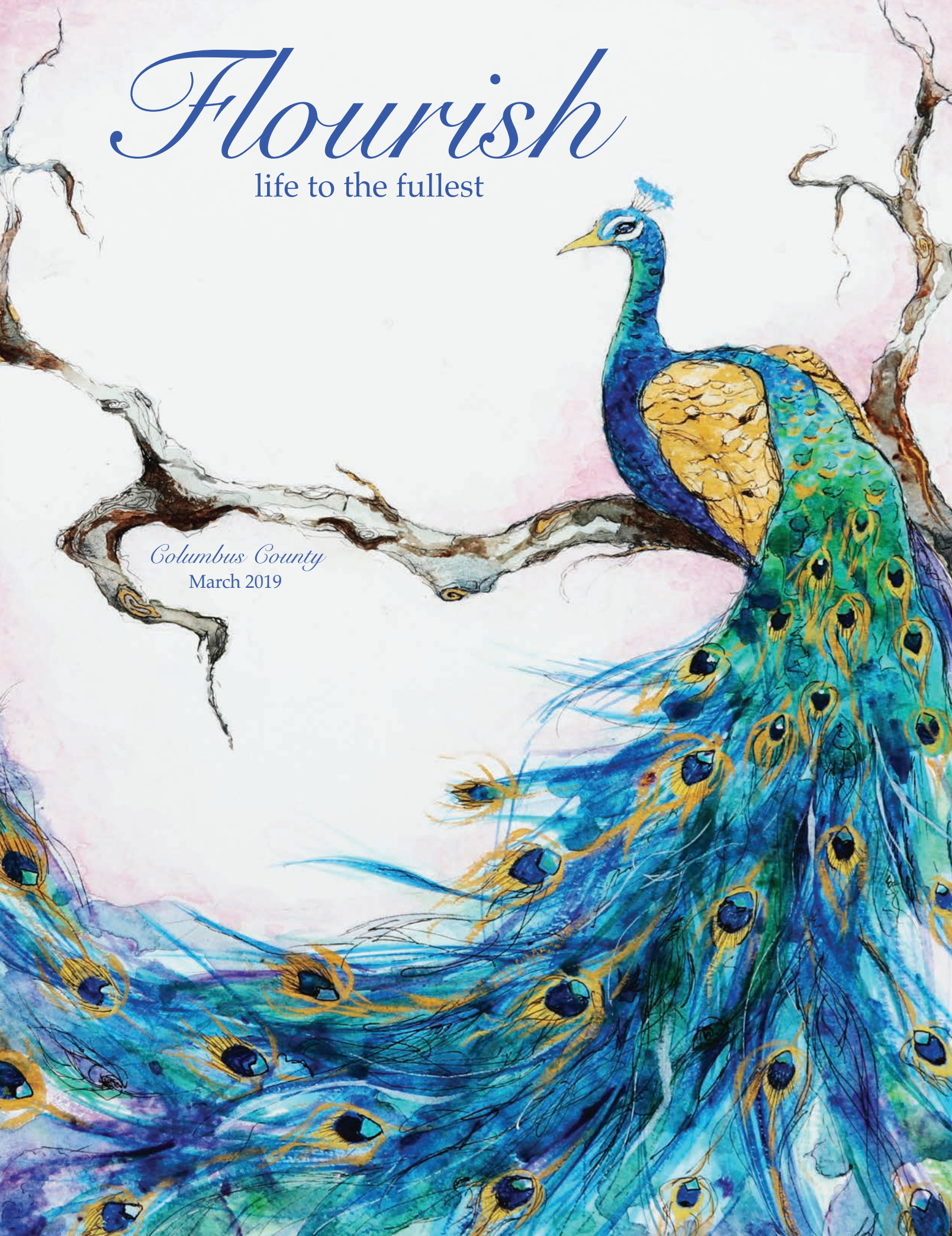


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Because of your warm welcome to *Flourish*, we are happy to bring you the second edition. Just like life and the stories in *Flourish*, we have experienced highs and lows since we published in August.

My father and *News Reporter* publisher, Jim High, died after a brief illness in January. With his encouragement, we launched our first feature magazine, *954*, in the summer of 2013. *954*'s success makes *Flourish* possible.

This month *Flourish* will be awarded first place in the feature magazine category in our division in The North Carolina Press Association editorial contest.

It is with gratitude for his innovative ideas and unwavering support through all the "highs and lows" that I dedicate this award to my dad.

— Stuart High Rogers



## FLOURISH CONTRIBUTORS



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& Yoga Teacher*



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*Graphic Design  
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**Isabel Humphreys**  
*Spunky 17-year-old with  
a big imagination*



**Donna Moody**  
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**Samantha Singler**  
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**Sarah Crutchfield**  
*Advertising & Marketing  
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*MMA: Mother, Musician & Artist*



**Janna Sasser**  
*Graphic Design  
The News Reporter*



**Julieann Strickland**  
*Fine Arts student  
SCC*



# JULIEANN STRICKLAND

## Get to know our cover artist

*story* STUART ROGERS & *photos* GRANT MERRITT

A life that follows art and art that follows life is how Julieann “Julie” Strickland of Cerro Gordo describes her inspired journey to explore and develop her creative talent as a student in the fine arts program at Southeastern Community College (SCC). She says her art “is like a record of different periods of my life that illustrate my growth as an artist.”

SCC Fine Arts instructor September Krueger encouraged Julie to translate her vision of what “flourish” means to her into the cover art for this edition of the magazine. Julie captured her interpretation in a watercolor painting of a peacock draped in glorious greens, blues and gold perched on a sparse and dry branch. Julie likes to “capture likeness and translate the mood the subject emits.”

Like many women in Columbus County who find beauty among the challenges of earning an education, working and caring for family and friends that need them, Julie’s peacock is a symbol of strength and grace. The encouragement of friends and family inspires Julie every day.

