evening. And the wine? You better believe I'm working my way through all of their offerings! They're delicious.



GO WATCH

Voicemails For Isabelle. We have so much programming available to us these days that I'm always so pleasantly surprised when I fall head over heels for a movie or show. I had seen Netflix's teasers for *Voicemails For Isabelle* and immediately knew I had to watch it. I later learned this was a book adapted to film, but of course it was, all the best ones are. So it's no big surprise that this movie was incredible. It was truly refreshing, raw, honest, funny, and emotional. It literally made me feel so many things all at once, and it was just so real. Prepare yourselves though because you will be full-on ugly crying in the first 20 minutes of this film. Get the tissues out. I also have to make special mention of the acting in this film; Zoey Deutch (the lead) is truly phenomenal! Like... wow. The scene at the hospital, the scene where she kind of loses it on her boss – she should be nominated for an Oscar, IMHO, not that anyone asked. Do yourself a favor, click on over to Netflix and watch this one!



Netflix

TO READ

The "Kinda" Secret Pineapple Island Swingers' Resort by Jade Dollston. In honor of August being both National Romance Awareness Month and Read-a-Romance Month, of course our book recommendation had to be a romance book! But this is no ordinary romance book, this is rom-com that will literally have you peeing your pants from laughing while also swooning so hard, and then Jade Dollston will throw in a bit of frustration and you'll want to rage... just a little bit ... in the best possible way. For full disclosure, I'm a huge Jade Dollston fan. She is hilarious and so are her books, and at the same time they are witty, beyond entertaining, deep, emotional, and at times complex. This book is all of those things combined and is one of my favorite Jade Dollston books. As the title states, yup! She takes us to a swingers resort where there are some hilarious misunderstandings while a real connection unfolds right before our eyes and it's just everything. This book truly makes me so happy.

To do



Hike to Bash Bish Falls. For those who haven't been to Bash Bish Falls State Park, you really should get on that. The park is named after Bash Bish Falls, Massachusetts' highest single-drop waterfall, which lies within its borders. It's a quick quarter-mile or so walk from the New York State parking lot to the falls. The walk up gives you a great view of nature while the ascent is at a very manageable incline. About two-thirds towards the falls you'll cross the border into Massachusetts, where the falls are located. You can also park in the upper parking lot and walk down to the falls. Sadly you can no longer go down to the basin of the falls, or go into the water (like we often did when I was a kid growing up here), but the view from up above is still really impressive and peaceful. On our day there we struck up a conversation with the Park Rangers who were stationed there. They spoke to us about the park and its history, the many trails that are available for hiking, and even had some photos and maps to share. If you're not familiar with the falls or the park, give it a quick Google search and then head on over. But remember, whatever you haul in, you haul out.

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LOREN WHITELEY'S THE HAIR LOUNGE IN MILLERTON, NY



Loren Whiteley is the owner, operator and one of the hairdressers at The Hair Lounge in Millerton, NY. Depicted beside Loren, and on the following page, are some samples of her and her team's work. Pictures courtesy of The Hair Lounge.

By Thorunn Kristjansdottir
info@mainstreetmag.com

Feeling absolutely fabulous as a result of getting a fresh cut and dye and my eyebrows done just so, I was able to sit down with the very busy Loren Whiteley and talk about the ins and outs of running a hair salon. The Hair Lounge, which is located in Millerton, NY, is a full-service hair salon. Besides being the owner and daily operator of the salon, Loren is also one of its hairdressers, and she was able to shed some light on the day-to-day as well as the business in general.

What makes The Hair Lounge stand out from other hair salons?

Getting your hair and or eyebrows done is a very personal thing. It's one-on-one, so it boils down to the personal connection and service you have with your hair dresser. Each hair salon has its people, its characters, and so it's really about customers' preferences. Who do you want to work on your hair or eyebrows while you talk to them for an hour or more?

When did the Hair Lounge open?

After the tragic passing of Chad Malarchuck of Chad's Hair Studio in 2018, we were in shock. I had been

working there as one of his hairdressers for a few years, and Chad had become one of my best friends. It was a really stressful time between his passing, grieving the loss of my friend, finalizing the closing of his business, and then eventually everything that went into opening my new business.

It was basically out of necessity though that I decided to open The Hair Lounge. I was happy to continue Chad's legacy, and that was made easier because most of Chad's team and his mom came with me to The Hair Lounge, which I opened in September of 2018.

Have you always liked all things hair?

I have always loved hair. I remember French braiding all my friends' hair when I was around 10. I started working at a salon when I was 15. I remember because my mom had to drive me. I learned the ropes there, first as an assistant, then answering the phones and making appointments. It was a right of passage, and I learned every aspect of the hair business. When I was in 11th grade, I completed the BOCES hair program. After high school, I went to beauty school, where I got all my certifications. From there I got a job at Shine

Hair Salon in Lakeville, CT. When Shine closed I moved to Chad's along with Tara.

What does The Hair Lounge specialize in?

Well, obviously hair. [To which we both laughed.] Specifically, coloring, highlights, cutting, Brazilian blow-outs, and hair extensions. No perms though! We also do a lot of eyebrows, and soon we'll be offering lash lift and tinting.

We provide these services for men, women, and children of all ages.

How is the "hair" business?

It's fun and really rewarding when our customers leave feeling beautiful and good about themselves. But it can also be really stressful because we hear about everyone's best days as well as their worst days – hairdressers, therapists, and bartenders, we're the ones who hear it all.

There are never enough hours in the day. Between hair appointments, we're always busy making sure we're fully stocked with color and shampoos, cleaning and preparing for the next customer, as well as making sure

Continued on next page ...



we have available appointments and reminding customers about upcoming appointments. We feel so bad when we're booked and can't accommodate a customer, but the reality is that we then often end up staying late because we want to please our customers.

Have there been a lot of changes within the industry?

Oh definitely. When I first started we could only really take in-person classes and seminars, but now you can go online and on Instagram to learn just about anything. There's much more knowledge and many videos available for tips, tricks, and general (continued) learning.

Social media has also become a huge factor in the industry. It plays a major role in getting your name out there, both as a salon as well as a hairdresser to build your business and client list. Hailey, for example, has gotten so many new customers from them seeing her Instagram and TikTok posts of her doing hair.

But balancing all of these things is a lot: running the business and all that that entails, working as a hairdresser, creating content and doing social media, marketing, and being a mom and wife.

What makes this sector different from other types of businesses?

It's a very personal, one-on-one, type of business. And every appointment is different. No day is the same.

What's your favorite thing about the business?

I love my team; they are like a second family to me. Every day is different; nothing is repetitive. I love meeting new people and getting to know my customers on a personal level. I've made many great friends, including customers who've become friends outside of the salon. Those long-lasting and meaningful relationships mean a lot to me.

What are some of the challenges you face in the hair business?

COVID was huge. That really threw me for a loop. Between the increased prices of all of our materials and having to navigate that whole "keeping everyone six feet apart" thing – it was a lot. And we're obviously the type of business that's performed in close quarters, so it was just a really challenging time.

Post-COVID though, our challenges are mostly centered around continued price increases of the supplies we use and inflation.

What does a typical day look like?

Our first clients usually come in between 8:30 and 9am. From there, we run appointments every half hour until 5pm or later, often with no lunch breaks. The daily routine, besides doing hair, also includes answering the phones, taking appointments, handling walk-ins, sweeping, doing laundry, cleaning bowls and brushes, talking, talking, talking, and then talking some more.

Do you have a busy and or slow season?

We are hoppin' in the summer! May through December is our busy season. Everyone wants to get their hair done for prom, graduations, special occasions, and then obviously for the holidays. We rarely see holes in our schedule this time of year.

After Christmas it slows down a little bit. Some of our clients head south for the winter months. And most of our clients get their hair done ahead of the holidays and then hunker

down for the winter if they don't head out of town.

Who are your customers?

They're primarily from New York and Connecticut. Our clients are split pretty evenly between men and women. And we literally have clients that range from toddlers to seniors.

What's the latest hair trend?

I feel like there's no specific trend that really applies right now to our customers. Again, our clients are men and women ranging in age from toddler and up, and everyone's got their own style. We help them cultivate their personal style.

What's on the horizon for The Hair Lounge?

We're adding eyelash lift and tinting to our services very soon. We're pretty excited for this. We're always working to stay current with the latest industry hair trends and techniques.

What's a piece of advice you'd give to someone interested in entering into this profession?

As a hair dresser, you've got to be prepared to hustle and be willing to do the work, to take on any client that walks through the door. You're not just going to get a full book of customers handed to you overnight; you've got to work to create that. It takes a lot of commitment, hard work, dedication, and constant learning to be successful in this business. As a hair dresser, you're basically running your own mini business within another (larger) business.

As a business owner of a hair salon, you literally have to be prepared to do it all. You're responsible for keeping the lights on and running every facet of the business. It's a lot and it's not necessarily for everyone. And that's okay.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I love to golf. I also really love to be at the lake and on the boat with friends and my family. I also try to visit my family in Florida as often as I can. •

To learn more about The Hair Lounge, or to make an appointment, call (518) 592-1167, or find them on Instagram @hairloungebyloren.



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LEMON, BLUEBERRY, MINT

Slush

By Olivia Valentine with
Caroline Markonic
info@mainstreetmag.com

It was one of those very hot summer afternoons when I just couldn't cool off, and all I wanted was something cold and slushy. I wasn't in the mood to run to the store, so I started looking around the kitchen to see what I could make with what I already had.

I had fresh blueberries in the refrigerator, more mint than I know what to do with growing in the garden, and a bowl of lemons sitting on the counter. It seemed like a good place to start.

Then I dug through the pantry looking for something to add a little sweetness and creaminess. Thankfully, I found a can of coconut milk and some sweetened condensed milk.

I threw everything into the blender with a generous amount of ice, crossed my fingers, and hoped for the best. I also had some leftover whipped cream from another dessert I had made, so I decided to top the slush off and make it extra special!

A minute later, my partner and I each had a frosty glass in hand, and it turned out even better than I expected. It's sweet without cloying and tart from the fresh lemons. The mint gives it a fresh, summery flavor, and the blueberries give it the prettiest color. It's one of those recipes that came together completely by accident, but I

know I'll be making it again all summer long. If your garden is overflowing with mint like mine is, this is a great way to use some of it up. Just don't drink it too fast, or you'll be rewarded with instant brain freeze!

Ingredients

Zest of one lemon
Two lemons, juiced
⅓ cup sweetened condensed milk
½ cup fresh blueberries
⅓ cup coconut milk
2 cups ice
3-5 fresh mint leaves
Whipped cream

Place all ingredients in a blender and blend until thoroughly combined. It helps if your coconut milk is cold. Makes enough for two eight-ounce glasses. If the mixture is too thick, thin it with more coconut milk. Top with whipped cream.

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 @oliviavalentine.





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Real estate results: Six towns, six months

SALISBURY, CORNWALL, SHARON, KENT, CANAAN & NORTH CANAAN HOME SALES



Salisbury



Cornwall



Sharon

By Christine Bates
info@mainstreetmag.com

Right for all the wrong reasons – demand remains strong

At the beginning of 2026, *Main Street* asked area real estate writers, analysts, and agents what they were predicting for our area's residential real estate market this year. They were correct in foreseeing that the Northwest corner of Connecticut and New England would stabilize around historically high price points as compared to the national market, which was already seeing price corrections in many over-built regions.

But our pundits were wrong about the forces, including mortgage rates and inflation, driving the residential real estate market. Who knew in January that a war would be started with Iran and that inflation and mortgage rates would rise, not fall as predicted? Or that New York City would elect a Democratic Socialist Muslim as mayor? In January, fixed rate 30-year mortgages were around 6% and in early July around 6.4% with little hope anytime soon of the rate cut predicted in January. Consumer confidence as measured by the University of Michigan sank to an all-time low in May 2026 to 44.6% from 56.4% in January. At the same time, the stock market reached new highs.

