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A Civil War love story
By Cathy Griffith

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Spring is in the air. What better time for a love story? Cathy Griffith spoke to Kathy Fearday about her great-grandfather’s letters, which tell a tale of love and war.

The letters were written by Henry Eversman to Caroline Waschefort. Throughout the five-year correspondence, Eversman wrote more than 280 letters that began with Henry’s admission of love for Caroline — and the anxious wait for her reply. He shared with her his innermost thoughts of his adoration for her and his daily life as a medical student and eventually a doctor at a prison during the Civil War.

Fearday has compiled those letters into a book that has been a labor of love in itself. Elsewhere in this edition, we talk to two people from our area who served proudly in the Peace Corps, which has been sending young Americans on errands of mercy around the globe for 60 years. Have you ever thought about joining? “Do it. Go. Why not?” advises Joanna Davies, who packed her bags for South Africa in 2004.

We also introduce you to a rural Altamont resident who is representing pork producers across the state. Alan Kollmann has been involved in the pork industry most of his life, and is now president of the Illinois Pork Producers Association. Those stories and more fill the pages of your Spring 2021 Effingham Magazine. Enjoy.

Jeff Long
Editor
Devoted to duty — and Caroline

Teutopolis Civil War doctor served with honor while longing for home

Kathy Fearday holds a copy of the book she compiled of letters written by her great-grandfather, Dr. Henry Eversman, to his wife-to-be, Caroline Waschefort, during the Civil War.

Cathy Griffith photo

Kathy Fearday holds a copy of the book she compiled of letters written by her great-grandfather, Dr. Henry Eversman, to his wife-to-be, Caroline Waschefort, during the Civil War.
CATHY GRIFFITH  
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

Kathy Fearday can’t contain her excitement when talking about her great-grandfather’s letters. From the stylish cursive handwriting to the words contained in them, they tell a tale of love and war.

“They’re beautifully written,” she said with admiration.

The letters were written by Henry Eversman to Caroline Waschefort. He met her while teaching in Teutopolis and she was a student. He developed a fondness for her and when he attended medical school a few years later asked her parents’ permission to write to her.

Throughout the five-year correspondence, Eversman wrote more than 280 letters that began with Henry’s admission of love for Caroline — and the anxious wait for her reply. He shared with her his innermost thoughts of his adoration for her and his daily life as a medical student and eventually a doctor at a prison during the Civil War.

The letters, which span from 1860 to 1865, give an intimate glimpse of the love between the two and of a nation on the cusp of Civil War and in it, as seen through the eyes of someone devoted to duty yet longing to be back in his hometown of Teutopolis.

The love story continued beyond the letters. After Henry returned from service, the two married and settled in Effingham County. An entrepreneur, Eversman would later establish Effingham State Bank, now Midland States Bank.

The letters were passed down to a few family members entrusted to keep that legacy of love and service. And now over 150 years later, Fearday is sharing those letters with the extensive family, community, history buffs and anyone who enjoys a good story in a book that took her 40 years to make.

LOVE OF GENEALOGY

Kathy Fearday grew up hearing about the letters. As the youngest in her family, she benefited from time spent with elders learning about family history. She developed a love for it and married someone with that same love.

“We both have this love for family knowledge, where we came from, what our roots are,” said Fearday of husband Bill.

The two spent time doing family research that often included their children. Sometimes that meant making trips to cemeteries to glean information from tombstones. Fearday remembers one such trip when her oldest son was young. The couple was trying to recall the date that someone had died.

The answer came from an unexpected source.

“Our oldest son said, ‘Oh, that was 1849’ or whatever date it was,” said Fearday.

The children also tagged along to local genealogy meetings, each with their own black briefcase with items to work on and play with.

“They would sit there and play,” said Fearday.

Youngest son Joe Fearday remembers the briefcases, which still exist.

“They were sacred things,” he said with a chuckle.

He also remembers trips to the cemetery. He admits the cemetery trips may sound a bit “creepy,” but their quest to find nuggets of family history ingrained an appreciation for genealogy he now shares with his wife and children.

“My wife is very interested in that as well from her side,” he said.

When the couple’s 11-year-old daughter asked how she is related to cousins in her class, Joe responded by drawing a family tree.

“It started to make more sense for her,” he said. “I think it’s neat to put those pieces together as to the common links between the other people in the community as well.”

Daughter Jessica Closson didn’t realize growing up she would have the appreciation for family history she does now.

“My brothers and I, we grew up doing all of these, like researching, and people would come visit and my parents were always talking family history. As kids maybe you’re not appreciating it as much as we do when we’re adults,” she said.

One of the letters Dr. Henry Eversman wrote to Caroline Waschefort Eversman is shown.
LABOR OF LOVE

It has always been a dream of Kathy Fearday’s to take the letters — copies of which filled five binders, each over four inches thick — and make them more accessible for future generations.

“I had always thought that I would someday like to pass these down in our family,” said Fearday.

Fearday also realized the interest those outside her family have in the Civil War.

Although Fearday said the letters were beautifully handwritten, they were hard to read at times and the originals were fading. She knew she had to make a more lasting record of the letters. So, Fearday decided to record them onto cassette tapes. She would work on the recordings in her spare time as a mother of three children.

“I would get about probably seven to 10 cassettes. I would pass these out to my different cousins. They would listen and say ‘Oh, we love this. When’s the next one?’” I’m thinking to myself, “You know how long it took to do one of these?” It took forever,” she said.

The project was eventually put on the back burner when Fearday went back to teaching until she retired in 2013. A few years later, a conversation with another retired teacher resurrected it.