Columbus County has a treasure in the SCC fine arts program under Krueger’s guidance. Students who are interested in any aspects of the arts, including fine art, art education, illustration or design, can get started at SCC with their foundation courses in the College Transfer program.

Artists on campus know each other well and spend time together in the studio exploring their ideas. Julie hopes to incorporate art in her future plans, “Creating art that brings people joy would be most rewarding.”



*Julianne in the art studio at SCC*



*Self Portrait, Julieann Strickland*

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# Spring tips for a happy, healthy landscape

story DIANA MATTHEWS & photos GRANT MERRITT



Clarie McQueen

Clarie McQueen gets a serene but excited look when she describes how much she loves spring. “It’s my favorite time of year,” she said. “Things are coming alive, and it’s all newness. I hate to see spring end. It can be a busy time. March is an excellent time to work outside and an excellent time to plant,” she said.

After 46 years in the nursery and landscaping business, McQueen is an acknowledged local authority in helping plants flourish year-round. Not only do her own

customers call McQueen’s Nursery to ask questions about ailing shrubs or stubborn weeds, but so do people who haven’t bought from her.

She wasn’t always a landscaping expert, though. As Clarie White, she grew up on a small farm. “I knew what vegetables were, and I worked in tobacco until I was 15. But I had no idea about any kind of bedding plants or trees.” After working at Rose’s in Whiteville for three years, she married Robert McQueen in 1973.

"I didn't even know what an azalea was when I got married," she said, but she learned under the guidance of her father-in-law, Merlin McQueen, who ran a nursery off Pleasant Plains Church Road, close to the current location on Prison Camp Road.

In those days, Merlin and Robert McQueen ran the landscaping side of the business, and Clarie McQueen grew bedding plants in the nursery. The family also sold seeds out of a store in Whiteville. Clarie and Robert McQueen had two sons, Bobby and Thomas Aaron.

Those early years, "when my husband and I were both working with my father-in-law, were the years I really enjoyed," she said. Her father-in-law died in 2000 and her husband in 2014.

"Back then we grew everything," said McQueen. "We rooted little cuttings, then transplanted them into bigger pots and saw them grow up. Those were good times."

Sometimes people don't recognize how much they appreciate good times until later, McQueen said. Any time she had a question, she could count on her father-in-law to answer it.

"If you had somebody that had as much knowledge as Mr. McQueen did, and then you don't have them there to ask any more, that really makes a difference," she said. "That's when you really have to learn on your own."

"I called (Cooperative Extension Agent) Dalton Dockery a lot," for horticultural information, McQueen said. "I would call my brother-in-law, Randy Hester." She developed an extensive understanding of landscaping, "just by working in it every day."

McQueen's Nursery and Landscaping remains a family business today. Both sons, plus nephew Kris McQueen and grandson Addison McQueen work part- to full-time. Sisters Penny Lynn and Tammy Young, and Tammy's husband Charles Young, help part-time. Temporary seasonal workers help meet the summer mowing demand, and an assortment of adopted cats round out the personnel.

Some customers need one-time landscaping help, but others contract for routine maintenance, with or without mowing. "We do it all," she said. Do-it-yourselfers simply stop by the business to get mums in the fall, pansies in the winter or shrubs any time.

Pots of ferns, bougainvillea, geraniums, Gerbera daisies, petunias, begonias, pentas and vinca have been growing in McQueen's own greenhouses since mid-winter for the spring planting season.

In addition to the plants started on site, Clarie McQueen said she would bring in lantana, coreopsis, verbena and other warm-season flowers and plants from outside suppliers.

"At Christmas we have poinsettias, Christmas cactus, Christmas trees and fresh wreaths and garland," she said.



*Kris McQueen digs a wide hole in a well tilled bed before transplanting an evergreen.*



*Depth of the hole should not exceed the depth of the container the plant grew in.*

## McQueen's top landscape tasks for spring

**REMOVE WEEDS** - If winter weeds are still present, March is the last chance to eradicate them before they set seed. Some common winter weeds are hen-bit and chickweed.

**FEED LAWNS** - If lawns need lime or fertilizer, it can be applied until April 15. Lime reduces soil acidity. Acidity level affects the ability of nutrients in the soil to be taken up by roots. Various types of grasses and weeds thrive at different acidity levels, so maintaining the optimum level for the desired type of grass will mean less competition from weeds.

**FINISH PRUNING** - Complete any severe pruning by mid-April. McQueen would define severe pruning as cutting a shrub down to about half its previous height. Minor pruning can continue throughout the year for non-fruit-producing shrubs. It is best to prune fruit trees and grapevines in January and February to avoid excess bleeding from the cut places as sap rises in March and April.

**FEED TREES** - As trees, evergreens, roses and perennials emerge from dormancy, McQueen recommends feeding them with a balanced fertilizer such as 8/8/8 or 10/10/10. The numbers refer to the percentages of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in the product. It's better to apply small, separate doses, or a time-release fertilizer, than to stress the plant with one huge dose. McQueen recommends feeding again in late May or early June. She also urges gardeners to avoid feeding when a heavy rainstorm is predicted as the surface water can wash the fertilizer away from its intended target.

**PLANT** - "Any time the temperature is 45 and above is an excellent time to work outside and plant," McQueen said, but complete transplanting of container-grown shrubs and perennials by the end of March. "When it's sunny and warm, they start to grow," she said. "When it's cloudy and cool, like us, they want to stay in."

With winter coming to an end, the soil is usually well supplied with moisture. When established trees and shrubs break out of dormancy, their rising sap will pull moisture from the soil, as will the longer, warmer days. To give a spring-planted shrub the best start, machine-till the area around where it will go. Then dig a hole twice the width of the pot from which you are removing the plant, but no deeper than the pot. Fill the hole with water and allow it to soak into the ground; this will ensure extra water in the area around the plant's roots. McQueen teams fill in around the plant using the previously dug dirt, enriched with manure and bagged potting soil.