Despite this economic and political turmoil, demand for full-time and weekend homes in the Northwest corner of Litchfield County has remained

strong with limited inventory. The prediction that pricing in the Northwest corner would become more rational was accurate, with homes closing within five percentage points of listing prices. The fundamentals of the Northwest corner remain ever more attractive with proximity to major metropolitan areas, year-round recreational and cultural opportunities, high quality of life, and lower property taxes compared to metro and suburban centers.

Salisbury perpetually in demand

With very low property taxes, excellent private and public schools, and quality housing stock, Salisbury remains the most sought-after town in the Northwest corner and the most active with 23 public sales in the first six months, not very different from last year.

The median price of a single-family home in the first six months of the year reached \$1.35 million, about the same as last year, but 80% above June 2024. Million-dollar homes drive the Salisbury market with the average home price of \$1,829,022 for the six months ending this June, substantially above the median price. Houses went under contract within 38 days of listing at 96.9% of asking. Only 26 homes were for sale at the end of June, compared to 33 last year. Don't expect a bargain in Salisbury.

The historic 1820 five-bedroom Georgian house at 299 Main Street (above, left) balances architectural heritage with a modern renovation and includes three antique barns on five acres in Lakeville. It sold in June above its listing price for \$3,410,000 after only 15 days on the market.

Only nine houses for sale in Cornwall

In three of the six Northwest towns, Cornwall, Kent, and Canaan/Falls Village, only one or two houses a month are sold – and sometimes none. This small sample distorts the calculated six-month median prices and historic six-month highs.

There may be many Cornwall hamlets, but at the end of June only six homes had been sold in the previous six months, and just nine homes were listed for sale in the entire town.

Like Salisbury, Cornwall's first half 2026 residential price level is over \$1,000,000, but houses are taking longer to sell, 44 days, than last June. June's median price of \$1,030,000 is 8% below June of 2024 and well below the six-month median record high for the town: \$1,235,000 reached in February 2025.

The sale of the renovated, ready-to-move-in farmhouse built in 1800 at 23 Johnson Road in Cornwall (above, middle) closed in early January for \$960,000 – just below the median

price for the first six months of the year. Bordered by protected State of Connecticut land, it was originally listed for \$1,185,000 in August 2025. The property included a 2,682-square-foot, three-bedroom, three-bath residence on 10.35 landscaped acres.

Sharon rising

Traditionally Sharon, Cornwall, and Salisbury competed as the most expensive place to buy a house in Northwest Litchfield County. Sharon's prices mid-year are tending up but still well below Salisbury and Cornwall. Although it took longer to sell a house in Sharon, an estimated 63 days, in the first half of the year, the six-month median price is well above the previous two years and approaching the record high of \$880,000 achieved in February 2024. Like its neighbors, Sharon appears balanced between buyers and sellers with 20 houses sold in the first half of 2026 and 22 houses for sale.

21 South Ellsworth (above, right) is a charming antique house built in 1784 with three bedrooms and two bathrooms nestled into the landscape in the historic Ellsworth district in southwestern Sharon. During COVID it sold quickly for \$875,000,

Continued on next page ...

over the listing price of \$795,000. This June it sold for \$1,050,000, over its listing price of \$975,000. Bidding wars for desirable properties continue.

Kent

Only seven single family houses sold in the first six months of the year in Kent (condos are not included), and 23 residential properties were listed for sale at the end of June, suggesting that buyers may have the advantage in Kent. The June 2026 median price of \$625,000 was below 2025 and the historic six-month high of \$880,000 but 20% above the \$522,250 level of June 2024.

132 South Kent Road (top image) has a primary bedroom on the first floor with a fireplace and three bedrooms upstairs. It sold for \$555,000 in April, well under the median price of \$625,000 in the first half of the year.

Canaan/Falls Village

Canaan/Falls Village, with a median price of \$470,000 in the first half of the year, was the only Northwest town whose median sale price in 2026 was lower than in 2025 or 2024. Like Cornwall, Canaan sells only about one single family home a month but currently has 10 homes for sale – all listed at or above the median price. This small and erratic volume of sales explains the historic six-month high of \$1,725,000, higher than any of the other towns, as only three houses were sold in six months between January and June of 2023.

A freight train rumbles by the conductor's house twice a day during the week at 62 Railroad Street in Falls Village (left image). The original structure was built in 1874 by the

Housatonic Railroad and doubled in size when first renovated in 2003. This 2,463-square-foot home on 0.23 acres with three bedrooms and two and a half baths underwent a total renovation after being purchased for \$78,000 in 2019. The sale closed in February at \$600,000 – above the Falls Village median price of \$470,000 for the first six months of the year.

North Canaan catching up

This working-class town is attracting buyer attention for its affordable values at all price points. Like Sharon, North Canaan's median price in the first half of the year was higher than in either 2025 or 2024. With a median price of \$345,000 in 2026, \$300,000 in 2025, and \$317,000 in 2024, North Canaan was the least expensive of the six towns in every year and is now approaching the historic high of \$385,000 set in the six months ending in April.

Looking over fields and surrounded by fruit trees, 16 Brown's Lane (right image) was built in 1986 on 0.91 acres just outside the hamlet of Canaan. This compact home was listed at \$325,000 and went to contract within five days at \$345,000, the median price for the first half of 2026 in North Canaan. With 1,252 square feet of living space, two bedrooms, and one bath, plus a two-car garage, it's an example of affordability that can be found in North Canaan.

The big picture

Historically the first six months of the year are the strongest for home sales with research indicating that April or May is the best time to sell a house. Our local housing market responds



slowly to change, so the second half of the year should be interesting.

The unexpected seems to now be a constant and the Northwest corner will continue to attract buyers seeking an attractive safe haven. The detailed chart prepared for *Main Street* summarizes real estate activity by town, but the big picture of the Connecticut Northwest corner illustrates the overall strength of our region's housing market in the first half of 2026. In general, median prices are higher, houses are selling at 96% of listing price or above, and inventory remains low. Overall the Northwest corner remains a seller's market because of continued high demand and low inventory. •

Note: Figures presented in this article are drawn consistently from InfoSparks and CT Smart MLS.
Compiled by Christine Bates, real estate advisor with William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty, Licensed in CT and NY. Opinions expressed are those of the author alone.

Top: Kent.
Above, left: Falls Village. Right: North Canaan.

SINGLE FAMILY HOMES REAL ESTATE SALES – FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 2026 IN SIX NORTHWEST CT TOWNS

	6/30/26	6/30/25	6/30/24	% change 1st half 2026-2024	Days on market 1st half 2026 & 2025	% list price	Houses sold 1st half 2026 & 2025	For sale June 2026 & 2025	Historic six month high
SALISBURY	\$1,350,000	\$1,395,000	\$750,000	+80%	38 - 46	96.9%	23 - 21	26 - 33	May 2025 – \$1,550,000
CORNWALL	\$1,030,000	\$762,500	\$1,120,000	-8%	44 - 27	96.0%	6 - 10	9 - 4	February 2025 – \$1,235,000
SHARON	\$835,000	\$685,000	\$710,000	+18%	63 - 51	99.3%	20 - 13	22 - 19	February 2024 – \$880,000
KENT	\$625,000	\$707,500	\$522,250	+20%	24 - 13	98.2%	7 - 10	23 - 18	August 2024 – \$955,000
CANAAN	\$470,000	\$840,000	\$545,000	-14%	39 - 53	94.6%	6 - 3	10 - 10	June 2023 – \$1,725,000
NORTH CANAAN	\$345,000	\$300,000	\$317,500	+9%	49 - 34	100%	11 - 11	9 - 12	April 2026 – \$385,000

* Six month results from Smart MLS Info Sparks



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GILDED MOON
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“DIRECTING ALWAYS ON MY RADAR,” says award-winner John Saunders

By Barbara Peduzzi
info@mainstreetmag.com

Watch a movie, television program, or stage show. The movements, emotions, expressions, emphasis – the whole feeling, look, and presentation of it involves many people, but when it’s added up, it all comes down to the director. He or she carries the weight of the show on their shoulders, from first deciding to take the project on through opening night.

John Saunders is a director. He is also the producing artistic director of The Mac-Haydn Theatre in Chatham, NY, having taken that role when Lynne Haydn passed away in 2018; co-founder Linda MacNish passed in 2002. We talked during his directing *The Secret Garden* for its fourth time on the professional musical summer theater stage; Saunders had played the leading role of Archibald Craven, and so has an intimate knowledge of the show.

Seeing him work through blocking a scene, a week before an audience of volunteers will see the dress rehearsal, shows how he has arrived at many highly praised and award-winning musicals at Mac-Haydn.

Behind the scenes

In traditional stagings, a small chorus, called the Dreamers, has little to do beyond occasionally illustrating parts of the young girl Mary Lennox’s past. Saunders makes them much more a part of the show, not only describing Mary’s past but also guiding her future, and her grieving uncle Archibald’s.



Director John Saunders outlines parts of the scene which he will block next, while Nina Lang, playing Martha, and Wild Handel, who will be Mary Lennox, make notes on what he will want them to do.

The scene flows from the Dreamers leading Mary to Colin’s bedroom to Lily as a Dreamer showing her the entrance to the secret garden. Saunders, on stage, instructs, “Turn,” demonstrating how he wants them to make the move. An actor asks, “Are you not gonna be right there?” and they all, including Saunders, laugh.

He rearranges movement, “So we have all this forward motion.” They run the bit the new way, and he throws both hands up for a double ‘air high five’ and proclaims, “Perfect!”

That set, he turns to the actors playing Archibald and Neville, asking, “You guys wanna walk this?” as they go into a powerful duet, and he motions to move them into their places throughout the scene.

This leads to, “Now, where are we? Oh – it’s another storm. Let’s rock and roll!” He walks backwards, pointing people to their spots, while explaining where a set piece will stand. With the piece in place, they do it again. He adjusts one person, turns another, and explains how Mary will weave her way through them to find the source of the crying she hears.

Choreographer Anthony Michael Velez steps in to stylize the Dreamers’ poses, “Be like robots, just from the waist up. That’s it.”

Saunders gathers everyone in a seating section, to read and sing through the scene. “Great! Questions, comments, concerns?”

He gives them all a note, “Lean into that accent. Don’t be scared of it, go for it.” To one actress, “Really nail that ‘C’ – Comin’ a terrible storm,” and to others, “Shoot your line this way,” “Mary don’t go too far upstage,” “Don’t get too close to him, give yourself somewhere to go,” and “Land here for your line”.

The Dreamers characters have all passed away, but he advises one, “You wanna be sick? Okay, you’re sick,” and to another, “You’re not sick yet,” as a part of the scene illustrates the cholera that took them.



Both director John Saunders and actor Logan Pavia, Dr. Neville Craven, are thoughtful as they watch other performers work through part of the scene Pavia is waiting to enter.

He turns to the musical director, “This is a little too slow for me. It needs to build a little more. Try it again, from the solos.” Listening again, he nods approval of the change.

Moving a dozen or so performers around a 12’ by 14’ stage is challenge enough. Then, there are set pieces. Without a curtain to cover scene changes on the in-the-round stage, and to keep the action flowing, these must be integrated into the blocking. This leads to arranging Colin’s bed being taken off stage while the Dreamers move to their next bit, “Mike, do you really need Will on the bed? I need to get you back quicker,” and the response, “Yeah, I do, to steer it.” Running the maneuver several times helps the timing.

During this, he reminds the others, “Gotta get this bed out of here. We’re all creeping in, creeping in. Leave yourself somewhere to go.”

Who is John Saunders?

Saunders started as an actor, playing Jigger in *Carousel* and the title role in the children’s theater show, *Rodney*,

the Reluctant Dragon in his first Mac-Haydn season. In his second year, he started directing those children’s shows, and a few years later *Sugar Babies* was his first main stage work.