The two were part of a crafting group. During one of the crafting sessions, Fearday mentioned the letter project and got an offer she didn’t expect.

“Janice Ochs, said, ‘That sounds really interesting, I’ll type for you,’” said Fearday.

Ochs knew the project would be a big undertaking. But she also knew she could use her skills from when she taught transcription in business classes at Teutopolis High School. However, Ochs had two requests before she would take on the project.

“I told her I wanted to email the transcribed letters to my dad because he is a history buff, especially Civil War, and the second thing: Don’t tell me what happens. I wanted this to be like a novel. That was exciting to me,” said Ochs, who is a history buff herself. “I have a history minor, so I always enjoyed history and enjoyed reading about historical figures.”

In 2018, the two began meeting one to two times a week. Ochs couldn’t decipher the cursive handwriting that was sometimes cross-written to save space. So, Fearday would dictate the letters for her to type.

“It wasn’t easy, but it was so much fun,” said Fearday.

Ochs found the courtship contained in the letters exciting.

“Every time she came it was like ‘OK, I get to pick the book up again and enjoy more of the story,’” said Ochs.

She noted how Eversman’s writing evolved over the course of the letters. He started writing his letters very formal — usually one page. But by the end of the war, she said he was using the letters as a journal and they were more informal and longer.

The two continued to work on transcribing the letters into 2019 and were pretty well finished. But there were still other parts of the project that needed to be worked on, including checking over the transcriptions and searching for missing words. They hoped to get the book published that year. But various
health issues delayed completing the project, pushing it into 2020.
And then the pandemic hit.
“In 2020, I had a lot of time to work on it,” said Fearday.
The book was finally ready to be published.
“I decided at the beginning if I was going to do this, I wanted to do it well. Because it’s been such a lifelong dream of mine to have this, I said I wanted to have it hard bound,” said Fearday.
Fearday had worked on other local historical publications with her husband, Bill. She noticed those books didn’t hold together as well as time passed.
“So, we got it into hard bound and it turned out to be 467 pages,” she said.
Fearday chose the book cover of navy blue with gold print to represent the Union colors.
Jessica Closson appreciates the work her mother put into the book.
“When she came by to deliver that, it was a really emotional and powerful moment. This is a project going on four decades of work that we grew around hearing about, being a part of the process. So to see it in concrete form and knowing just the time and love that she put into that, I’m very, very proud of her and I’m so honored just to get to receive such an amazing part of our family history and history in general,” she said.

Joe Fearday also is grateful for the work his mother put into the project.
“She makes it look easy, but it’s certainly not easy,” he said.
Joe said his mom originally sought his help in the project years before but he struggled with the transcription.
“But I’ve enjoyed getting a chance to read them now and being able to see the finished product of what she put together,” he said.

THE LETTERS

Henry Eversman was born in Hanover, Germany, in 1837. The Eversman family came to America in 1845 and settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1852, they moved to Teutopolis. He began teaching school there at age 16.

Henry got to know one of his students, Caroline Waschefort, who was the daughter of one of the town’s founders. After 4 ½ years of teaching, Henry returned to Cincinnati to attend Ohio Medical College and began a correspondence with Caroline.

“Oh! would that these turbulent times would cease — that this cloud would soon disperse and peace and prosperity combine with a united feeling be reflected over all the States…”
— Henry Eversman

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Henry wrote to Caroline of his daily life while in medical school and after when he contracted with the United States to serve the Union cause as a surgeon. Surgeons at the time were not engaged in war and served both sides.

He continued to write to her as he organized and reorganized 11 general hospitals in Kentucky, and when he received the commission of Major and joined Union forces in 1863, serving at a prison at Johnson Island, Ohio, off of Sandusky, that incarcerated Confederate officers.

During that period, he updated Caroline on what happened each day, including conversations that took place, people he met and news of the area he was in.

Great-granddaughter Mary Ellen Eversman said the letters are more than an account of the time period. They are poetic.

“He had such a great command of the language,” she said.

While Caroline did reply to Henry’s letters, only his remain. He committed her letters to memory and then destroyed them.

“He knew she wasn’t comfortable writing and told her not to worry about it,” explained great-granddaughter Kathy Fearday.

Through his letters, Henry encouraged Caroline in her letter writing and “made her into a strong woman,” according to Mary Ellen.

“Later, he was one of the founders of Effingham State Bank. When he died, Caroline became a director on the board of directors at a time when women weren’t really into too many things.”

Mary Ellen said the letters are of historical significance — not only because they refer to a pivotal period in our nation’s history, but also because he shared his medical knowledge.

“He wrote down formulas. He tried to figure out formulas. There was not much to go by, especially in a war,” she said.

Mary Ellen Eversman and Fearday point to one letter in which their great-grandfather had sent a “crust of vaccine virus” for smallpox to his father, who was a pharmacist in Teutopolis, that he got from a young, healthy girl and insisted Caroline and her family get vaccinated.

Although the letters were written over a century and a half ago, great-great-granddaughter Jessica Closson believes they are relevant today.

“What I’ve gained is a lot of understanding around what was happening within the nation during that time, which is really parallel to the time now where we see that kind of angst and turmoil as well,” she said.

On Nov. 4, 1861, Henry wrote of regiments filling up and being ordered to the “seat of war,” while wishing for peace.

Oh! would that these turbulent times would cease — that this cloud would soon disperse and peace and prosperity combine with a united feeling be reflected over all the States — but alas — I am afraid that our national troubles will not end so soon. This enmity of feeling between North and South — kindled and nourished by political parties, has now acquired such a magnitude — that it will take the blood of thousands to extinguish it.