(Continued on page 12)



*A container-grown plant can be set out anytime of year, McQueen says.*



*McQueen refills the hole around the shrub, adding organic material. Frequent watering will help the plant establish strong roots if rain is scarce.*

## McQueen's top landscape tasks for spring

(Continued from page 11)

Even if no amendments are added, just tilling and shoveling to loosen in a wide radius around the root ball "makes such a difference," McQueen said. Be careful to keep the top of the root ball level with the ground.

Burying the plant more deeply in the yard than it was in the nursery pot will stunt its growth and cause other harm. Wait two or three weeks before fertilizing lightly around the circumference of the planting hole.

Once March is over, McQueen said, it's best to wait until October for any remaining major transplanting projects. Over the winter, it may appear that nothing is happening, but the roots are becoming established, allowing the plant to face the growing season with less stress.

"It's hard work," said McQueen. "Don't let people tell you any different. I enjoy seeing things planted and growing.

"Being in it every day is easier to learn it than any other way."

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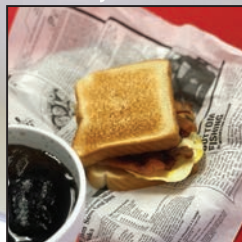


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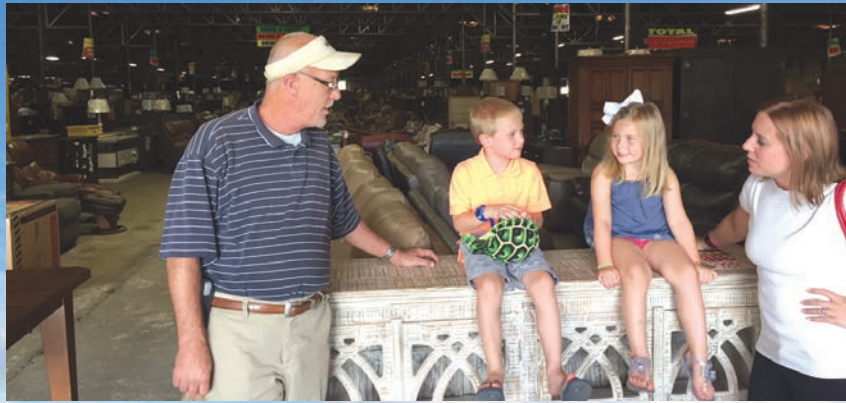
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- Valeria Balogh

# THE ART OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

## The tale of a mini apocalypse

story & photo by VALERIA BALOGH

I have been studying and teaching yoga and mindfulness meditation for a good while now and have dedicated six years of my life to the study of psychology. I have developed an awareness for some of the reasons people do what they do and have developed some professional opinions on how to make changes to one's own character or personality, if one wishes to do the work. I have been working on my own quirks and habits that I want to leave behind and characteristics I would like to develop to become a better version of myself for a decade now and one of the most challenging is the art of accepting help and kindness from others. This can be in the form of accepting a simple compliment from a friend or a lifesaving service from the community. Why is this an important thing to cultivate? Yoga teaches us to be in the present moment with all of our physical and mental sensations and to understand the fluctuations of both joy and pain as a part of the human condition. If a person is too overbearing about certain things, simple or complex, others may feel they have no autonomy. This, in effect, is stealing from another person's path. I have been working on this foible of mine for years. I am an independent and pragmatic kind of gal (read: stubborn and hardheaded) and usually feel like I can do pretty much anything on my own without bothering anyone else. I have found that this seemingly positive trait can be a nuisance to friends and family – so, I work on the art of acceptance. This is my story of Hurricane Florence.

It is human nature to take everyday things for granted and become settled in one's own world-view. But when disaster arrives, as it is likely to in one shape or other, we are suddenly launched out of our comfort zone and into a strange world of regret, anxiety, and a sense of loss. Hurricane Florence had that effect on many people in our area including my family and myself. My husband and I awoke at 3:30 am Sunday morning after the storm to our belongings floating in a tea-colored pool that was our living area. We had gone to bed satisfied that the storm had passed and that we had once again been lucky enough to avoid any major damage from the storms that visit our area. Reality, however, came to say, not so fast little ones, you too must experience what others did when Matthew came to call. So, we quickly set about doing damage control, rescuing things from the rising waters and setting them upstairs. There was no time then to grieve for lost things or to think about what should be done – we simply acted. I went to my father's room to

awaken him and tell him the news of the flooding. It was still early morning and he has the great good fortune to be a sound sleeper. I said to him, "Hey Pop, we are flooded" and his response was, "Too bad for you" as he rolled over and continued sleeping. This struck me as incredibly funny and I have since shared his response with several friends. Our home is situated on a slightly uneven lot and because of that two of the rooms were not flooded. One was my office and the other, fortunately, was my father's bedroom. So, I let him sleep for a bit. As the day wore on, we became more and more anxious as the flood rose above our front porch and began first to seep, then gush into our living room through the front door. We were assaulted by the continuous sound of rushing water as the water from the swamp ran like a churning river around our house and into the lake. We were an island. Now what?

Later that morning, a new sound soon came into being. The sound of a large tractor pulling a landscaping trailer to rescue those who were willing to leave. Of course, the first reaction for many, not least the elderly, is to remain with their home and belongings, so we passed the first opportunity by saying we could manage. This was followed by almost immediate regret. We held on to the parting words of Lake Waccamaw Police Chief Hyatt, Police Officer Schmidt, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Nye, "we'll be back by in a little while if you change your mind." We hurried to pack what we thought we might need for a few days. It was about 1 o'clock when the rescuers returned and helped us wade through the flood waters and climb upon the trailer. So grateful to these men for insisting we go along with them.