He has staged an impressive number of shows at Mac-Haydn, as well as at Wagner College, Nantucket Theatre Workshop, and Seacoast Rep, while continuing to perform at Mac-Haydn, in national tours and regional theater.

In the past few years, he gained an enviable three ‘Berkies,’ the Berkshire Theatre Critics Association awards, for *Ragtime*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *The Fantasticks*.

We sat down with him between his finishing an afternoon of directing *The Secret Garden* and solving a situation with company housing.

We first knew you as an actor. What got you into directing?

Directing has always been on my radar. I always knew I wanted to do it. Talking to Lynne and Linda at my first audition, I said I eventually

Continued on next page ...

wanted to direct.

As artistic director/producer, you determine the shows for each season. When in that process do you decide what you will direct?

For me, it's always about the audience. Mac-Haydn is deeply rooted in classic musical theater, so I start with that to appeal to groups and subscribers. Next, something new every year, something they haven't seen yet. Then we choose the rest around shaping the company and the skill set needed. I think about the other directors' schedules and work my way in. I certainly don't want to do, for example, the first show because I'm working on getting the season open. I also like to give a new director the three-week rehearsal time to work in. If a show is especially difficult technically, it makes sense for me to do it because I've been working in the space so long.

Do you have a concept for each show and for what you want the finished product to be?

Every show has to have a director's concept, especially here, because you have to think about the nature of the space. I think about how the show makes me feel and try to pass that on. I hope the audience will feel that same thing when they see it.

How do you work towards making that happen? And does your plan change as you go through the process?

[With a smile] First and foremost I trust the creative team assembled to build the show. It's all about trusting the team to be really good, the ones who can add an ingredient to the cake. For example, I told scenic

designer Alivia Cross about wanting to have the tree bark made out of book pages. It was me throwing the idea and her putting pen to paper and coming up with how to do it. It's really not a solo sport at all, but rather a huge group effort. That team, that crew makes my weird little dreams come true.

The classics are usually full of standard things, but you find ideas that make the show your own, like in *Secret Garden* using the Dreamers more than they are usually featured.

The Dreamers are not just working for Mary, they're also working to pull Archie back to the garden, to find Mary a home, and also ultimately to get Archie to know Lily is always with him. Using them as the denizens of Paris, and seeing them as ghosts when usually he is there alone, leads to his hallucinating spiraling to "There she is!"

With the director's concept first and foremost, how much do all the other elements enter into how the look, feel, and presentation of the show ends up?

Oh, quite a lot, especially in terms of scenery and clothing. Scenic design is key here; Olivia Cross solved some of my problems. I go in with a question and "Poof!" there's an answer. It's so important to the process.

How do you help the cast give you the performance you want?

It's technically known as "side coaching." My idea as a director and actor is to export a little data for them. Don't tell them how to read a line, but give them something they haven't clocked yet, "Think about this, what if this is



"Cross here and come around to where you'll turn," director John Saunders shows leading players Logan Pavia as Dr. Neville Craven, and Kevin Egan, Archibald Craven in "*The Secret Garden*", the path they will take as their dialogue goes on.

going on?" I give a lot of visual stuff, like Nina Liang, playing the servant Martha, putting the night sky here, the storm here, through her number. Working in the round is nothing like performing in a proscenium theater. He explained to Logan Pavia, Dr. Neville Craven, about the British accent needed, "Speaking is the same as singing, find the cadence to it."

How is directing at Mac-Haydn, in the round, different from working on a proscenium stage?

Phew! The biggest difference is you have to move the picture more. I use the word "share" a lot. "Let's cross to two but share to four," or "face two, but then turn to four." Movement is important; it then makes stillness important. The picture has to change more than on proscenium. I think it's thrilling here, it's fun when the performers are singing right next to you.

How do you feel on opening night when you see the show as the audience does?

It's my favorite part of the entire process. I think it's why I love directing so much, I love the hand-off, to see the cast live in this thing they've built. I love the audience reaction.

Is there anything else you'd like people to know that hasn't been asked?

Honestly, I love my job, I really do love my work. I know how lucky I am to do it, I know how lucky I am to have inherited Mac-Haydn Theatre. I love my audiences. I love seeing the kids make it through the summer. They don't rehearse that much at all, and they put on these magnificent shows. We're firing so much at them, gotta let them have their process. It's a teaching moment, that all comes back to the mission. I've definitely realized over the years, trust the teams.

Saunders paused his answers to interject praise, "People don't see singing like this. It's insane. I'm blown away." He added, "*Newsies* is the largest cast we've ever had: 32 people. That includes 10 local kids, who are so good. They'll be working with the professionals." That runs through August 9, followed by *Beautiful, the Carol King Musical*, and then *Hairspray*, where you can see Saunders on stage as Edna Turnblad; he is also directing *Daddy Long Legs*.

His final comment: "We all want the performers to look their best." The applause, the people returning year after year to Mac-Haydn, and the awards attest to much of their best coming from his best. ●

To learn more about the Mac-Haydn Theatre, visit their website machaydntheatre.org.



Wild Handel as Mary Lennox, and Colin Czornobil as Colin Craven rehearse their first meeting in "*The Secret Garden*", as (from left) choreographer Anthony Michael Velez, director John Saunders and music director Connor Crotzer Scartascini observe; Saunders making sure the staging gives the audience the best view and sense of the moment.

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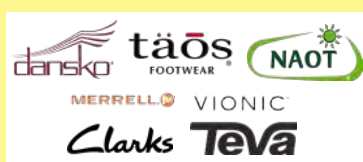
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SOUL CLASS

By Ian Strever
info@mainstreetmag.com

As of this writing, stock futures in the Far East are skittish. Nvidia, SpaceX, and eagerly-anticipated IPOs from Anthropic and Open AI have sparked a bull market like we haven't seen since the late 1990s, but suddenly, unexpectedly, last night, they stumbled. Although analysts are not warning of market vulnerabilities like we saw 30 years ago, "unnerving" is the word of the day on Wall Street.

On the heels of Artificial Intelligence-laden graduation speeches that audiences met with full-throated boos, this moment lends some financial gravitas to the emotional backlash against AI. In its purest version, the question is, "What should the future of work be?" While the 21st century represented a shift toward a knowledge economy and the diminishment (both in estimation and in proliferation) of the trades, thanks to large language models, the 22nd century may witness the end of many knowledge-based jobs and a return to site-based work that can only be performed by skillful human hands.

Hands-on at Housy

At Housatonic Valley Regional High School, preparation in those skills is expanding, thanks to the hiring of two new technical education teachers. Donald Crossman, formerly of The Gilbert School, and Luke Vermilyea, formerly of Griswold High School, will inherit the program from longtime woodshop teacher, Paul Padua, who, for an astounding forty-seven years, guided students from the basics of shop safety through self-designed woodworking projects.

Over the years, the school has had as many as three tech ed teachers who led courses in subjects including black and white photography, graphics production, and metals.

Crossman and Vermilyea will bring their experience in computer-aided design, additive (think 3D printing) and subtractive (think CNC tooling and plasma cutting) manufacturing, robotics, and other contemporary production processes to HVRHS this fall. While their classes for the coming year will consist of the existing woods, metals, and graphics curricula, they are beginning to retool for the future as the school undertakes a curriculum-writing process across the building. Their revised courses will complement the farm-to-table and ceramics classes in other departments, both of which have been immensely popular in their first few years of existence, largely due to their hands-on, product-based learning model. With fundraising help from local group, All Falls Village, the school is updating machinery that will provide students with training in fundamental shop practices as well as contemporary operations.

Career pathways

This shift aligns with a renewed push from state officials to promote school-to-career pathways. While HVRHS has always featured agriculture, food, and natural resource instruction through its agriscience program, Connecticut has identified eleven other "career clusters" that align with the state's industry and occupation forecasts. The tech ed program most closely aligns with the state's architecture and construction, manufacturing, and STEM priorities, all of which are further subdivided into "career pathways" such as "design/pre-construction" and "manufacturing production." These pathways involve advanced courses that are certified through the state's university system and credentials that can be earned



by students as industry-recognized certifications in areas like OSHA-10 or Autodesk (CAD software).

Although these efforts are intended to provide a pipeline from schools to workplaces, there is no shortage of arguments for the involvement of meaningful, hands-on learning in the education of all students.

Stochastic work

Matthew Crawford, author of *Shopcraft as Soulcraft*, left a position as the executive director of a science and public policy think tank to open a motorcycle repair shop, where he regularly found himself involved with more authentic problem solving than he did in some purely academic settings. Crawford and others describe this as stochastic work, involving nearly inevitable failures for which algorithms cannot account. There is no anticipating when a screw head will snap off in an old carburetor, and only a veteran woodworker will best know

New faculty members Luke Vermilyea (left) and Don Crossman (center) inherited the keys from Paul Padua (right) at the start of the summer.

Continued on next page ..

how to incorporate a leftover piece of chinkapin oak in an upcoming restoration project. Experienced hands will sense how much pressure is too much on a belt sander or what five Newton-meters feels like when tightening a hose clamp. And in the field, when tools and replacement parts may be limited, creative problem-solvers often improvise as well as Broadway actors to get a job done.

Nordic countries have recognized the value of stochastic work for over a century. The Swedish word, *slöjd*, which translates as “crafts,” “handicraft,” or “handiwork,” refers to a part of the school curriculum that is compulsory in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. So whether you are headed to university or a trade, everyone has an appreciation for both hand-making as a trade and as a way of thinking. A key proponent of the movement, Otto Salomon, put it best: “Slöyd, properly taught, will be found to supply an educational value not furnished by the subjects usually taught in schools, and in that sense, we regard its introduction as necessary.”

What learning ought to be

But what, exactly, is that educational value? In the poetic language of George Ricks’ 1892 preface to S. Barter’s *Woodwork: The English Sloyd*, “Manual training is a development of the manual and visual activities of the child, having for its purpose to quicken and develop the mental powers of observation, attention, and accuracy; to cultivate the moral faculties of order and neatness, perseverance, and self-reliance; to awaken and train the artistic faculties and direct the child’s instincts towards the beautiful and true; to satisfy and cultivate the child’s

instinct for activity and excite pleasure in the acquisition of skill; to provide opportunity for the development and practice of the inventive and constructive faculties; and to afford scope for the imagination.” I’d suggest rereading that passage if you have the time; I can’t imagine a more sublime depiction of what learning ought to be.

Flow state

While the reader might object to the use of a quotation from over 130 years ago in an article about contemporary education, this writer would suggest that: a) what goes around in education definitely comes around, and b) recent research and practice are not so divorced from Ricks’ lofty description. His words perfectly describe a “flow state” that is experienced by artists and athletes when they are fully engrossed in their passions.

Renowned Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihályi studied the phenomenon in the 1990s, and research into brain-based learning has linked it to the central role of emotions in intellectual activities. Csikszentmihályi’s seminal work, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, outlines the characteristics of flow state, which include “concentration on the task at hand,” “loss of self-consciousness,” “transformation of time,” and “immediate and unambiguous feedback.” This last trait is unique to stochastic activities in schools, where the materials themselves and their resulting products can provide a tangible assessment of a student’s success. If your birdhouse didn’t come out right, you were the cause of it, and you can probably trace it back to something you need to learn or practice.

“Work orientation”

Later on in his life, Csikszentmihályi connected flow to autotelic personalities, or people who perform acts for their own intrinsic value and, as a result, find happiness. He coined the term “work orientation” that is characterized by “achievement, endurance, cognitive structure, order, play, and



Padua explains the intricacies of the shop to Vermilyea and Crossman.

low impulsivity,” and some studies have shown that it is a better predictor of academic success than experience alone. In other words, a person’s ability to find meaning and immerse themselves in work is the key to both academic and personal fulfillment.