The letters that touched Kathy Fearday the most during that time...
contained Henry’s personal account of the end of the war and Lincoln’s assassination.

On April 16, 1865, he wrote:

It is under the saddest and most depressing news — that I pen these few lines to you this evening. A whole nation is in mourning at the unprecedented and most atrocious assassination on record. I enclose you an extra from the Sandusky paper — issued yesterday morning — immediately on receipt of the sad news — which will give you the particulars. Our President is dead — killed at the hands of the darkest villain ever born — what sad news for a nation — so recently rejoicing over our successes in the field and over a speedy return of peace. Also Wm H. Seward our Minister of State who was suffering from a fracture of his lower jaw and one of his arms — was so badly injured by the assassin’s knife — that his is not expected to live — “God save the country” — if divine Providence does not soon interfere — I do not know what will become of us

The rebels in prison as a general thing condemn the act in the strongest terms and many of them say — that it is the worst thing that could have befallen them.

It was through the letters Fear-day said she got to know her great-grandfather.

“I felt like I’ve known him for a long time,” she said.

She learned that, through everything, he was a gentleman.

“He was very kind to people that he dealt with,” Fearday said. “I think he was very fair with people. If he didn’t think something was quite up to what he wanted to do, if it was necessary, that was his duty.”

Mary Ellen Eversman said the letters show Henry’s humanity in treating the rebels. One letter, in particular, although written by a Confederate prisoner to Henry, thanks him for the treatment he received while in captivity at Johnson Island.

I cheerfully and voluntarily state that the delicate relations which we have born to each other have been scrupulously regarded by you, while you have endeavored, and that successfully in many instances to ameliorate my condition.

Subjected as I have been to a long and wearisome captivity, and so many privations which might have been alleviated, you have never the less conducted yourself to such a manner as to earn respect while the practical benefit, which your energy and business attitude has conferred upon my suffering comrades, demands my sincere thanks. — J.F. Sessions

“This man thanked my great-grandfather for the wonderful care he and all the prisoners got without malice. He gave them his attention and care. That’s a beautiful thing when you have a rebel prisoner finally leaving that writes a letter to

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someone on the other side thanking for care and kindness he showed to the rebels. It shows his humanity and his heart and soul regardless of who he was treating.

“That was his job. I think it just portrays him as the very honorable, caring man he was and you can see that in all his letters to his wife to be,” said Eversman.

Joe Fearaday and Closson believe the letters have appeal beyond their family as they reference not only the war but the Teutopolis community.

“It’s a tremendous gift there that she’s done for our family and for the community as well. I’m excited for my kids to be able to have that too,” said Joe Fearaday. “Also, who doesn’t love a good love story.”

He hasn’t read all the letters. Neither has Closson, but she has a plan.

“I started on Valentine’s Day in the evening. I turned on my fireplace and sat down with it. I thought what a better way to end Valentine’s Day but to read love letters from the war,” she said. “I started reading it and it was just so moving cause you’re just hearing them from Dr. Eversman’s side and you’re trying to put the pieces together as you’re reading it.”

For Closson, the letters are a time warp, giving the reader an amazing snapshot of values and priorities of the time period — and the endearing way he addressed Caroline.

…”feel assured that no one loves you more or more tenderly and thinks oftener of you than

Your own loving
Henry

“Just the way that they would write to one another, a lot of the etiquette and manners and the way he always begins the letters and he ends them, and so you kind of learn about history, but when you’re actually reading it and reading larger content like this, it’s so powerful that you feel like you do have a better understanding. You can almost hear it,” she said.

On Dec. 3, 1860, in admitting his love for Caroline, Henry wrote:

I will therefore state very briefly I cannot keep the secret any longer — destiny seems to spurn me that I should proclaim it, and I sincerely hope and wish it to meet your approval. Caroline I love you truly and most sincerely, not only recently but for some time. My regard for you is unlimited — these are my feelings in a few words. They comprehend all, I could not have expressed myself more fully than I did above. … I hope your sentiments are the same as mine and your feelings may meet mine to the fullest extent.

Closson plans to read the letters in chronological order — as they are ordered in the book — even though she’s tempted to skip ahead to certain parts her mother has referenced.

“I’m disciplining myself, even though she’s like, ‘Oh, go to this page.’”

For now, Closson is just looking forward to getting further into the letters.

“I’m really anxious when I do have some free time just to sit down and it’s nice and quiet and I can focus and keep going through it.”

Kathy Fearaday is now in the process of distributing the 200 books, half of which are being dispersed across the country.

“Lot of them are Civil War history buffs, a lot also descendants,” she said as interest in the book has spread through word of mouth.

The original letters are now at the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, where a display is planned on Eversman sometime in the future. The Effingham County Museum currently features a display of some of Eversman’s items as well.

Now that the book is finished, Fearaday is working on her next project — digitizing it. She plans to have digital copies available at the Effingham Public Library when it is finished.

“I want it to be read. That’s why I did it, I wanted to share it.”
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A rural Altamont resident is representing pork producers across the state.

Alan Kollmann has been involved in the pork industry most of his life, following the footsteps of his father, Clarence Kollmann, and grandfather, William Kollmann. The third generation farmer started working on his family hog farm when he was 8 years old, about the same time he started 4-H.

“I have been around hogs all my life. I never really had just one particular job. We always shared in the duties that we had to do for the operation,” Kollmann said.