A few days. Surely we would be back in the house to begin cleaning up the mess in a few days. The storm was over. The water would recede quickly now, and we could come back and do triage. We were taken to City Hall where friendly volunteers helped organize the influx of those displaced by the storm. I called my friend Nicole Martin. This is where I began to really understand the art of giving and receiving. My dear friend. She came to pick up three bedraggled people- two fifty-somethings and an 87-year-old- who rode a slow tractor down a flooded road in the rain. The Drs. Martin welcomed us into their home. Imagine, if you will, three tired refugees entering a beautiful home with two gracious people, a precocious 8-year-old, a sparkling toddler, two dogs, and a cat... and no electricity. After we settled in,

my father sat in a chair in the middle of the living room and looked around, "You have taken me out of the woods and brought me to this beautiful place! I am so lucky you have good friends." He spoke for the three of us. I assured my friends it would only be for a few days. Ten days later we left their home. There is so much more to this part of the story, but for this tale the moral rests in the open heart and the grateful soul. We became more like family and will cherish these friends forever – Thank you Nicole, Anthony, Ian, Jovie, Vinkman (cat), Crouton (dog), and Frohman (dog, RIP) from the bottom of our hearts.

Thereafter, although we were able to access our house we still could not inhabit it. My husband and I managed to find and rent an unfurnished apartment downtown (thank you Mr. and Mrs. Thompson). The lack of furnishing and the long staircase would have been very challenging for my father, so I arranged for a few days here and there with some of his long-time friends. While he was in good company my husband and I worked on what I referred to as "mucking out the house." I will not talk about the challenging (read: negative) parts to this story here. Needless to say, there were many. Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Richard Simms and Mr. and Mrs. Grant Egley for your kind hospitality to my father, and for allowing me to let go of any worry for his well-being.

Now I tell you of another kind family we have known since I was a child, the Potters. These folks are some of the best friends my parents had the great good fortune to have met. When they heard that we had been displaced from the

house, they insisted we come up to Oxford, NC and stay as long as we liked. Of course, we hesitated to impose on yet another group of cherished ones, but a few days had turned into weeks and we were no closer to moving back into the house. There is a sort of spiritual ache that exists when you are grateful for the offer of help but struggle with the idea of rearranging other people's lives. My father was spoiled by these kindred spirits for another 10 days, more or less, and when my husband and I were finished with the mucking out, mopping up, and disinfecting, we went to pick him up under the protest of the entire Potter household. We are so thankful to Sue and Ed Potter and their daughter and son-in-law, and their son for a lifetime of joyful friendship.

There is so much more to this story that remains unwritten. The lessons of kindness, offers of financial assistance from friends and strangers alike, the understanding from my employer when I could not return to work right away, as well as the outreach from several corporate entities with offers of relief if needed, all come together to raise the spirits and comfort the anxious mind. I have discovered that accepting kindness relieves the weight that disasters bring. And it doesn't matter how big or small the kindness is, it is the giving and receiving with openness and gratitude that grow the bonds of friendship and community. Cultivating the art of giving and receiving paints a brighter picture for everyone. With deep gratitude to everyone named and unnamed who helped me and others through this time of upheaval. You elevate humanity.

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# Alternative transportation a good alternative

story ELIZABETH DeLOUISE, DO

photos ELIZABETH DeLOUISE, DO & JACKIE LEWIS

**D**r. Lauren Rust has been riding her bike to work for the last 3 months because as she said “I need some exercise!” What started off as an attempt at getting more active has turned into something she enjoys doing on a daily basis for transportation.

If you’re one of the many Americans who have stalled in their fitness goals/New Years Resolutions by this time, you’re not alone. Golds’ Gym has conducted research into the matter and deemed February 9 the turning point where people stopped going full force towards their fitness goals. They call it the ‘fitness cliff.’ (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/dont-fall-off-the-fitness-cliff-stick-to-new-years-exercise-goals/>). But we don’t have to fall off the fitness cliff! Here in Whiteville, one local pediatrician is sticking with her goal of getting more fit by bicycling to work.

“Also, I needed a new car and didn’t feel like shopping for one,” Dr. Rust said. It had been several years since she had ridden a bike but biking for transportation seemed like a good idea. In addition to biking to work most days of the week, she and her boyfriend Zach Caudle bike to breakfast or lunch when they’re in town. “We love riding to Penn’s for breakfast on the weekends.”

She said at most places she wants to go around town she can always find somewhere to lock her bike like a lamppost, but one place in particular has been proactive with providing her a safe spot to lock up. “The hospital was great to work with in terms of getting a bike rack. They asked me where I thought it should go, and it was installed within a few weeks.”

Jeff Faulk, owner of Body Shapers gym, says many of his gym members ride their bikes to their workouts. Mr. Faulk says maybe in the future Body Shapers will have bike racks out front but for the time being the light poles are at least a decent option for his members to lock their bikes.

Commuting via bicycle has many benefits. As Dr. Rust pointed out, it can help toward your daily fitness goal. According to [averagejoecyclist.com](http://averagejoecyclist.com), you can burn up to 450 calories per hour of biking. Biking for 1 hour in Whiteville might involve several laps around the court house since we’re a small community, but this small community is part of what makes bike commuting so attainable. “I can be to work in 2 minutes riding my bike,” Dr. Rust says, “but on nice days I take the long way which takes 10-12 minutes.” Biking also helps decrease



*Left: Dr. Rust riding her bike to work. Anytime you're riding your bike remember to wear your helmet. Right: Dr. Rust working at her desk with bike in foreground. Most days of the week Dr. Rust bikes to work.*

traffic and decrease pollution, which Dr. Rust mentions as one of her main reasons they bike so much to be environmentally friendly. Not to mention you can save a ton on gas money, and repairs to a bicycle are so much cheaper than repairs to a car. Biking can also just be a fun way to run your errands. Dr. Rust said she has biked to the post office, pharmacy and Farmacy on Main (her new favorite spot to get kombucha on tap). "It would be nice to have a grocery store to ride to, but I wouldn't feel safe on the roads I have to take to get there," Dr. Rust said.