A few years ago, a gifted math student at Housatonic took her first shop class in grade 11 and discovered that she also had a talent for welding. The same traits that helped her to focus on advanced calculus problems served her well as she strived to lay down a perfect bead, and while she headed off to explore engineering as a vocation, she took with her a knowledge of the practical challenges that a welder would face on a daily basis. Should she end up designing engineering solutions that need to be executed by a welder, I can imagine her “talking the talk” with that tradesperson, and knowing just what the finished product should look like. More importantly, however, she will bring a level of mutual appreciation and respect to her work that will bridge the divisions that typically characterize relationships between blue-collar and white-collar workers. Shopcraft as soulcraft, indeed. •

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KAREN ALLEN ... BEAUTY AND BALANCE

By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

"After I saw *Lovesong* in Dublin, I ordered the script to read ... and I simply couldn't get over it." Karen Allen is reflecting on how the sensitive exploration of marriage that evolves across decades written by Abi Morgan made it to The Unicorn Theatre in Stockbridge, MA, with a run that has been extended to Saturday, August 29. "I sent the script to Kate (Maguire, CEO and artistic director of Berkshire Theatre Group) and told her I really wanted to do this play. Not as a director, but to act in it."

For her part, Kate Maguire could not have been more grateful for the suggestion. "Karen is such an extraordinary artist, and it is always a joy to welcome her back to Berkshire Theatre Group. There is something especially wonderful about seeing her return to the stage in a play as intimate and deeply human as *Lovesong*, and we are thrilled to have her with us."

Marion Ravenwood, meet Maggie

Karen Allen has had a high-profile career as both a film actress (start with the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* franchise, *Starman*, and *Year by the Sea* and go from there) and as a stage actor and director with glowing credits from Broadway to Shakespeare & Company to Williamstown Theater Festival to both acting and directing at Berkshire Theatre Group. "I hadn't acted here in a play since doing *Two for the Seesaw* in 1981, but I have directed and really feel at home with this company."

Her chosen role as Maggie in Morgan's play – a deeply personal, sensitive exploration of a poem by T. S. Eliot – offers Allen the opportunity to display her incredible ability to perform what she refers to as a balancing act. Acting for the stage, she points out, is an intense process that involves discovering the play, becoming the character, being engaged in an intense collaboration with the director and cast, and then allowing the audience to both clarify and elevate the perfor-

mance.

Film acting is quite different, requiring a set of skills that are, at best, episodic, and at worst elusive. "You've got one shot at the performance," Karen muses. "You may not really know the director or your fellow cast members. You may be far from home, pacing around a hotel room trying to memorize lines with no real sense of how the scene in front of you fits into the complete story. The script indicates the scene is in the kitchen. Next morning, you arrive on set to find out you're in the garden ... in the rain."

Allen's latest cinematic endeavor is *Other Mommy*, a horror film shot in Ireland, set to premier in the United States in early October. Certainly, quite a departure from *Lovesong*.

Control issues

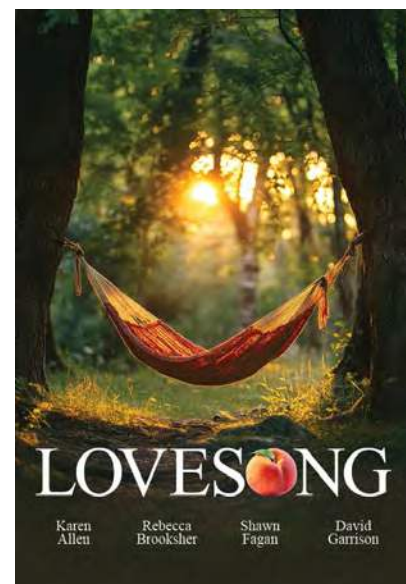
Looking back across a rich tapestry of film and stage roles, Allen savors the diversity and the inherent discipline in becoming the character described and required. The total control required to direct a major film and the enormous number of personnel involved – cast, crew, production team, post-production team, executive producers who bankroll the production, studio marketing staff that position and promote the film – end up creating countless opportunities for things to quickly spiral out of control.

Presenting live theater is quite different. From first reading through line rehearsals, through blocking and tentatively moving to preview performances before officially opening the play, is a tightly interwoven tapestry that requires transparency and trust. "Seasoned stage directors really don't feel in control. An ensemble cast relies heavily on each other and together move the idea of a play to being the event that organically comes together."

Born in Illinois, Allen's family moved often because of her father's job as an FBI agent. Coming to rest outside of Washington, DC, she graduated from a Maryland high school, then set off for New York to pursue art and fabric design at Fashion Institute of Technology. Her infatua-



Photos courtesy of Karen Allen and Berkshire Theatre Group.



tion with the complexity and beauty of fabric design would stay with her throughout her career and led her, in 2004, to open Karen Allen Fiber Arts on Railroad Street in Great Barrington, MA. A creative life on stage and in front of the camera coupled with creative expression manifested in elegantly woven scarves, shawls, throws, and sweaters created by Karen Allen and a very select group of fiber artists from around the world.

Allen credits her dedicated staff to keeping the boutique fresh and viable through economic ups and downs. Some of the staff have been in place for the 22 years the shop has been open, giving her the confidence to continue to engage in the peripatetic life of a widely recognized star. "I try to be available when needed, but learning to trust and delegate has been the key to making the store sustainable. I look for the same qualities in the team that I look for in a cast – wakefulness, attention, and presence."

This fall, Karen's latest feature film will be released, hard on the culmination of her current role in *Lovesong*. Although wildly different – both in genre and production – Karen's joyful attitude shines through. "It's hard to say 'no' when you find something interesting."

"Patterns on a screen ..."

Lovesong was written by Abi Morgan based, in part, by her response to

Eliot's landmark poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, which often finds its way into required reading in high school English. For some, memorizing passages from the epic was standard fare. For others, the occasional quoted phrase reminds us that, after all, we age and spend precious time looking back over the life we've lived. Should Karen Allen take time, during the extended run of *Lovesong* at The Unicorn Theatre, to look back over a very full, very nuanced career, perhaps the motivation of the play and the poem will evoke not regret, but a deep, beautiful smile and the commitment to look forward to the next "something interesting."

And would it have been worth it, after all,

*Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and
the sprinkled streets,*

*After the novels, after the teacups, after
the skirts that trail along the
floor—*

And this, and so much more?—

*It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves
in patterns on a screen:*

*Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a
shawl,*

*And turning toward the window, should
say:*

"That is not it at all,

That is not what I meant, at all."

(*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*
—T.S. Eliot) •

Songstress of Wassaic

Elizabeth Rose Forbes

If you don't already know the name Elizabeth Rose Forbes, consider this your official introduction. I suspect you'll be glad to have made her acquaintance – especially if you're a music lover who enjoys unearthing new artists in unexpected places.

Elizabeth, or “E,” as those who know her best call her, turns 18 this August. And while this blond-haired, green-eyed beauty might still be mistaken for a tween, her songwriting skills, soulful voice, and passion for the arts tell of someone who's mature well beyond her years.

*By Whitney Joseph Shavelson
info@mainstreetmag.com*

Close connection

Full disclosure: I've known E ever since her little lungs belted out their first howl oh-so many summers ago. I was also present for her older brother Jack's birth 21 years back.

You see, the Forbes family and I lived next door to each other for 20 years before I moved out of New York. During that time, we became like family.

E's mom, Amanda (Amy, to me) is among my best friends; her dad, John, I likewise love dearly; her grandfather, Dick Sobielo, is like a second father to me; and her brother, Jack, well, I've watched him grow into a kind, intelligent, and compassionate young man with the same pride I imagine I'd feel for my own child.

Amy's brother, Mike, and John's side of the family are also absolutely wonderful, but as I must get on with E's profile, I shan't name them all individually. Suffice it to say, Elizabeth Forbes and her family are among my very favorite people on Earth.

E's been fortunate to have parents who provided balance, affording her the structure and support needed to learn and grow along with the freedom to develop a sense of confidence and curiosity. Their guidance and love nurtured an independent streak in E that allowed her creative side to flourish.

Dancing to the beat

Elizabeth first dipped her toe into the arts – quite literally – by donning a pair of tap shoes and heading to dance class before entering elementary school.

“I have danced since I was four, I think, and I've done pretty much everything you can think of dance-wise,” she said, adding she's studied music since that early age as well. “I love to tap the most; that's my thing. I'm just a little tapper. I love the movements. I've also done lyrical and contemporary. Music is also very emotional, but there's a lot of emotion attached to dancing, not just for me but for any dancer.”

E explained she has “the same head space” dancing as when singing.

“I love dancing; it's another outlet that makes me feel good,” she said. “It conveys my emotions. Dance is just as valuable as music; it gets me moving. Physical activity is great. Some people, like my brother and dad, play soccer; others, like my mom, like to run. Dance is a way to get my mind out of my body and just move. It kind of feels the same to me – when I'm dancing or playing the guitar or writing – I'm out of my body and going.”

Shaping a sense of self, early on

Personally, it's been amazing to wit-

ness this spunky little creature explore always, anything, and everything: flitting around while investigating her mom's bountiful vegetable garden, prancing through wooded trails picking dandelions en route to the river's edge, or organizing dances at her family's annual Christmas Day dinner, to which I was always invited to.

Quirky and soulful, E's artistic streak has always been balanced by the things that count: a stable family, a strong moral code, and a solid work ethic.

She graduated from Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village, CT, on June 19, her sense of self intact and her curiosity about the world burgeoning.

“I'm a bit sad,” she acknowledged. “I really liked high school. I enjoyed meeting so many different people there. There were people from six different towns in Connecticut, plus some kids from New York, like me, and there were so many different opportunities to get involved with.”

And get involved she did. Along with her core classes, Elizabeth participated in HVRHS's night choir and band, performed in its annual Battle of the Bands and spring musical (with the exception of her junior year's production), and, although she wasn't a member of the FFA, took several agriculture classes and attended many ag events.

“I really enjoyed them and spent a lot of time in the ag department,” she said. “I loved the animals. My very favorite time of year was always when they had a lot of baby goats and lambs.”

Her favorite subject? French! Elizabeth just obtained her Seal of Biliteracy.



eracy. E particularly relished traveling with her school's international travel club to France, England, and Iceland.

Traveling adds to the creative well

"I take inspiration from everything," explained E. "France and Iceland were very cool experiences culturally, and I brought those experiences back. All my writing comes from emotions. We went to Normandy, France, and it was very sad. We went to really beautiful cathedrals and castles, too, which were very hopeful and uplifting.

"In Iceland, we went to a crater that was very, very cool; that was awesome," described E. "We got beautiful weather; it was very unusual, sunny and mid-50s. It felt warm for Iceland, and we hiked up the crater and inside it. We went to glaciers, of course, and waterfalls, a couple of cute little towns that were each unique; the architecture was all very different. We saw a lot of farms, and much of the land isn't civilized. We saw horses that were just roaming, which was beautiful. Even in the US, I try to find beauty in things around me, but it's easier to do that when you're traveling. There's so much beauty around you."

Inquisitiveness leads to inspiration, support leads to success

This quietly ambitious superstar-in-the-making recognizes her family's role in allowing her to freely and honestly pursue her art. If not for her parents fostering her own self-expression, E said it's likely she'd have been more self-conscious or had a greater fear of failure when starting out.

"My household is very supportive of me and my music," she said. "My family and friends give me the confi-

dence to go out there and perform.

"I'm sure you remember when I would perform standing on my parents' balcony and have you sit below; I was six years old and sang short, little tunes," she recalled. "I got inspiration from my mother, who has a beautiful voice, and I would make up little tunes. My father, too, would love it when I'd do that. He'd be like, 'add a bridge and you have a full song, sweetheart.' Then I'd write a full song, and a mix of parents and other adults in my life would say, 'Go and play guitar.' My father likes country music and encouraged me to take guitar classes."