Kollmann became president of the Illinois Pork Producers Association during its annual meeting, held virtually in February due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the event is usually held at the Bank of Springfield Center and features both an expo and meeting.

The IPPA is affiliated with the National Pork Producers Council and the National Pork Board. Kollmann said the National Pork Producers Council represents 42 affiliate state associations to make sure the pork industry in the United States is a consistent supplier of pork nationally and internationally. It also works with federal legislators to educate them on pork-related issues.

The National Pork Board unites pork producers through research, promotion and education.

The IPPA has over 1,600 members statewide and helps Illinois lawmakers understand pork-related issues.

For the past three years, Kollmann worked his way up the ladder as IPPA secretary, treasurer and vice president/president elect before taking on the role of president of the organization. He also served IPPA on several committees, including Production Tech and Research and State Fair. He has chaired the Education and Youth committee for the past three years.

Kollmann said as chairman of the Education and Youth committee he made changes to bridge the gap between the show pig and commercial sides of the pork industry. He said their mission was to allow youth to see the opportunities the pork industry can bring by implementing a youth day during the month of February.

“These kids are eventually going to end up in our industry somewhere, whether they are nutrition-
ists, veterinarians or caretakers of buildings,” Kollmann said. “It was important for us to enhance the education and youth program by educating the kids with different events throughout the year.”

In addition to his IPPA presidential duties representing pork producers in 102 counties of Illinois, Kollmann is still director of IPPA District 5. This is his 13th year serving on the IPPA board of directors and his 13th year representing IPPA District 5.

IPPA District 5 includes the counties of Effingham, Fayette, Douglas, Edgar, Jasper, Coles, Clark, Shelby, Cumberland, Crawford, Marion, Clay, Richland, Lawrence, Jefferson, Wayne, Edwards, Wabash, Franklin, Hamilton, White, Williamson, Saline, Gallatin, Johnson, Pope, Hardin and Massac.

Kollmann is sole owner of Kollmann Hog Farm in rural Altamont. He lives with his wife of 21 years, Michelle Kollmann, along with their four children: Jenna, Eric, Justin and Jared, who work with their father on the Kollmann Hog Farm. The Kollmann family farm has 1,000 head, raises show pig sows and operates a small corn and soybean operation.

Locally, Alan Kollmann is logistics coordinator for The Equity, secretary of the Altamont Unit 10 Board of Education, 4-H swine superintendent for the Effingham County Fair, a member of the Effingham County Farm Bureau, the Effingham Knights of Columbus, and a board member of the Altamont Education Foundation. At St. Clare Catholic Church of Altamont, he serves as director of the Parish School of Religion. He is a board member of the Altamont Sports Booster Club.

He is a 1993 graduate of Altamont Community High School and participated in the local Future Farmers of America Chapter. Kollmann was FFA chapter president during his senior year of high school. He was named District 4 Star Agribusiness recipient and became a finalist for the State Star Agribusiness Award.

He earned his associate degree in Applied Science with a major in Swine Management from John Woods Community College of Quincy in 1995.

As IPPA president, Kollmann would like to see more pork producers sign up for Premises ID tracing program. Producers can sign up through the Illinois Department of Agriculture to receive a personal seven-digit identification number. The PIN keeps track of a producer’s location.

“We need to educate people as to why this is needed,” Kollmann said. “If we ever had an animal disease or something of that nature, there is going to be a time we will have to quarantine that location or that area. With Premises ID, we will be able to insure that location or area is quarantined.”

“We need to identify where the animals are that might have a disease,” Kollmann said.
Kollmann thinks Premises ID should apply to anyone who has farm animals — show or commercial. As IPPA president, Kollmann is advocating for COVID-19 vaccinations for pork-producing essential workers.

“This includes meat-packing plants and local meat lockers,” Kollmann said.

Kollmann said Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s modification of frontline workers eligible for COVID-19 vaccine under the 1B category now includes those working in animal care, veterinary health, processing plants and livestock services.

He said every year the Illinois Pork Producers Association, through its Pork Power program, donates over 1,700 pounds of pork to Effingham-area food banks. While IPPA donates the meat produced from local pork producers, Farmweld pays for the processing at Kirby Foods IGA Plus of Effingham. This year IPPA donated 1,770 pounds of pork to make pork sausage that was divided among Enduring Freedom Ministries in Shumway, Catholic Charities in Teutopolis and The Master’s Hand in Newton.

“I have known Alan for over 10 years,” said Thomas Titus, IPPA President-elect. “His strong work ethic and commitment to the pork industry will allow him to keep leading our association in a positive direction during his presidency.”

“I am looking forward to working with Alan this year as our newly appointed IPPA president,” said Jennifer Tirey, IPPA Executive Director. “After the unexpected year our industry experienced in 2020, his high level of enthusiasm and willingness to jump in and advocate for our pork producers is refreshing.”

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— ALAN KOLLMANN

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For the past 60 years, the U.S. government has sent college grads around the world to try and mitigate the global challenges of our time: health, education, agriculture, economic development, and more. The volunteers integrate with the communities they serve, speaking the local language and living on only a modest income.

This army for humanitarianism is the Peace Corps, which has sent 240,000 people to more than 140 countries.

The organization was the brainchild of labor organizer Walter Reuther and President John F. Kennedy. The former president created the group through an executive order he signed on March 1, 1961.

“This corps will be a pool of trained men and women sent overseas by the United States government or by private institutions and organizations, to help foreign countries meet their urgent needs for skilled manpower,” Kennedy said when he signed the order. “I’m hopeful it will be a source of satisfaction to Americans and a contribution to world peace.”