Safety is a big issue for commuting, and for some of us biking to work or for errands is just not feasible based on where we live. Whiteville is potentially an excellent town to commute by bicycle to almost any location, but taking safety precautions into consideration is key. Always wear a helmet; North Carolina state law requires all children under the age of 16 years old



*Sign on Airlie Road in Wilmington indicating bicycles have full use of traffic lanes. Bikes aren't in the way of traffic; they "are" traffic!*

to wear a helmet with bike riding (<https://www.bikewalknc.org/important-nc-traffic-laws-applicable-to-bicyclists/>). Bike with the flow of traffic, this means biking on the right side of the road. Use safety lighting to "see and be seen" including front and rear lights, and obey traffic signs and signals. Further NC bike laws can be found at the link above. Involvement by our local government can help expand access on all roads by supporting bike lanes, installing signs on roads to bring awareness of bike traffic working with businesses to install bike racks, but it will take interest and work by our community to generate these changes.

Councilman Justin Smith says there has not been a lot of time spent on considering expanding Whiteville's alternative transportation services such as bike lanes and bike racks due to the focus of regrouping after Hurricane Florence in September last year. "It hasn't come up much in the year I've been on city council since we've been so focused on downtown flooding." However, back in 2014 Whiteville created a

Pedestrian Master Plan that was supported by a grant awarded to the City of Whiteville by the NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Grant Initiative. The seeds have already been planted for us towards a healthy, active community that can utilize bicycles as transportation.

There are many attachments to hook onto your bicycle to make even every day chores like going to the grocery store doable on a bike. Bags called paniers can attach directly to your bike. I personally was caught in a Category I hurricane in 2005 biking home from the library, and thankfully my paniers kept my books and other belongings completely dry! Lightweight bike trailers can also easily attach to the back of your bike to transport things like children or firewood. One popular brand is called Burley. Search for the Burley Kids' D'Lite Trailer at [www.mountainsteals.com](http://www.mountainsteals.com).

Be forewarned Burley's can be pricey, but they don't have to be. A quick Craigslist search five years ago led our family to a gently used version less than 90% of the cost of a new one and is still getting good use today.

When considering how to "locomote" to your job, the grocery store, or your favorite local restaurant consider bicycling as one good option.



*These munchkins enjoy riding in the bike trailer to the park.*

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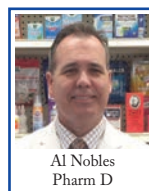
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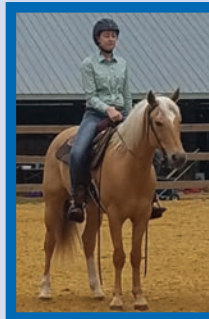
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*A woman with money was a woman with freedom.*

# ABBEY AND SADIE

PART 11 - CONTINUED FROM FLOURISH, AUGUST 2018

From the upcoming book *A Push From The Past*, a fictional account based on absolute truth

story KATHRYN OGDEN HUMPHREYS

**Synopsis of Part I:** *In the midst of a crumbling marriage, Abbey discovers 14 miniature paintings in an old box in the corner of a junk store. These paintings lead Abbey on a journey to uncover the mystery of the 19th-Century artist Sadie Palmer Waters. Meanwhile, Abbey tries to decide how to protect her daughter Penelope, her son William and herself from an abusive, unstable husband and father, whom she thinks of as "Him." You can read the digital version of Part I on [www.NRcolumbus.com/publications](http://www.NRcolumbus.com/publications), click on Flourish.*

## The Characters:

Abbey (main character)

Sadie Waters (19th century artist)

Him (Abbey's husband)

Penelope (Abbey's daughter and eldest child)

William (Abbey's son and youngest child)

## 3.5 years later: The beginning

Abbey could not get Sadie out of her head. Who was she? How did her paintings end up in Virginia? She had a gnawing in her gut to find out everything she could. Every day for two weeks, Abbey dropped Penelope and William off at the Presbyterian preschool, and she went straight to the University of Virginia library to plunder. There just wasn't that much information on Sadie. Abbey discovered that Sadie had been born in St. Louis, Missouri. She had two brothers, William and Frank, and a sister who died at the age of 5 from scarlet fever. Her father, William Waters, was a wealthy oil magnate and her mother, Sarah G. Waters, was a wealthy socialite. The Waters family were members of the elite St. Louis mercantile society. They were not just wealthy; they were super wealthy. Due to her lineage, Sadie was a woman with plenty of money, and during the late 1800's, a woman with money was a woman with freedom. Women of the late 1800's who had money, as Sadie did, in many cases, chose to remain single. They could afford to be independent. After the death of Sadie's father, Sadie, along with her mother Sarah, lived as expatriates in England, France, and Italy. Sadie studied in M. Luc Olivier Merson's studio. He was one of the few great academic masters who allowed women in his school. To study under Merson required a hefty fee, and Sadie could afford it.

"Interesting...but...I still know nothing," Abbey thought as she speedily read through journal after journal. "Special Collections, here I come!"

Abbey hopped down the winding staircase to Special Collections in the basement of the UVA library. In the in-

dex, she found call numbers for old Harper's magazines. She had requested the dates of 1888-1900. The librarian brought them out two at a time. The first two, nothing. The next two, nothing. And then, there Sadie was again, listed in the index as an Illustrator for Harper's Magazine. Sadie worked at Harper's after attending the St. Louis School of Fine Arts. Abbey's stomach was aflutter with a million butterflies with every small piece of information that she uncovered and pieced together. Sadie's name was in the index of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Abbey also found in the same index Alfred Parsons and his address of 54 Bedford Gardens, Kensington. According to the Index, Sadie used that same address.