Elizabeth's mom teaches at Kent Center School and previously taught at Dutchess Day School. About six years ago, she enrolled E in private guitar lessons with former colleague Eric Marshall.

"[Eric] taught me everything I know on guitar," said E. "I'm not taking lessons with him anymore, but I did for four years, from seventh grade to sophomore year, and he was just great, incredible. He taught me so much, really everything I could possibly need to write music and more. He taught me so many cool things about music, and he was an open ear for my songs. I'd show him all the songs, and he'd help me with different chord progressions. He'd give me feedback. If I had writer's block, he'd help. I'm very grateful I studied with him."

Striking the right chord

These days, Elizabeth has taken the musical note and run with it. She continues to write her own songs in addition to recording and performing them.

And while acknowledging that her first Battle of the Bands was intimidating as a freshman, she's since fallen in love with performing her music on stage.

"This year for Battle of the Bands I went out and had fun with my friends. I saw it differently; I've gotten into a mindset that performing there is no different from singing at home – just in different location," she said philosophically. "I enjoy it just as much. It's a very different feeling from writing. It's different on stage, I'm locked into the emotions, but it's a different flow. Performing or playing, I'm just having fun. It's like I'm floating."

These days, Elizabeth glides through pretty much the entire musical process herself – from composing the melody and lyrics, which typically happens in a single stream-of-thought session, to plucking the strings of her acoustic guitar (though she occasionally plays electric), to bringing her own lyrics to life.

"If I don't get a song out on the page, poof, it's gone," she said. "I figure it out, start playing the chord progression, and start writing while I'm sing-songing it, talking it, and writing it down on the page. I'll play a verse to make sure it sounds right. That lasts maybe 20 minutes, and then I've got it down. I find I don't come back to my songs often to change them once I'm done. I don't know if that's a good habit, necessarily. Once I put the guitar down, after those 20 minutes

Elizabeth Forbes performing at various events. Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Forbes.

Continued on next page ...

my brain says, 'that's the song.'"

Elizabeth has amassed a collection of hundreds upon hundreds of songs since starting her songbook at the tender age of six. Her four-song EP, *Dear Leo*, is "a combination of songs from throughout high school that I recorded last year."

Many of those songs have been bounced around among her musically minded friends, including film and photography student Simon Markow. "I have a lot of very talented friends and he's at the top of the list," said E. Simon took photos and shot a music video for *Dear Leo*. It was "so much fun as a teenager, making a music video. I'm so lucky to have that experience."

Such know-how proved invaluable when Elizabeth recorded her EP at Stone Studio in Austerlitz, NY, during two seven-hour days with producer, recording engineer, mixer, and multi-instrumentalist Graham Stone.

Stone has worked with major-label artists as well as acclaimed independent musicians, making the experience an invaluable learning opportunity for the young songwriter.

"He was great," she said. "That was a very unique, new experience in its own right. I went to him with my guitar and my songbook, and he was like, 'Let's do it.' I played my songs and one by one, we went through them." Rather than tweaking, Stone merely added to E's compositions.

"He offered, 'Let me help you get what you want from this.' I went in as a 16-year-old girl who was scared. He played a couple of instruments and did some mixing, and he was really great at it," she said. "He made all my songs come to life. The only thing I could execute was guitar and voice, but he added drums, bass, and occasionally a second guitar. It was awesome."

Working with a professional engineer was eye-opening. On one song, she translated her knowledge of percussion instruments including the xylophone and marimba into learning more about the piano.

"The keys look exactly the same; I just hit the piano with a stick instead of my fingers," she said. "So, I got a keyboard and taught myself how to play during band; I've come a very long way on that. Now I'm determined to do this. I know how the chords work, I know the theory, and I've taught myself how to play piano."

While recording, Stone asked E if she'd ever played bass before. She hadn't, but he posed, "You play the guitar, so why don't you try?" She wound up playing bass on the same song on which she "hit" the piano keys, entitled "Why Don't You Care?"

"I learned so much – not just about recording but also about layering," said Elizabeth. "And now that the EP is out and people are able to hear it, it's so cool. I also didn't know how to upload my songs, so doing that whole process was unique, and I'm so grateful I was able to do it."

Opportunity knocks

More opportunities have landed in Elizabeth's lap since recording *Dear Leo*, though let's be honest: she's earned every prospect that's come her way.

On Saturday, June 20, Elizabeth was the opening act for the inaugural Cornwall Music Bowl, held on the grounds of the Cornwall Market at the junction of routes 4 and 7 in Cornwall, CT. The outdoor music venue was dreamed up by Spotify Head of Music Booking Chris Sampson. Elizabeth was tapped to perform after she brought down the house at HVRHS's Battle of the Bands on May 22. Sampson was among the judges.

"He said he really enjoyed 'Your Toy,' one of my songs, and invited me to play next to the Cornwall Market in a small amphitheater [he created]," said E excitedly. "I opened, and then *Kate from Baltimore* played, and then *Wavy McGrady* from Hartford, CT, performed. That was a great experience; all of us were there having fun."

Upwards of 100 people relaxed on the lawn, enjoying the free concert on the hill. Elizabeth said there are hopes for six more concerts this summer (for details, visit cornwallct.org/event/cornwall-music-bowl-cornwall-market).



Elizabeth Forbes performing at various events. Pictured above, left are Elizabeth with her mother and Whitney. Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Forbes.

"Chris set it up and put it together. It looked great. It was cool to go, play for the community, and just jam. It was super exciting," said E. "I was on Cloud 9 listening to the other bands. I got over my nerves and was just full of joy, playing guitar for people."

Next up for Elizabeth is Springfield College in Massachusetts, where she'll study athletic training and hopefully take a dance class or two, maybe even join the a cappella club. She also intends to keep writing, playing, and performing music.

"I have no doubt opportunities will come to me and I will take them, it's just part of my life," she said. "I'm sure I will continue playing. I'm just not sure where."

For now, those interested in hearing Elizabeth's songs may do so by searching for Elizabeth Rose "anywhere you listen to music," including Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube.

And to those contemplating picking up an instrument or testing their own vocal cords, E offers her wholehearted encouragement:

"It's fulfilling. Whether you're musical or not you can always find a song," she said. "When I first picked up a guitar, I wasn't very good at playing it, and I'm still not a professional, by any

means, but I've come a long way.

"It's rewarding, and being able to write songs that other people enjoy is a gift. It's mind-boggling. I love to hear that other people enjoy my music, but I also love that I enjoy it," said a humble yet earnest Elizabeth.

"Everybody gets a very different experience out of it. People connect to lyrics in different ways. They connect their experiences to songs, and they connect emotions to songs – everybody does. I do. The best thing about it is that it's so rewarding personally. To be able to feel the way I do when I play and when I write ... I feel happy every time."

A momentary pause made me wonder if the call had dropped.

"And you were there from the beginning," she said with feeling.

"I was," I responded, my emotions matching hers.

And I'll keep tuning in, I thought, because I know whatever Elizabeth pursues, she'll do so with purpose – her words, her music, her role in life – guaranteed to resonate with anyone who takes the time to listen. ●

Heat got you beat?

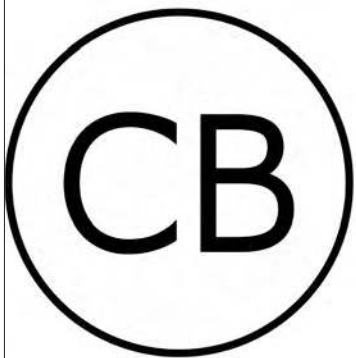
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A new chapter in a storied space:

SAY HELLO TO KIKI'S CONVENIENCE AND DINER IN ELIZAVILLE, NY



By Abby Audenino
info@mainstreetmag.com

Sarah Khoshaba never meant to become a restaurateur. She had been working in the music industry, and when the pandemic hit in 2020, the venue that she was managing quickly shuttered its doors. She very suddenly found herself with too much free time.

Sarah, who had always loved cooking, quickly turned to making soup. What started as something to keep her busy during lockdown, turned into a real, thriving business. Dubbed the “Soup Queen,” Sarah began selling soup through Instagram, then through pop-ups at bars and coffee shops around Brooklyn, before progressing to open her own brick-and-mortar deli – Gunther’s, named for one of her dogs – on Seneca Avenue in Queens.

“I guess you could say I accidentally found my dream career,” she mused. “Looking back, it’s funny how one unexpected detour completely changed my life. It eventually led me here – to Elizaville, NY, – and now I’m lucky enough to be writing the next chapter with Kiki’s.”

The right time

Sarah has always loved venturing upstate with her dogs. For years, they would spend weekends hiking, exploring towns, and enjoying being outside away from the hustle and bustle. “I felt like I had one foot out the door of New York City, but my close friends and family kept me rooted there,” she says. “My mom lives about an hour outside the city in New Jersey, and my sister is still in Brooklyn, so it wasn’t an easy decision. But the Hudson Valley always felt like home every time I visited.”

Eventually, the opportunity to bring Kiki’s to Elizaville was the push that Sarah needed to finally make the move, and she hasn’t looked back. She initially came across the listing for the former Elizaville Diner a few years ago, right after the longtime owners put the space on the market. And while Sarah completely fell in love with it, she wasn’t in the position to take on a project of that caliber. A few short years later, though, the space found its way back into her life.

“This time, the timing was right. I couldn’t stop thinking about what the building had been to the community and what it could be again,” she says.

Why Kiki’s, you ask? Sarah named her first shop after her dog Gunther, so it only felt fair that her pup Kiki now got her chance to shine, too. “They’re both such a huge part of my life, and I wanted the names to feel personal,” she says. “Kiki’s isn’t just a business name. It feels like home, and I hope that’s exactly how people feel when they walk through the door.”

Kiki’s Convenience, the adjoining deli and store space, opened in the beginning of May and stocks all the goodies you might need. On the shelves, you can find snacks, drinks, local treats, everyday essentials, and grab-and-go meals. Sarah notes, “if you came in for one thing, there’s a pretty good chance you’ll leave with five. I don’t make the rules.”

Now, all of Sarah’s focus is on reviving the diner. As of the writing of this article, the grand opening of Kiki’s Elizaville Diner is set for Sunday, July 26 – which holds dual meaning as it is also Kiki’s birthday!

Continued on next page ...



All images courtesy of Sarah Khoshaba

Bringing the diner back to life

The former Elizaville Diner has had a bit of a complicated history. It opened in 2006, after its then owners traveled to Pennsylvania to rescue the Kullman Dutchess prefabricated car from its scheduled demolition. They owned and operated it for many years, but it was taken over by new owners in 2023 and abruptly closed in 2024.

Sarah recognizes the special connection many locals have to the diner, noting, “I don’t think you replace history, you build on it. My goal isn’t to erase what people loved about this place. It’s to bring that feeling back while adding new reasons to fall in love with it all over again. Hopefully, old memories and new memories can sit at the same table.”

If the menu at Kiki’s Convenience is enough to go by, guests can expect to see all of the classics on the diner menu, too. All with a little flair, of course. “I ask myself one question: ‘Would I order this?’ If the answer is no, it doesn’t make the menu,” Sarah says. “I love comfort food with a little personality. Familiar enough to make you nostalgic, but interesting enough that you can’t stop thinking about it.”

On the deli menu currently, you can find classics from breakfast sandwiches and burritos to an array of cold and hot sandwiches and burgers for lunch. On Thursdays through Sundays, Kiki’s has pizza classics, as well as fun orders like Kiki’s Special, a vodka, mozzarella, and sweet sausage pizza; the Rippin’ Roe Jan; or the Forager’s Friend, topped with the chef’s choice of mushrooms. There’s always the option to build your own sandwich or pizza, and of course, you can find a rotating selection of soup on the menu and in the grab-and-go case at all times.