The modern Peace Corps has shifted a little bit, expanding into areas like launching an initiative to eradicate malaria in Africa in 2011. But the Peace Corps follows the same central mission Kennedy laid out.

“The past 60 years have truly prepared us for this historic moment. During a pandemic that has...
touched every corner of the globe, it’s clear that we are all in this together,” said acting Peace Corps Director Carol Spahn in a statement. “As we look to the next 60 years, I know the Peace Corps will continue to be a community of people — all over the world — willing to do the hard work of promoting peace and friendship.”

JOANNA DAVIES: SOUTH AFRICA

Joanna Davies works at the library as the Effingham County Case Manager, helping people with such tasks as applying for SNAP benefits, registering for a COVID-19 vaccine, and doing taxes. With anywhere from 50 to 150 clients a month, she is often busy. Most of the people come in with questions about unemployment benefits and unemployment fraud.

But before her current job, Davies was a volunteer with the Peace Corps.

“I went to South Africa in 2004,” Davies said. “It seems like so long ago, but yesterday.”

Davies joined the Peace Corps after working at the United Way of Greater St. Louis, where she spent most of her time in a cubicle – something she was anxious to get away from. In South Africa, she worked in the Capricorn District in northern South Africa, an area about the size of Vermont.

“My group was there to help with the HIV/AIDS epidemic,” Davies said. “I worked with 300 community organizations.”

Davies worked with vulnerable populations and orphans to curb the spread of HIV. She worked with health care providers, offering training and community workshops. One of her first trips outside of the city of Polokwane, where she usually worked, sticks out in her memory.

“One of my first outings was going to a village to meet a home-based care group. They took me to a house in that village and there was a woman. She was laying on the floor and she was just bones,” Davies said. “That’s how she died — on the floor.”

But not every moment was so dire in her time in the Peace Corps.

“My house became the hub,” she said. “Every weekend, someone was sleeping over.”

Davies was lucky. Her house had running water, something not all Peace Corps volunteers get. She jokes that she accidentally joined the “posh corps” because of her relatively lavish living situation.

Still, she had to bundle up in the winter due to a lack of heat. And she
had to be careful because of a cholera outbreak.

The Peace Corps typically offers two-year placements around the world. But when Davies approached that limit, she wasn’t done. Davies married a South African man and went back to work for the municipality in South Africa. Since coming home, Davies has realized how wasteful Americans tend to be — careless when it comes to things like water and garbage, compared to the region she lived in, where water insecurity was a major issue.

“We’re so wasteful in America,” she said. “If you’ve never experienced that, you don’t think about it.”

That was part of what inspired her to help out with Effingham Recycles, an advocacy group which aims to implement policies to encourage recycling and less wasteful management of garbage.

**MARCUS HUELS: MOZAMBIQUE**

Marcus Huels grew up in Effingham before going to Chicago to study public health. After that, he joined the Peace Corps and shipped off to a rural village in Mozambique in 2015.

“After I graduated, I thought about going to law school,” Huels said. “But I’m not very good at tests.”

Though he had the Peace Corps in the back of his mind for a while, he’s fond of cities and says he applied “kind of on a whim.”

“I think that was maybe a bit of a quarter-life crisis,” Huels jokes.

When he joined, he went to Philadelphia for a few weeks of training before heading to Maputo, Mozambique’s capital, for more in-depth training.

“I didn’t know a word of Portuguese,” he said, though he eventually picked up on it. When describing his experience, Huels casually dropped Portuguese phrases into conversation when he couldn’t think of a word in English.

Training in Mozambique involved getting oriented to the new country and language classes, but it also involved more informal learning.

“We would stay with families. They would teach us Portuguese. They would teach us how to cook,” Huels said.

After two months, he headed to the other end of the country, to the small village of Milange. “It’s like going from Terre Haute to St. Louis,” said Huels. “But there were no roads.”

While in Milange, Huels worked with the local health center and local government to teach and
encourage good health practices to combat illnesses like HIV.
“...A lot of the time I spent in the district was out in the community,” Huels said.
His mornings were often spent at the health center giving talks about health. In the afternoons, he would help local students learn English.
“I would sit with them and they would bring their English lessons,” he said. “We would go through sentences.”
Unlike Davies, though, Huels’ living arrangements were anything but posh. He lived in a small cinder block house with a corrugated metal roof and no running water. His electricity would cut out during the rainy season. Baths were taken using a five-gallon bucket and a loofah.
“I tend to prefer bucket baths to regular baths,” Huels said. He says it’s easier to get clean and wastes less water.

“...I was so proud of him. I think he did good...”
— Nanci Wood-Huels, mother of Peace Corps volunteer Marcus Huels

Though he was comfortable working and living in those conditions, they were a bit of a shock to his family. Huels’ mother is Dr. Nanci Wood-Huels, the owner and head veterinarian at Pet Wellness Center of Southern Illinois.
“When he first started, I thought ‘Oh gosh,’” she said. “I was always afraid he would get sick.”
Of the 35 or so people who started in his Peace Corps group, Marcus said only about 15 were left by the end of his two years, many due to medical reasons.

Wood-Huels went to visit her son during his time in Mozambique and some of her fears were quelled.
“They were such very, very nice people,” she said, though she laughed when she remembered running out of water halfway through her first “bucket bath.”
Still, Wood-Huels says her son made the right move when he joined the Peace Corps.
“I was so proud of him,” she said. “I think he did good.”
After having the experience of working on the ground in international public health, Huels had found what he wanted to do. Since leaving Mozambique, Huels attended The London School of Economics, where he earned a master’s degree in international health policy.
He now works for the Clinton Health Access Initiative on their global geospatial health information project in Mozambique, where he works with their central government. Though based in Washington, D.C., he still makes visits to Effingham.