"That is the address on the back of Jane Hading's portrait," she mumbled to herself.

"Carl Gutherz probably knew her from St. Louis School of Fine Arts. Alfred Parsons must have known her from Harper's, maybe?" Abbey's voice went from a mumble to high-pitched excitement, much to the dismay of the surrounding academic scholars. Abbey looked up, embarrassed. She saw the clock was at 11:55.

"Crap! Penelope and William! I am gonna be late to pick them up!" she whispered to herself as she rushed back to the desk to return the journals. She would have to come back tomorrow.

## Investigation: Don't say too much

Abbey stared at Sadie's paintings on her wall. She spoke. "How do I figure you out, Miss Sadie? Talk to me."

Abbey decided to call Mr. Jacobs, the old man who ran the consignment shop. Mr. Jacobs told her that the paintings came out of a very wealthy woman's estate. That woman was Darrah Waters. Waters had no heirs and left 2 million dollars to the SPCA. Her two neighbors had begun taking "care" of her. In reality, these caretaking neighbors were taking her possessions to the consignment shop and putting them up for sale. That is how the paintings ended up in the shop and ultimately with Abbey. Mr. Jacobs gave Abbey the name and number of the lawyer, Cecil Darden, who was the executor of Darrah Waters' estate. Abbey called and introduced herself. She was greeted with irritable, fiery vitriol.

"What do you have and how the hell did you get it?" Cecil asked in a grumpy, slow, high-pitched old Virginia drawl.

Abbey was nervous and thought she should hang up "Be careful what you say..." she thought to herself.

Instead, she said, "Mr. Darden, hello, this is Abbey

Hampton...um... I bought some paintings from Mr. Jacobs on Market Street?"

"What paintings?" This time he sounded suspicious.

"Well, they were in a box. A bunch of miniature portraits? They were thrown on top of each other," she said. Are you familiar with these? They came from Darrah Waters' estate?"

He replied sounding a little confused "No...No I don't know of any paintings. I will tell you this, though. Two ladies who lived next door claimed to be Darrah's friends. They were taking her things and selling them in that damn junk shop. I had to go to their homes and retrieve jewelry that was worth well over 100,000 dollars." He seemed to be getting more irritated as he spoke. He said, "I don't remember Darrah listing anything about paintings in her will. Are they worth anything?"

Abbey wondered what was on Darden's mind. "Um, no, sir. I just happen to be an artist myself, and I am trying to learn about the artist that painted them," she laughed nervously. "Do you have the names of the women who were caring for her?" Abbey asked.

"Oh, yes, ma'am I do. I do, I also have their phone numbers and addresses. You want those?" he asked in his heavy Southern drawl. Then he said, "Come to think of it, I do remember a small painting with three naked women and some flowers. Do you have that one?"

Abbey was surprised. That must be one of the paintings discussed in *Women in the Fine Arts*, "Le Chrysanthème." "No...no ... but I would appreciate the names and numbers of the women."

### July 4th Homecoming

Abbey pulled the car into the gravel driveway. She looked in her rearview mirror and saw Penelope quietly staring out the window and William peacefully sleeping. She had a sinking feeling every time she pulled into the driveway of their 100-year-old farm. She quickly pushed the sinking feeling away and said happily and softly, "We are home, y'all."

He would be home. When Abbey and the kids had packed for a week at her parents' place, He stayed behind, supposedly to work. She didn't really think he had to work, but as always, she chose to ignore her instincts.

Now Abbey saw Him walking up from the bottom field to greet them. From a distance, he looked big and strong. He looked handsome. He was tan from working outside and he had big, muscly arms. His dark brown hair always lightened to a golden brown in the summer from the sun. She had a fleeting memory of when she had first met him at age 20. He had walked into her college English class, clean cut, strong and beautiful. Her first thought when she saw him was that He was the boy she would marry. Butterflies.

After all these years, Abbey knew what was behind that mask, but He still had power over her.

The memory of that feeling faded the closer he got. He walked to the car and greeted them with bloodshot eyes, matted and greasy hair, an unshaven face and, a pair of helium balloons rising from one hand. He hugged Abbey and kissed her mouth. She could taste leftover smoke and alcohol. He smelled grimy and unwashed. His kiss made her feel sick.

"Hello little kiddies," he said as he pulled William out of the car seat. "Look at the balloons Daddy got for you!" He handed one to each child as they all walked to the back door.

Abbey entered the kitchen and was stunned. Mud was everywhere. It was on the floor and the ceiling. She slowly followed muddy boot prints leading to the guest room. The guest room bathroom had smeared splatters of sludge all over the walls, and the shower was filled

with dirt and red, pasty Virginia clay. There were red clay handprints all over the yellow walls. The bathroom looked like one of those Neolithic caves from her art history books. Abbey walked back to the kitchen and stared. There was food sprayed on the kitchen walls and what looked like black grease all over the cabinets. The refrigerator had been left open, and there was pooled water at the base. There was a week's worth of dirty dishes in the sink and on the counter. Amidst the dishes, there were crumpled up paper napkins, empty beer cans, and dirty silverware. Abbey was shocked and dumbfounded. She wanted to cry.

"What on earth?" she said quietly to him.

"We just had a little fun. I'll clean it up. Don't worry, Babe," he said casually. He then grabbed her in his arms



*Her legacy was just thrown into a box and put in a junk store.*

as his hands traveled to her backside. He squeezed as he buried his face into her neck. Abbey bristled. She could smell the days of no shower, and too much alcohol and smoke. He felt her pull away and became more aggressive.

Then he said in an intimidating tone as he squeezed her tighter. "It was a little fun. Are you going to start a fight in front of the kids?" He let go of her and reached for Penelope and William as they looked from Him to Abbey.