Sarah notes that, “Great food starts with great ingredients, and it’s even better when your neighbors make

them!” With an array of farms, bakeries, and producers nearby, it makes it easy to source locally. Currently, Kiki’s sources its bread from Filli’s Bakery over in Claverack, eggs from Speckle Ridge Farm in Germantown, dairy from Ronnybrook in Pine Plains, and ice cream from Del’s Dairy Farm in Red Hook.

A community mainstay

For Sarah, recognizing familiar faces, learning everyone’s go-to order, and watching Kiki’s become part of people’s daily routine has been the most rewarding part of running the business. “It’s also been really rewarding finding new ways to be involved in the community, whether that’s supporting local events, partnering with other small businesses, or just being a place where neighbors stop to catch up,” she says. “My goal has always been for Kiki’s to feel like more than just a convenience store or diner. I want it to be a place that people feel proud to have in their town.”

Next on the to-do list is getting the diner doors open to the community, and beyond that, Sarah hopes that Kiki’s will become a place that is woven into everyday life. Whether it’s morning coffee, lunch with friends, dinner after a soccer game, or stopping in to grab a gallon of milk, she wants Kiki’s to be a part of all of it.

“Opening a business is exciting, terrifying, exhausting, and rewarding all at once,” she shares. “Every person who’s stopped in, left a review, offered encouragement, or even just said, ‘welcome to town,’ has helped make Kiki’s what it is. We’re still growing, we’re still learning, and we’re having a lot of fun. I hope everyone feels like Kiki’s is their place, whether you’re here every day or it’s your first visit.” ●

Kiki’s Convenience and Kiki’s Elizaville Diner is located at 573 E Kerley Corners Road, Elizaville, NY. Kiki’s is open from 6am-8pm on Mondays through Fridays, and 8am-8pm on Saturdays and Sundays. For more information, visit kikisconvenience.com and keep up with them on Instagram at [@kikisconvenience](https://www.instagram.com/kikisconvenience) and [@kikelizaville-diner](https://www.instagram.com/kikelizaville-diner).

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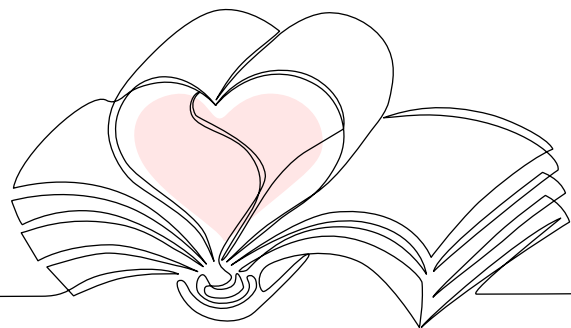
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Not your average romance

ROMANCE AUTHORS, AND FRIENDS,
CAROLINA JAX AND RYAN MARIE
REYNOLDS SHINE A SPOTLIGHT
ON THE ROMANCE BOOK WORLD



For the past few years, in honor of August being not only National Romance Awareness Month but also Read a Romance Month, we have interviewed quite a few romance authors as well as influencers and others within the romance book industry. This year I was able to get together with two incredibly talented authors who also happen to be dear friends (yes, for the sake of full disclosure, we're friends in real life). They are Carolina Jax and Ryan Marie Reynolds, and during our sit-down we were able to dive into their author journeys. They have (independently) published over a dozen books, are great humans who are kind and passionate, have worked on some very exciting collaborations, and are huge football fans.

By Thorunn Kristjansdottir
info@mainstreetmag.com

Carolina Jax

How did you get into writing, specifically the romance genre?

I am an avid reader and I would feel a certain way about the characters I read. I could see them doing different things or acting a certain way. So I started writing my own short stories, which eventually turned into full-length novels. I love to create a world and build characters into it.

What's something personal?

I've been married for over 20 years to my military husband, and we have two boys together.

Tell us about your first book.

The Biggest Win is about a small-town football hero. Football is my favorite story to read so creating the world came naturally. I had no process besides writing when the inspiration hit. Because of that, I held onto it for almost two years before finally deciding to hit publish.

What does it mean to you to be an indie romance author?

For me, it's doing what I want, on my own time. It's choosing the covers and working closely with an editor to put out the best story I can. It also means doing every single bit from the writing to the marketing to publishing, all of which can be very time consuming. Challenges for me are that I have multiple stories running in my mind, at the same time and I want to do them all right now! It can be hard to balance time and ideas, so I've learned to take notes and come back to things when the mood strikes again.

Despite the romance genre being the largest selling genre in the book world – by far – there is still a stigma when it comes to romance books. What are your thoughts on this?

I believe writing romance is very hard because you have to tap into the emotional aspects of every action for every character. The world likes quick fixes and often associates emotion and feelings with a negative connotation. I believe readers use romance as an escape from the everyday chores of life. Personally, I don't look to it for

a replacement of my real life, and I think those who don't understand that want to put a negative spin on it.

As an indie author, you have to be a bit of everything: writer, editor, marketer, social media expert, PR person, artist, and illustrator. How do you manage all of it? Did you know all of this when you started?

I did not know all of this when I started! I wanted to write a story, and that's what I did. But then finding out how much more is involved in the process really made it more challenging to know which way to go. I have a great circle of author friends who constantly share tips and give references for cover artists, etc. I think now I'm a bit more streamlined. I know what I need and who can deliver my vision.

How has the industry changed since you've been an indie author?

I'm coming up on celebrating four years as a published author, but even in that small time I've seen a change mainly as it pertains to the marketing and promotional aspect of the business. The world is always changing how it delivers information and how it wants to sell you something, so you have to be able to adapt and move with it. It's good because it never lets you get stale. There is always a new thought or idea; however because the marketing landscape is always changing, you never know what's going to stick. What worked today may not tomorrow and that can be frustrating when you're trying to figure it all out.

What's the most important lesson you've learned since publishing your first book? What do you wish you knew then that you know now?

It's more than just writing words. You need to deliver a feeling behind each character, each story, and each event, and it can be difficult to bring that feeling across correctly. You need a tight circle, a few people you can rely on and trust, to work the process through with you. For me, that is my circle of author friends as well as my beta team. My beta team is a group of readers-turned-friends who read my books after I finish them but before they go to my editor. Their reactions and feedback give me the opportunity to make adjustments or changes before the book goes to my editor.

How do you come up with your stories?

Sometimes a lyric from a song or a scene from a movie will get me thinking of how two characters could meet, how they might fall in love – or not fall in love – and then it grows from there.

Tropes are a big thing within the romance book genre. What are your thoughts on them?

I seem to stick with the basic tropes: second-chance romance and best friend's brother are two favorites of mine. They are classic, and there are many ways to spin the story differently, yet still stick with those same tropes.

Tell us about your biggest wins and your biggest challenges.

My biggest wins have been steady growth since I started. I knew starting out that this journey was not going to be quick and easy or an overnight success, but I'm happy with the way I've

grown my readership and continue to put out stories that I love. A challenge is trying to stay fresh and marketable within a changing world.

Tell us about some of your collaborations.

Yes! I've joined a few collaborations since I began publishing. They are a great way to test different storylines, different tropes, and characters, depending on what the collaboration entails. I have found my favorites, though. *The Man of the Month* series has been my absolute favorite. I was invited to write with them a few months after my debut, and I was so excited to be part of the team. The team consists of an amazing group of authors, and we always have a great time.

I've also done mini collaborations with a few of my author besties, and those have been the highlight of all of my writing. *The Boyfriend Builder Series* was a lot of fun. I collaborated with three close author friends, and we created everything from character names and storylines up to covers. That series has been picked up by Tan-tor with audio editions of the books releasing at the end of this year.

My other favorite collaboration was a football series, *In the Nick of Time*, with Ryan Marie and Moxie Reins. We had the best time creating this series, laughing and writing together while creating a whole world. This series is about three best friends, their names all a derivation of "Nick," who grew up playing football together. The three-part book series starts on Draft Night, when all three are drafted, but then their carefully laid plans go bust. Each book has its own storyline, but they overlap, and books one and two's endings don't get revealed until my book, book three.



Carolina Jax (left) and Ryan Marie (right) have published over a dozen romance books, participated in a number of collaborations, and are also good friends in real life.

How do you feel about technology, including AI, as it relates to the romance book world?

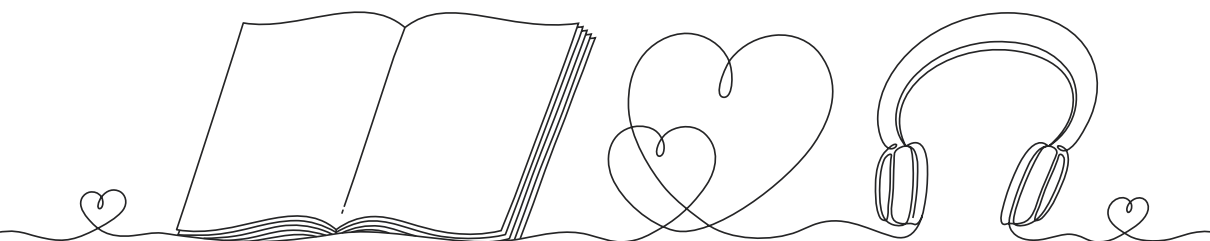
Unfortunately AI is here to stay. I think anyone using it to write their books is taking the easy way out and cheating readers and themselves. Writing is hard. It should be a personal challenge to put out the best story that you can.

How do advance reader copy readers, reviews, and social media play a factor in the books' success?

ARC readers are important because they're that front line right before release day. Their reviews and social media posts are important because they can attract new readers and drive the book into hands it may not have otherwise come across.

My street team is also super important to the success of my book. Some of my street team members are also my ARC readers. This team will specifically read and review my books, and then they create social media content about the book that they post to their own social media accounts. Obviously, the more organic social media posts, the more your book has a chance to be seen, so I'd say the readers and your teams are very instrumental to a book's success.

Continued on next page ...





Above: Carolina usually publishes her books with a couple of different cover options that include a model or models and discrete. Here you can see samples of that.

Right: Carolina and Ryan participated in a collaboration with their friend Moxie Reins in 2025. Pictured here are the illustrated covers that Ryan Marie created for the series.

What have you found to be most helpful to you as an author and book promoter?

Most helpful to me is having someone I can depend on. My PA, Mindy, is amazing. She keeps me organized, is always ready with a post to push to my street team, and is my number one cheerleader. She's always the first to get each new book, and I really rely on her to guide me through the story.

Who have been some of your biggest inspirations along the way?

I have a close circle of author friends who are huge inspirations. The time they dedicate to every aspect, from writing to choosing the title, graphics, and release dates, is really exciting to watch happen from beginning to end. I love getting their text messages with pictures of the typed words "The End." I am grateful for their encouragement and sometimes kick in the a\$\$ to keep me on track.

How do your covers and accompanying graphics contribute to reader engagement, readership, and sales?

Covers are personal to everyone. Some may like couples, discretion, cartoons, or a mix. I always offer a couple and a discrete version to give the reader options.

Some authors will send out PR book boxes or prizes. Do you find such promotions helpful?

I've done PR boxes for two different books. I had a great time choosing

the items and designing the stickers, bookmarks, and all the other goodies that went in the box alongside the book. I love to find one or two scenes from the book that may not exactly stick out, but once you accompany an item with some form of depiction or representation of that scene, it makes the reader fall in love with the story all the more because you're triggering a memory of the book. I don't know if the book boxes necessarily increase sales, but I love to send my devoted readers a special package.

If you had any advice for an aspiring author, what would it be?

Just write the story you love. It's easy to fall into the trap of following what's trending or what everyone else is doing, but I've found when I just sit and write what I love, every word flows.

To learn more about Carolina Jax and her books you can find her on Instagram @carolinajax_author, you can also find her on TikTok at Spicysportsandsmalltowns. Or if you're one Facebook, so is she: facebook.com/carolinajaxauthor. To browse her website, visit carolinajaxromance.com.

Ryan Marie

How did you get into writing romance?