LESSONS LEARNED
Davies and Huels took lessons away from the Peace Corps they hope more people would take to heart.
For Davies, it was a matter of perspective.
“When you get out and see the world, something happens to you,” she said. “Go out and see for yourself.”
“It’s realizing not to judge people too much,” she said. “Just because they’re different doesn’t mean they’re bad.”
Huels shared this kind of humani-
tarian connection.

“One thing I learned that I really want people to understand is that no matter where people are, quite often, in the vast majority of cases, people are very similar. We have immensely more in common than we have different,” Huels said.

Both former Peace Corps volunteers encouraged people to consider joining.

“It’s a good stepping stone,” Huels said, though he advised thinking ahead.

“A decision like the Peace Corps should be made if it aligns with their goals. If somebody has a very advanced degree in something like health, there are other ways,” he said pointing to non-governmental organizations like Doctors Without Borders.

Davies said people shouldn’t let worries hold them back.

“Do it. Go. Why not?” she said.
Chef Gene McWilliams has been cooking almost all of his life. His interest in cooking came from his Italian mom. McWilliams said he began his cooking adventure in the sixth grade, when he was the only boy signed up for home economics class. He continued to cook through high school.

“You learn something new each day. You need to learn as much as you can and master it,” McWilliams said.

Over the years, McWilliams has gained a variety of cooking experiences.

McWilliams moved to Arizona to work with a chef at a high-end sports bar, operated a food truck in Arkansas called Johnny V’s, then started cooking farm-to-table dinners for groups of 10 to 14 people and developed a farm-to-table menu for Anna-Kay Tomlinson, owner of Miss T’s kitchen in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, for a restaurant she was opening on Murphy’s Hill.

He is represented by talent manager Manda Cicirella of Cleveland, Ohio, and McWilliams will join three other chefs, Adam Weisell, owner of Aventio Forno restaurant of Chicago, and Food Network chefs Mario Rizotti and Leventino Harris to host cooking demos, classes and participate in competitions.

“I never went to culinary school. I’m self-taught. I researched and read books about cooking all of the time and tried different recipes,” McWilliams said.

McWilliams is from Flora and grew up in Wilmington, south of Joliet. He’s a member of the U.S. Pizza Team.

“If I don’t make a good pizza, they might kick me off the team,” McWilliams said.

When COVID-19 arrived in the United States, along with all of the restrictions that came with it, he decided to change directions and open a “ghost kitchen.”

“We didn’t want to put a ghost kitchen too far from home and we thought Effingham is growing, so let’s put it there,” McWilliams said. “A ghost kitchen wasn’t even in the mix before COVID.”
A ghost kitchen is a restaurant without tables and chairs or in-house dining that offers only pick-up and delivery. McWilliams said the ghost kitchen concept was becoming popular in Europe before the pandemic.

McWilliams opened Kitchens Unlimited at the end of last year in Effingham. It is actually three restaurants rolled into one, offering a variety of cuisines.

“Ghost kitchens are typically in an empty warehouse where someone rents out kitchen space,” McWilliams said.

He classified the Effingham ghost kitchen in another way.

“Ours is more of an independent ghost model that is an owner/operator system,” McWilliams said. “We’re delivery and take-out only. When you open the door, all you will see is the kitchen, with no dine-in whatsoever.

“We must get two to three calls a day asking us if we are dine-in. We’re not,” McWilliams said.

McWilliams said Lucia’s Italian Kitchen is named after his granddaughter, Lucie. Lucia is Italian for Lucie.

Lucia’s is one of three restaurants owned under the Kitchens Unlimited umbrella featuring Italian cuisine. There is artisan pizza in eight varieties, made-to-order pizza, take-and-bake pizza, lasagna mortadella, rigatoni buttera and Roman carbonara. You can build your own pasta, with a choice of spaghetti, bucatini, rigatoni or campanelle, with an additional choice of either tomato sugo, pistachio cream, garlic cream and Bolognese sauce or take-and-bake pasta.

“Our bestsellers are the Cicero pizza and Piccolo Maiale,” McWilliams said. “Our pizzas are a cross between Neapolitan and Roman-style pizza.”

He said the Piccolo Maiale pizza features a special cornicione, or outer edge.

Geno’s Grill, named after a restaurant McWilliams owned in Flora in 2009, offers a variety of cheese steak sandwiches: the traditional cheese steak, chicken bacon ranch, roast chicken Philly, jalapeno steak and southwest steak. McWilliams said they have nine chef-crafted cheese steaks.

Southern Illinois Burger Company creates chef-crafted gourmet burgers, including the Whiskey Barrel Burger, Southwest Burger, Cowboy Burger and Bacon Bomb Burger, a build-your-own burger with a wide variety of condiments, and several side items – french fries to onion rings. McWilliams features a different “Burger of the Month.” He said SI Burgers offers seven chef-crafted burgers.

McWilliams runs seasonal specials for all three restaurants.

“The model is built so you can go to our website and order from all three restaurants at the same time,” McWilliams said.
There is an option on the website to choose either delivery or food pickup.

“When you cook an order from two or three restaurants, you want to make sure all items come out at the same time,” McWilliams said. “Then it all gets delivered all at once by one driver.”