Then he said to the children, "Mommy is gonna start a fight with Daddy. That is not very nice, or Christian, is it, kids?"

Abbey went into a full defuse mode and tried to sound lighthearted. "What kind of fun?"

"It was fun. Are you gonna come home and immediately get on my case when I haven't seen my kids in a week? I can't believe you would do that to them," he said with an increasingly irritated tone.

William slowly nestled himself behind Abbey's leg and began humming. Penelope held on to her balloon and stared hard at her father. The little girl didn't flinch. It was as if she knew what was coming and she was preparing herself.

Abbey immediately felt guilty, and then fight or flight began kicking in.

"Please don't get mad. We are happy to see you." She reached for his arm and he snapped it away.

"Well, I am mad. Look at you. You can't take a little mess. Clean it up! Little miss, I have to have a clean house. I bet your mommy and daddy's house was perfect and clean!" His voice was searing. "Hey, kids... was grandma and granddaddy's house clean?" He was now yelling as he turned to Abbey. "Maybe you should have stayed here instead of taking my kids from me for a holiday that is meant for families."

Abbey grew anxious, and Penelope said, "Daddy, look at my balloon you gave me. It is so red and pretty."

William's humming became louder as he wrapped both arms around Abbey's leg and let go of his balloon.

"We are happy to see you." Abbey placed her hand on William's head and said to Penelope "Y'all go watch a movie and I will clean up...OK?"

"Daddy? You want to come?" William asked halfheartedly.

"I don't have time to watch a movie. I am going to work at Alberta's farm so you and Mommy and your sister can have health insurance! You just had to ruin the 5 minutes I get with my kids...What is it like to be such a narcissist?"

William started crying as Penelope quietly said, "No, Daddy."

And then he stormed out the back door down to his truck and drove away.

William began to scream, "Why is Daddy so mean. Dis is my fawlt!"

Penelope screamed and pulled the balloon to the ground and began trying to stomp it with her little Dora

the Explorer tennis shoes that lit up when she walked. Abbey sank to the brick floor of the kitchen and pulled both William and Penelope into her arms as they cried. She held them tight and stared at the floor. They had laid the brick together as husband and wife in one of their better moments. Now as she sat holding her babies she noticed the cracks that were forming due to their amateur construction. The cracks went through the grout and were beginning to cut through the very expensive brick pavers.

After three hours of scrubbing and mopping, the house was finally clean. Abbey walked to the great room and found Penelope and William playing together on the floor. They were talking and laughing. "See, brother? This is how you count. You take this seed, and this seed is number one. OK? Then this seed is number two." Penelope spoke like a little kindergarten teacher.

William said, "OK. One seed. Two seed. Thwee seed." Penelope giggled.

"Good! Very good, but you have to say your r's. You say it like this: rrrrrabbit trrrrracks." said Penelope as she instructed her brother on his pronunciation.

William replied, "wwwwabbit twwwwacks," and both children exploded into silly laughter..

Abbey plopped down beside them smiling, then immediately became concerned. "What are these??" She said as she reached for the gray objects they were counting.

"These aw Daddy's seeds," said William.

Abbey immediately knew what they were. They were not seeds.

Abbey looked at their hands and began gathering the seeds up frantically. "No! Let's put these down, OK? Did y'all put them in your mouth?"

"No mommy, yuck," said Penelope.

"Did William? William, did you put these in your mouth?" Abbey was stern.

"No, I promise" answered William in his precious little voice.

Abbey picked both kids up and hurried to the bathroom to wash their hands.

"Are y'all sure nothing got in your mouth?" she said as she scrubbed repeatedly and swiped their mouths.

"Mommy, stop!" cried Penelope.

"I am sorry sweetie, but those seeds may be bad, and I don't want either of you to get sick!" Abbey was yelling and rubbing soap all over their hands and arms.

"We are not sick! OK?" said Penelope in a clear, calm and surprisingly adult tone.

Abbey stopped her frantic scrubbing. She gathered herself together and looked at her children. Penelope was an old soul. She had a sense beyond her years and a strength that Abbey did not have. William had tremendous empathy and was extremely bright and witty. As she looked at his big blue eyes, she remembered holding him on her hip when he was a baby. His father was in Abbey's face screaming that he was going to shoot himself. She

could still feel little William's tiny hands digging into her shoulders, but he didn't cry. He remained calm through the unhinged ranting of his father. Then she remembered holding Penelope while she was 6 months pregnant with William. They were in the upstairs bedroom. He had a shotgun and was screaming he was going to shoot himself. Penelope held on but didn't cry. Neither of them had cried.

She snapped back to the present and looked at both children. "OK," Abbey sighed. "No-one is sick," she said lovingly and calmly. "Let's go put on a movie."

She went back to the great room and examined the gray lumps. She had seen them before. He'd promised no more. They were psychedelic mushrooms. The kids were playing with hallucinogenic mushrooms.

A wave of crushing anxiety came over her. Did they get the mushrooms in their mouth? "Please, dear God! Please no." Her heart was beating a million miles an hour. She wanted to cry.

She grabbed the phone and called Him.

"What?" he answered, knowing it was her.

"Do not come home. I am calling the police. The kids were playing with your shrooms," she said, emphasizing the shrooms. "What is wrong with you? What did you do while we were gone? What if they ate them? Why are there psychedelic mushrooms in our house?" Abbey was frantic.

There was silence, and then he said calmly "What are you talking about? I don't know what you are talking about?"

"What are the gray things in the plastic baggie? Your kids had them." Abbey said.

Silence on the other end, and then "Hope they didn't eat them." And he laughed.

"What did you do?" Abbey cried. She felt her throat tighten. "I know what they are."

"Look, Abbey, Adams came up for the week, and I saw an opportunity for us to have a little fun, OK? The kids are fine. It is no big deal. You need to calm down. Don't blow this out of proportion" he said nonchalantly.