In high school I developed a love of reading like I had never had before. I soaked up everything from classics like *The Grapes of Wrath*, to mythology, and even snuck in a Harlequin book or two. That love of reading turned into a passion for journalism, and in college I decided to pursue a degree in broadcast journalism.

I had aspirations of being a sideline reporter for football at ESPN. It was quite a lofty goal, but kids need dreams.

Motherhood took priority, so I put ESPN on hold while I raised kids and did all the mom things. Reading moved low on the list, and it took a long road trip for me to fall head first into a romance book. After that, there was no looking back. I devoured everything I could get my hands on. Soon the stories in my head got me diving deeper. I began working for an author as an editor, and even contributed to a book by my favorite author.

That author encouraged me to "just do it" after she read some of my stories. She said, "What's the worst that can happen?"

Within months I published my first book.

Tell us about your first book.

It took the push of my favorite author to finally take the leap and publish my first book, *The Pieces Left Behind*. It told one of many stories that I had amassed over the years. It was a deeply personal book as it talked about the struggles of mental health challenges.

I am a member of the mental health community, so it was important to me to address the ups and downs in a true way that many people are too afraid to talk about.

What does it mean to you to be an indie romance author?

I absolutely love being an indie author. I get to live out a dream that I never fathomed I could. But as much as it fills my soul to put my words on paper, it can also be overwhelming.

There's always the looming doubt that seems to linger no matter how



many times readers tell you they love a story. The praise helps quiet the self-doubt, but sometimes the imposter syndrome is so loud it fills the background.

The one thing that keeps me pushing through all of the roadblocks and hurdles is a good friend. I'm blessed to have some amazing women in my corner that hold my hand when times are low but more often kick me in the bum when they know it's what I really need.

What are your thoughts on the stigma that the romance genre still carries?

Non-romance readers always assume that the genre is full of X-rated material with readers and writers to match. They have their hands over their ears and blinders on, refusing to hear otherwise. What they're missing out on is a plethora of beautiful stories that help to heal and allow many the escape they need from the struggles of the real world.

When outsiders "shame" the romance culture, I like to remind them that everyone has their way of checking out from the chaotic world and whether they like it or not, it's not their right to judge. I mean, I don't judge them for their trashy reality TV shows [chuckles].

We all have our thing.

How do you manage being a bit of everything: writer, editor, marketer, social media expert, PR person, artist, and illustrator?

When I first published I knew that, as an indie, I'd be wearing many hats. I never realized that the hats would be so heavy or big.

I was never big on social media. I posted pictures for my family to see, but I didn't have a bookstagram account or following. I literally started from ground zero and have learned in trial by fire.

I test out trends and try to read up on strategies, but at the end of the day I just do what I love and hope all the pieces fall into place.

I'm fortunate to have a wonderful support system of ladies: Alyx, Carolina, Steph, Cami, Mindy, Joleigh, Lak, Sher, and you of course,

are my tight circle that I surround myself with daily. They're basically my oxygen tank.

How has the industry changed since you've been an indie author?

In the past couple of years, I have noticed a trend amongst the book community that isn't necessarily good. It seems the world today has divided many, and as prevalent as those negative voices can be, I try to focus on those who want to share the emotions that falling into a good book can bring.

It's great to find like-minded readers who too like to feel a good gut punch followed by a happy ever after.

What's the biggest thing you've learned since publishing your first book?

The greatest lesson I have learned from publishing is not to compare your success to others. Am I good at doing that? No, but I am definitely more mindful.

I celebrate the small victories, soak up the joy, and boost up my fellow indies. That is what helps me get through the days when I just "don't wanna." Seeing other authors' happiness and success is pure joy.

What inspires you to write?

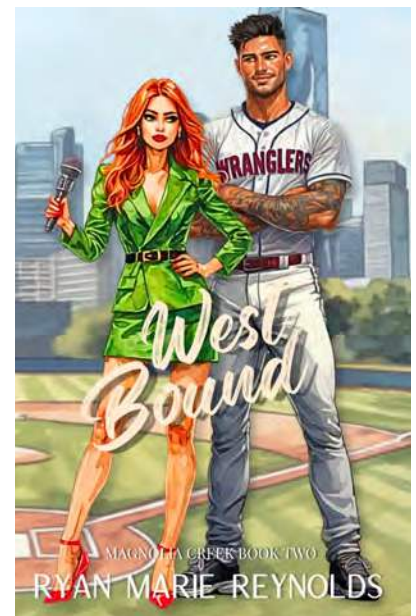
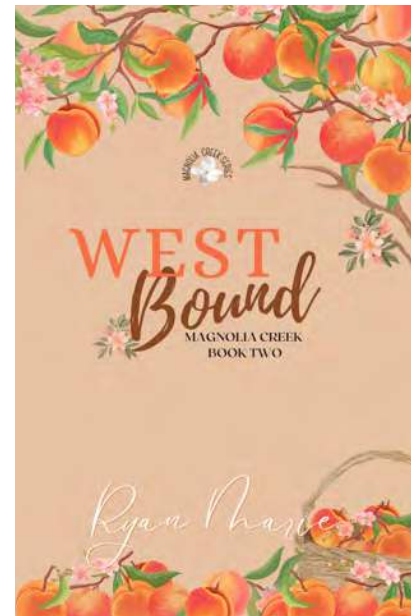
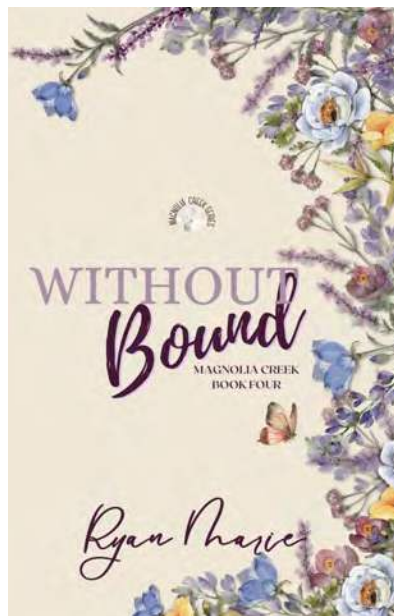
I pull inspiration from everyday life and sprinkle in a heavy dose of "that could only happen in a book."

I've taken some experiences of friends and family over the years and used them as a small catalyst to build on. The stories just rattle around in my head until a picture becomes clear and ends up on my screen.

What are your thoughts on romance genre tropes?

I am a sucker for a good trope. I love them because you can search for the ones that fit your mood.

When I read (which I don't do as much anymore for fear someone might think I've copied another author), I was a total mood reader. When my days were gloomy, I would dig into my to-be-read list for something to lift my spirits. If I had an elated day, I might want to balance that with some angst. And every once



in a while I just needed a good cry. Tropes are amazing in that way.

I think of tropes as a menu; sometimes you don't know what you want until you browse the dishes.

Tell us about your biggest wins and your biggest challenges.

Wins and losses are subjective, I suppose. If a book doesn't hit with an audience as well as I had hoped, I chalk it up as a complete failure. Yet, there are always readers that will come forward to gush on their favorite parts or explain how they connected with the story or a character.

I see two sides of the same coin. What I view as a failure, others may see as a mark in the win column.

Continued on next page ...

Much like Carolina, Ryan Marie also publishes her books with cover options ranging from models, discrete and illustrated. All the covers above are designed by Ryan herself.

Next page: As Ryan mentioned in her interview, she had already been creating illustrations of the main characters for her own books, as well as covers, but as of January of 2026 she has been working on illustrations for other authors. The character art depicted is just a small sample of her work from the past few months.

What are your thoughts on the whole “bookish world?”

The romance bookish world has truly become a place of healing for many people. Thrillers, sci-fi, non-fiction, and other genres have amazing works that appeal to readers. But sometimes you need something to heal, a story that resonates or “commiserates” with you when times are tough. No other genre that I’ve read can truly do that.

Self-help has a way of guiding you to look within yourself, but romance can give you hope and determination to go out and make your own happy ending.

Not all of it is realistic – I don’t know many 6’-10” tattooed, growly bikers with a soft spot for petite, sassy women with a broken past – but it certainly tells you that your person is there. You just need to look a little harder.

How do you feel about collaborations?

Collaborating with other authors is always such a pleasure. I love getting a look inside the minds of other creatives. It’s inspiring to see the passion in other writers and feed off of their energy. When the project is done, it’s amazing to see how each person has interpreted the project and how readers enjoy a multi-author take on a similar topic.

How do you feel about technology as it relates to the romance book world?

Technology is a wondrous thing as it now puts a thousand stories in the palm of your hand without spend-

ing a ton of money on paperbacks. E-readers have made books more accessible, and I think that is one of the greatest inventions.

However, with that has come the ease of AI use, which I really feel is ruining the written word. Of course AI offers great assistance for tons of industries, but it has no place in the book world. Stricter rules need to be made regarding the use of AI when writing, otherwise we are going to lose brilliant minds to robots and eliminate the true passion that connects us.

How do advance reader copy readers factor in your books’ successes?

ARC readers are the heart and soul of this book world. They are what gets a book started. The hype that they provide, a majority doing so without any expectations of payment, is immeasurable. And their reviews are better than gold because they help put your book in front of people who may never know it exists.

What have you found to be most helpful to you as an author and book promoter?

Honestly the most helpful aspect has been the reader. Those who have an immense passion for wanting to help spread the word with no strings attached.

Indie authors need bookstagrammers and booktokers because they can share the emotions of a book that the writer cannot. Their excitement is truly the most valuable marketing.

Who have been some of your biggest inspirations along the way?

My greatest inspirations have come in the form of friends and family. Of course without the words and encouragement of Melanie Harlow, I never would have taken the leap. But that led to a door opening with many loved ones on the other side waiting to give their love and support.

Without them, I wouldn’t have the desire or belief that I can, one day, succeed.

How do your covers and accompanying graphics contribute to reader engagement, readership, and sales?

Everyone always says to never judge a book by its cover, but I think that is false. That cover is the first impression, and it’s either going to grab a readers’ attention and have them wanting to know more or have them pass it by if it lacks luster.

Authors have to appeal to all the senses because you want potential readers to taste all the goodness of a story. Love at first sight is a real thing, and it all begins with a cover. I have to constantly remind myself it’s not about me.

You have recently started illustrating covers not only for your own books but also for other authors. How did that come about, and how has that experience been for you?

Illustrations began as a reset for me between writing books. It was that mindless creativity that I could get lost in without having to think. I started with some flat art and basic drawings. I tapped into my daughter’s art knowledge along with some tutorials and over time really developed my

skills. Friends started reaching out and encouraging me to venture into art for other authors. Once I finally put myself out there, it was like opening the floodgates to a tsunami. It’s been nonstop since.

What are your thoughts on PR boxes?

I love sending out PR boxes as a form of appreciation. It’s fun to procure goodies that have meaning to each story. I like finding all the little things that will have readers thinking about the book whenever they see it. But I’ve been burned by people just wanting free stuff and never actually appreciating all of the work that goes into the boxes. Now I send them to those who have helped me throughout the process. It’s my way of saying thank you for standing by my side.

What advice would you give an aspiring author?

I will pass along the words that were bestowed upon me: why not?

What do you have to lose? So you publish and your book doesn’t get the buzz you were hoping for. You have the choice to quit or keep pushing. But unless you try, you’ll never know how amazing it could be. •

To learn more about Ryan Marie and her books find her on Instagram: @ryanmarie.romanceauthor. You can also find her on TikTok at Ryan.Marie.spicy. Or to grace her inbox, email her directly at authorryanmarie@gmail.com.

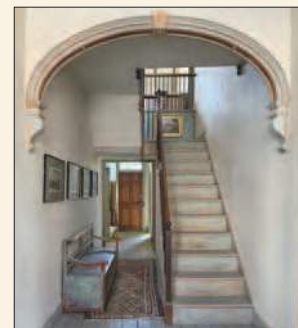




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THE BUCK STOPS ... AT THE CHERRY TREE



By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

The curiosities of human nature never seem to disappoint.