McWilliams’ family members help him with his three-restaurant operation. His son, Blake McWilliams, cooks and makes deliveries along with his daughter, Kylie McWilliams. He buys burgers and steaks locally from Nuxoll Food Center.

“We want to start using the Farmers Market once it gets open to be a little more farm to table,” McWilliams said.

Since day one he has been working to streamline his workflow. He started out with two small grills for the Geno’s Grill and Southern Illinois Burgers portions of the kitchen. McWilliams replaced one of the smaller grills with a six-foot-long grill the first week in order to keep up with food orders.

Even though the three restaurants offer separate cuisines, there are a couple things they have in common.

“Everything is made from scratch,” McWilliams said. “We make our lasagna to order. When it’s ordered we build it. It’s a 30-minute cook.”

McWilliams goes out of his way to make all of his bread, pizza dough and sandwich buns from scratch. His dough mixer was shipped to Effingham from Italy.

McWilliams said the ghost kitchen delivery and take-out concept should carry through even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Once things start to come back, people will go back to restaurants, however, they are also going to want delivery and take-out as well,” McWilliams said.

Kitchens Unlimited including Lucia’s Italian Kitchen, Geno’s Grill and Southern Illinois Burger Co. are open Monday through Saturday 11 a.m.-9 p.m. and Sunday 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Lucia’s has extended hours to 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, serving only pizza.

Charles Mills photo
Chef Gene McWilliams makes the final cut of a Piccolo Maiale artisan pizza at Lucia’s Italian Kitchen.

Gene McWilliams photos
Left, a chef-crafted Whiskey Barrel Burger from Southern Illinois Burger Company, one of three restaurants in the Kitchens Unlimited of Effingham ghost restaurant family. Right, Roman Carbonara pasta available from Lucia’s Italian Kitchen.
On the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Banker Street in downtown Effingham, across the street from Effingham Brew Company and Bike & Hike, is a nondescript gray building with the words “First National Bank of Effingham” carved into its facade. Inside the austere exterior is a sleek co-working space with modern loft apartments above.

The 131-year-old building was purchased by developer Michael Brummer in 2018. He’s spent the years since rehabilitating the building into its current form alongside architect Kevin Grewe.

Enter Duane Martin, who was doing work for Brummer when he started thinking about the upstairs lofts.

“We’d been looking for a place downtown to just enjoy. We have a farm just south of town as our main home and (Brummer) said he had one unit left,” said Martin with a smile. “So we struck a deal.”

That resulted in Duane and his wife, Julie Martin, taking over a spacious 1,600 square feet with a view overlooking downtown Effingham.

When you enter the apartment, you’re greeted by bright wood flooring and high ceilings. A hallway wraps around, past a bathroom with a sliding chalkboard door decorated with notes from friends and neighbors, the master suite, and a spare room that Duane calls “Julie’s Zen Room.”

Duane, a former grocery store executive who pivoted to property improvement, worked with Brummer to finalize the space before moving in. Brummer and Martin chose Pyramid Marble & Granite for the countertops and Sears Hometown Store for the appliances.

“Being a part of downtown is important to us, so using local companies made a lot of sense,” said Duane.

He attributed their affinity for local vendors to family history. Duane is part of the Martin family that owned and operated Effingham’s IGA store for decades, and Julie is descended from the founder of Dust & Son.

The Martins’ idea of staying local extended into the choices they made once they started adding their own decor to the space.

“We used Wright’s for the furniture and design, Al’s Electronics took care of all that for us,” Duane said, pointing to the living room’s large screen and webcam setup. “Jamie Stang did the paintings for us.”

Most of the decor came from local businesses, but some pieces came from even closer to home, like the striking blue of a river table in their main room.

“Our son made this table. We do epoxy flooring and this is one of the byproducts. It’s called a live edge table. This is the very first table our son built and so we actually now build those and sell them.”

Big city style, small town flair

ANDREW ADAMS
EFFINGHAM MAGAZINE

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Duane said.

Live edge tables preserve the gnarled edges and natural shape of slices of wood and have become popular in the last few years.

The decor also includes some unique pieces that bring an air of playfulness to the space – classic-style video game cabinets and a large (functional!) traffic light.

“Julie was in Florida and I told her, ‘Hey, I just bought a traffic light,’” Duane said as Julie laughed beside him. “She came back and said it actually looks pretty good.”

Though the traffic light was Duane’s idea, Julie has had plenty of influence on the space. The former teacher and Jazzercise franchise owner is a professional facilitator of “The Groove Method,” an exercise, dance and wellness program.

“It incorporates a lot of the ideas of yoga,” she said. “Music is so powerful. You’re working your mind, you’re working your body, your spirit.”

This work necessitates open spaces, so all of the furniture in the Martins’ space was selected to be mobile.

“When we picked out the furnishings, it’s easy to move. It opens up real quick,” Duane said. This leaves a large space for Julie to lead online or in-person classes. The room clears up, save for a metal pole that Julie only half jokingly calls her “dance pole.”

“I’ve done workshops here, so I’ve had ladies in here,” she said. “The ladies I’ve had up here absolutely love the pole. They have a blast with it. It gets them out of their shell a little bit.”

The location gives the apartment a distinctly urban feel, despite being in a relatively small community like Effingham. When the blinds are rolled up and the windows are open, the apartment feels connected to downtown, with bits of conversation floating up from the street and from the patio of Gopher’s Grill next door.

“We really enjoyed the feel of Central West End in St. Louis or downtown Chicago on Rush Street,” Duane said. “With this, it gives us the same feel of everything going on downtown with Village Wine, with Effing Brew, with Big Papa’s down there. You’ve got a lot of neat stuff here.”

The bustling downtown location, plus the welcoming design of the space, makes it perfect for hosting guests, something the Martins are excited to do.

“We entertain here quite a bit for our business, for clients and vendors,” Duane said. They’ve also hosted their family Christmas and a grandchild’s birthday party at the apartment.

Duane lamented that COVID put a damper on the couple’s social calendar, but he’s optimistic for the next few months as vaccines roll out and case numbers become manageable.

“We’ve seen it’s already starting to pick up,” he said. “It’s gonna be a good year.”
In each of our lives, we are periodically presented with a chance to hit the “pause and reset” buttons. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is giving us that opportunity. As the pandemic rolls over us, we struggle with changes to our normal routines for work, school and family matters.

Resilience is a valuable characteristic during a pandemic, as hardy individuals exhibit responses marked by elements of challenge, commitment and control. No matter what their socioeconomic status, hardy people see the pandemic as a challenge and commit to controlling its impact on daily life. Less resilient individuals view the changes as limitations imposed on them by someone else, perhaps the health department, or the state’s governor, or disease modelers, or federal scientists.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

Hardy people take a long view of the pandemic, basing their rationale on earlier respiratory pandemics. The Spanish flu was international in scope like COVID-19, and just as deadly. Troop movements helped it spread, in the same manner that international air travel did in the early months this time. Communication was much slower then, so Spanish flu spreaders had the excuse that they didn’t know any better. Hardy folks today look at scientific information and draw logical conclusions. The less hardy cast blame and flaunt willful ignorance.

For those who lived through a close encounter with the virus, the aftermath is an uncharted challenge. More information emerges every day. COVID-infected survivors may be labeled or unlabeled. Especially in the early months of the pandemic, testing was hard to come by. Some people with active signs and symptoms were not diagnosed because they lacked risk factors on the screening list. The level of scientific knowledge at that point made this situation unavoidable.

The hardy COVID survivor creates a personal record mapping residual effects. Obviously these could be respiratory, but emerging evidence points to the nervous system. Neurological changes can include fuzzy thinking and fatigue, deficits in taste or smell, and altered feeling and movement in the arms and legs. Because these are subjective changes, keeping a journal may prove helpful in the future, as the breadth of the viral impact is clarified. The prepared survivor will have a coherent answer to, “When did this symptom start?”

There is no way to predict exactly when the pandemic will stop being a central issue in day-to-day life, but considering what a revised future might look like is also part of our pandemic challenge. Missing faces at family gatherings will be remembered, but we don’t waste time and financial resources trying to make things “like they were before.”

MAKING THE COMMITMENT

Resilient survivors commit to conducting themselves wisely for their own benefit and that of others. We don’t voice anger at the willfully ignorant. Anger is a waste of energy, and emotional energy is finite. The hardy ignore the whining from legislators who flail about, railing against common good initiatives, such as making insulin affordable for diabetics whose lives literally depend on it. Pre-existing conditions in general, and specifically diabetes Type I, make death from
COVID-19 more likely, an easily verified fact.

Making a commitment to avoid the willfully ignorant is simple much of the time, but it takes planning. For now, resilient planners are cautious about taking part in fluid and active large group settings. If total avoidance is impossible, we enter the arena when it is least likely to be crowded. We take note of what we see – days of the week and times of day when there is more space between people.

If a hardy person encounters the unmasked in an aisle, a U-turn is our likely response. The publicly unmasked bear more than a passing resemblance to the lepers of Old Testament scripture. Those ancient unfortunates warned others about their potentially infectious status by wearing torn clothes, covering their faces, and living apart (Leviticus 13: 45-46). In contrast, today’s potential disease spreaders roam about freely with bared faces.

TAKING CONTROL

Living with uncertainty and the ongoing threat of an invisible deadly force can be depressing. For those who live alone, relative isolation makes it worse. Hardy individuals take control of emotional health. One online source is sponsored by the Harvard School of Medicine: medicine.yale.edu/caregivers/resilience/

Here you can take a stress assessment that yields a score for overall stress, signs of stress, and additional stressors specific to your situation. After completing it, you can print out your results, and follow up with Harvard Medicine’s recommendations for you.

When vaccines become available, the hardy seek control of physical health. We commit to getting on the appropriate list when the right category or age bracket comes up. We don’t expect handholding or a halter and bridle for ourselves, but we do advocate for those without household technology or the ability to use it.

Hardy people with a history of infection severe enough to lead to hospitalization are wise to acquire control of their medical data. Most hospitals have a process on their website. An electronic copy is ideal, because you can inspect the whole and print out important parts. This hard copy review will answer two questions: (1) How sick was I? (2) What interventions kept me alive? If you don’t know the meaning of some of the words, consult with a nurse or use a medical dictionary. Pay particular attention to chest X-ray results and lab work during this translation. This baseline data will come in handy more than once in your lifetime.

Finally, the resilience person recognizes the need to control time as a creative element. We act on that knowledge by choosing a long-term project and then planning and implementing it. Years from now, the Smith Cousins chain letter, the hospital fire book, the basement remodel, the king sized quilt, the PandViru Board Game, the genealogy tree, and the above ground garden plot will demonstrate to our heirs that time and hardiness produced tangible results during the pandemic.

Linda Ruholl is a retired nurse educator and an Effingham County Museum Board member. Her home is north of Teutopolis.

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It wore on our communities, and we continued to encourage them to wear masks, practice social distancing and wash their hands.

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