We enjoy being celebrated for our accomplishments. We're proud when our team wins. We feel momentarily down when we strike out in Little League, lose a game of pickleball at the senior center, or get 8 out of 10 in the Sunday *New York Times* Flashback History quiz.

And we seem inherently programmed to "pass the buck."

Some displays of ducking responsibility may be cultural, but we're not even close to being qualified to muse about the finer points of sociology. Some may be familial. We seem to share the tendency to pass off the occasional missteps of children or grandchildren (especially grandchildren in our case) as momentary displays and not to be harshly judged.

"Not to put too fine a point on it" (with due credit to Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*), actually accepting responsibility for something we've said or done seems to be a universal struggle. The accidentally fumbled jar of sweet pickle relish dropped in the aisle of the Big Y or Stop & Shop is quickly left behind since there was no

one else in the aisle to bear witness. Let the staff clean it up. Someone will notice. On to frozen foods. Quickly!

The CEO gene

We've long mused that hidden somewhere in the human helical coil, there must be a rarely occurring phenomenon — "the CEO gene." Over many years of working with, observing, chiding, and supporting senior executives from organizations large and small, we have found it frighteningly easy to spot those individuals who carry the gene. They're different. Things that bother mere mortals — emotion, empathy, sensitivity — are simply not there. The CEO gene has taken over, quickly eliminating the urge to behave like empathetic fellow wanderers on the planet.

Impact on the bottom line? Close the plant. Shareholders threatening to make the annual meeting a shouting match? Reduce the workforce by 10% under the oft-raised banner of "reorganization." Program over budget? Find someone, blame them, and fire them. Problem solved. And, perhaps the cruelest announcement of all. "I know it's her 12th birthday, but

I've got an important sales meeting in Sheboygan. There'll be other birthdays ... or dance recitals ... or graduations."

Anybody else hear *Cat's in the Hat* by Harry Chapin echoing in the back of your mind?

We recently experienced one of these CEO gene moments — details not important — and took a few days of reflection to sort out the impact. The ability to behave with Teflon-like insensitivity is simply not in most of our natures, so when we are on the receiving end of that kind of behavior, it takes a while to catch our metaphoric breath.

Truman and Washington

While assessing the impact and potential damage, we were suddenly drawn to two historic moments attributed to two American presidents. One may be apocryphal, the other is photographically confirmed.

Harry Truman, the plain-spoken haberdasher from Missouri who became an almost reluctant Commander in Chief at the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, had a plaque on his desk that said, "The buck stops here."

It was the fully accepted end point for those who wished to play "the blame game." No hiding. No petulantly firing someone to protect a bonus or re-election. The buck stops here.

And centuries earlier, a young George Washington figures in a parable that ended with a felled cherry tree. Asked whether he bore the responsibility, his legendary answer was "I cannot tell a lie." My fault. I did it. I'll take the blame.

As far as we know, there is no vaccine to ward off the impact of the CEO gene. There is, however, an exercise to defuse the potential for behaving like we ruthlessly run Gargantua, Inc. In that moment of realizing the relish jar has broken, when there is glass and sticky pickle/vinegar/sugar mess in aisle three, and there is no one else within 30 feet, take a breath, swallow hard, and park the cart to protect the spill. Then, find a jacketed store employee, and lead them to the point of impact.

We didn't mean to chop down the cherry tree ... but the buck stops here. •

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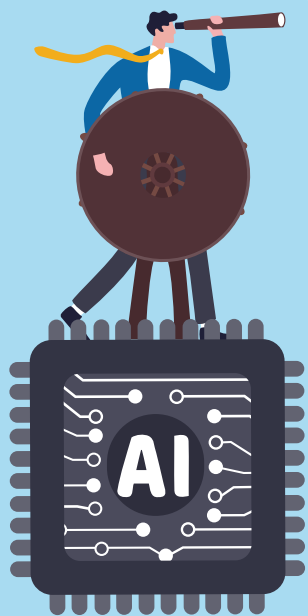


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Artificial Intelligence

*"Tell me quick," said Old McFee
What's this all have to do with me?
I've spent all my time at sea, a loner
Is there something else I should know?
Something hidden down below
The level of your conversation?
Ship of Fools – Bob Seger*

By Jesse DeGroodt
info@mainstreetmag.com

Dear Old McFee, If you are at all capable (no one else seems to be) of explaining the rationale behind what appears to be irrational enterprise to those of us here on the ground, my ears are open for business. And please include, if you have gotten hold of it, any of it, all the monkey business going on below the surface that no one ever talks about, because we here in Hoi Polloi-ville know it's there. Specifically, what does this have to do with the advancement of the human race? Signed, Thoroughly Flummoxed

Dear TF, Beats the sneakers off me.
XOXO, OM

Nonplussed, turning to one exceedingly bright human friend, asked I, "Can *you* tell me what the big idea behind artificial intelligence really is?" He thought for a second. "To make things faster," said he, in a questioning manner.

Oh.

I'd be willing to bet not even AI itself has a real good answer.

While on the surface it seems to me that as a species we may, as your favorite football coach might say, have outkicked our coverage on this one, to this stage I've resisted the temptation, as alluring as it might be, of going full Cassandra. At least not to the point where I'm entirely convinced AI is poised to drive every single last one of us out of work and leave us all standing around gobsmacked, wondering how we're going to feed the little ones

and stay warm in the winter. Instead, I'm more like the dog looking askance as you pull that steak out of the ice-box, pondering what little bit might be left for you and me. And it may be more than you think.

Or not.

Is it all sus?

It's entirely possible, of course, that while the chance exists this is all headed to the destruction of humanity as we know it, such an eventuality would amount to a spectacular achievement on the part of those foisting all this on us in the first place. I don't think the so-called geniuses behind AI are capable of that. To this old codger, it all seems rather sus, as the kids would say, although I sure could stand to rid myself of the continuous sensation that it's all being shoehorned into our lives by folks who are much less concerned with the status of your bank account than they are with their own.

But no matter how one looks at it, AI is in our midst, like it or not. Setting aside all the attendant sturm and drang, which may well in the end turn out to be the point of all this, when has something that carries with it such an overwhelming aura of disingenuousness ever worked out all that well?

Are data centers eating our lunch?

Nonetheless. As the gloomy prospects of an AI-centric demise stare us in the face, it may never get the opportunity, as the burgeoning world of data centers is busy threatening to eat our lunch first.

Okay, I realize we are not all working toward the same thing here. Indeed, most of us have no idea what that thing might be, but we are all acutely aware that it does not involve rapidly rising electric bills and ruined water supplies. And thus, we arrive at,

yes, the burgeoning world of data centers, which, as IBM has been known to so pithily phrase it, are "facilities that house the specific IT infrastructure needed to train, deploy, and deliver AI applications and services." Sounds innocuous enough.

Forbes gets us a bit further down the road: "One misconception is that AI data centers are simply server facilities. In reality, they are critical operational infrastructure combining energy, cooling, cybersecurity, networking, and real-time orchestration. As AI scales, infrastructure resilience and operational continuity become as important as compute power itself."

According to a map created by Erin Brockovich (remember her?) and quoted by *The Guardian*, in the United States as of mid-June, "33 AI datacenters have been completed and are operational, 68 are under construction, and 41 are proposed." According to the website cleanview.co, which tracks clean energy projects, data centers, and developers across the US in real-time, New York State currently sports 36 data centers, 25 in the planning stages and 11 already in operation.

Data centers = higher energy bills?

Let's zero in a bit closer to home, to East Fishkill, specifically, where Treetop Development has submitted preliminary designs for a 1,000-megawatt complex. For those keeping score at home, the scale of this proposal is "10 times larger than the largest active data center infrastructure currently deployed in the state of New York," stated latination.com, under this headline as the beginning of July rolled around: "New York residents

Continued on next page ...

discovered giant data center after power bills suddenly rise.” Busted!

Following intense, sustained opposition, recently the East Fishkill town board voted to establish a zoning moratorium that freezes all large-scale data center authorizations exceeding 20 megawatts until July 2029. This follows a one-year statewide moratorium on new data center construction, noted as the first of its kind in the country, adopted by the New York State legislature at the conclusion of its 2026 session.

A representative democracy?

What is being experienced by East Fishkill seems to have become the pattern for the — most often unheralded — arrival of a data center in a community, magically bypassing the usual planning and zoning regulations that in other cases might well halt a project in its tracks, if not at the very least provided the opportunity for interested parties — let’s think people quietly living their lives in their homes with no particular interest in ruling the world, for one — to learn more and ultimately, if so desired, voice their displeasure.

As of June, according to brockovichdatacenter.com, 116 moratoriums

against data center construction are currently in place in communities around the country. These are in communities that have tumbled to the threat, not necessarily in those where “data center developers often enter into nondisclosure agreements with local officials,” notes *The Guardian*. Data center or peanut farm, the notion of nondisclosure agreements being made with local officials should terrify any American harboring thoughts they are living in a representative democracy.

Say what, Utah?

Let’s ask the folks of the great State of Utah, which seems to have discovered itself beset with the things, how they feel about two genuine monstrosities that can likely be seen from Pluto. As one demonstrator’s sign so clearly proclaimed: “No.” If one were to ask around, seems to me that about covers the prevailing sentiment.

“The Stratos artificial intelligence data center footprint will cover more than 40,000 acres (62 sq. miles) over three sites in Box Elder County in northwestern Utah. The facility will require about nine gigawatts of power, which is more than the entire state of Utah currently consumes, and suck

up a significant amount of water in an area that has been hit by severe drought in recent years,” states *The Guardian*. Let’s allow that to sink in for a second, just long enough for the fog to come rolling in over the hill.

On the other hand, according to ABC4, “Box Elder County and MIDA claim that the project will not divert any water from homes, agriculture, or the Great Salt Lake. Instead, they say the water used will be completely on-site, and is too salty for human consumption or agricultural use in the first place.” Who decides that? Blokes like the one who once told me, with a straight face, to always trust corporations to do the right thing? Since when?

Got ... water?

In a world where “only 3% of Earth’s water is freshwater, and only 0.5% of all water is accessible and safe for human consumption,” according to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute, “large data centers can consume up to five million gallons per day, equivalent to the water use of a town populated by 10,000 to 50,000 people Meanwhile, data center developers are increasingly tapping into surface and underground aquifers

to cool their facilities. Together, the nation’s 5,426 data centers consume billions of gallons of water annually. One report estimated that US data centers consume 449 million gallons of water per day and 163.7 billion gallons annually (as of 2021).”

Oooof.

On a more relatable scale, the EESI states, “According to scientists at the University of California, Riverside, each 100-word AI prompt is estimated to use roughly one bottle of water. This may not sound like much, but billions of AI users worldwide enter prompts into systems like ChatGPT every minute.”

There’s very little chance that where this is all headed does not involve climbing into a basket with a fake wizard and floating back home to Kansas. Not if we’re onboard with Stewart Russell, a professor of computer science at University of California, Berkeley and president of the International Association for Safe and Ethical Artificial Intelligence, who writes in *The Guardian*: “The CEOs are telling us: ‘We’re on track to create superhuman intelligence, which has a good chance of causing human extinction.’”

Old McFee, what sayeth thee? ●





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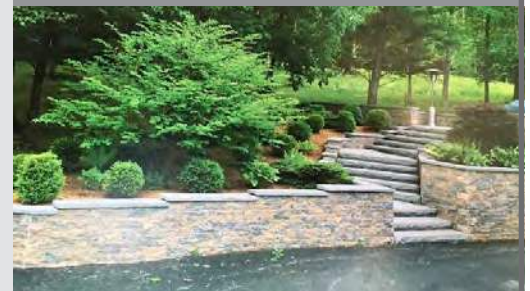
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