Abbey was confused and terrified. "No big deal that your kids were playing with drugs? What? That is no big deal?" Then Abbey said, "Let me get this straight. We leave to go out of town to visit grandparents on a trip that you chose not to come on because you had to work and it turns out you didn't come so that you could seize the opportunity to do drugs? You saw an opportunity to do drugs?" Abbey was distraught as she tried to keep her voice down so the kids would not hear her. She did not want to cry. Her head swooned, and her mouth was dry. Her throat felt like it was closing.

"Don't come home or I am calling the police. This is not about us. This is about Penelope and William. You can't

do this. You just can't." She was crying.

That was all she needed to say. The floodgates opened, and he came at her through the phone like a tornado in front of a hurricane.

"Don't you tell me what I can't do! Let me tell you what you can do! Do us all a favor and leave. The kids would be much better off with just me. You don't do anything with them anyway. You stick them in front of a TV while you research your stupid, old trash, pictures. You think you are a good mother. What a joke! You won't take them, and if you try you will never see the light of day! I will dance on your grave, and then I will see you in Hell you worthless —." He had reached the point where the mask of nonchalance came off. He always swore at Abbey with his voice at high octane full volume, in the most dirty, foul language and loved to see her wince under the attack. His words were a crack in Abbey's jaw. Thank goodness he couldn't see her now. His voice rose and rose as he unloaded one vile insult after another. "You don't tell me what to do. I do what I want! I pay for your insurance, your house, your food. I pay for it all! You are nothing, nothing without me." She held the phone away from her ear, but she still felt like he was spitting in her face." I do what I want!" He was still ranting like a maniac as Abbey hung the phone up. She couldn't move. She was frozen.

Her neck and shoulders were pulled up to her chin, and her mouth was dry. Her tongue felt heavy. Her head hurt. It was throbbing. She felt a burning fire in her chest and cheeks.

She had to do something this time. She had never followed through before when he threatened her. It was too much trouble. But this was about Penelope and William.

She couldn't do it. She couldn't call the police. Would she have to leave her home? What would happen afterward?

Then the thought of him coming home terrified her. She thought of her children, and the image of Penelope and William playing with the drugs filled her sight.

She picked up the phone and dialed.

She waited. 9...1...1.

She could see the red and blue lights flashing in the reflection of the glass door. As Abbey peered out the window, he drove up. Abbey was panicked. He walked up from his truck calm and collected and ever charming. He met the police officers with a smile and a firm handshake. They all three walked to the door to meet Abbey.

"Is there a problem, officer, Are my kids OK?" he asked as he looked at Abbey with a complete look of dumbfounded innocence.

"Sir, your wife has reported that you threatened her and that there was an incident with psychedelic mushrooms." The officer was very clear and calm.

"What!? No... I don't do drugs. She is confused. She

**"Ars Longa, Vita Brevis" meant "Art is Long, Life Short." She immediately felt an opaque melancholy overtake her.**

just blew everything out of proportion. I had a little fun with one of my buddies this weekend, and she is a little upset," he said as he smiled. Cool as a cucumber.

Abbey intervened. "Officers, I want to take the kids to their grandparents' house. Could you please stay here until we leave?" She could not form a thought to explain to the officers what had happened. Her mind was blank.

"Ma'am, do you have the mushrooms? That is a class two felony drug. Are you aware of that?" said the officer.

Abbey froze. The police officers stared at her, and she began to feel as if she were shrinking. Her heart was pounding, and all she could hear was it beating in her chest. Her husband stared at her with a frozen, cold smile and Abbey knew if she gave them to the police, they would take him to jail. The two officers waited. "Ma'am?"

Abbey had them in her pocket. Her hand was wrapped around the lumpy plastic baggie, and she squeezed it tight.

"Ma'am, do you have the drugs?" the shorter officer asked.

He looked at Abbey, and Abbey could see her husband almost sweating.

"Ma'am?" the officer asked patiently.

Abbey felt flushed, and fight or flight was kicking in.

The thought, "Just give them the drugs, and maybe this will change," went through her mind.

"Ma'am do you have the drugs?" the officer asked again.

"No." Abbey lied "I flushed them down the toilet because I was so upset."

She had chickened out. She just couldn't do it. She was scared and weak.

"Well, unfortunately, we can't do anything if there are no drugs." the officer looked over at him.

"We need to look around the property and then address the supposed threats, sir."

"Absolutely," he said with a triumphant smile like he had invited them over for dinner.

The officers followed him out the front door. Abbey went upstairs and found Penelope and William in her closet. They were huddled together, and William had his wooden train and his baby blanket that he slept with every night. Penelope had her stuffed doggie Sparky. They were quiet except for William's nervous humming.

"We are hiding, Mommy. You hide with us, OK?" Penelope said in a whisper.

"Do y'all want to go back to Grandma's?" Abbey asked, trying to sound happy.

They both looked up and said "yes" at the same time.

The officers walked back up to the door and left him standing in the driveway.

Abbey let them in.

"Ma'am, we did not find any other drugs. Your hus-

band says he is sorry and has just been overwhelmed with work. Do you think you overreacted?"

Here it is, Abbey thought. They feel sorry for him.

Abbey felt like screaming.

"Officers, I would like to take the kids back to their grandparents' house in the mountains. Please tell him that. Is that possible?"

The policemen looked slightly irritated as they turned and walked from the door.

Abbey could hear him. He was crying.

"Tell her I'll go to rehab," she heard him say.

"Rehab?" Abbey thought to herself. Why rehab? Why would he say that? Abbey quickly pushed the sinking thoughts out of her mind. Rehab?

### Back in the mountains

Abbey felt a temporary calm. It was 4:30 a.m. and her parents' house was silent except for the many grandfather clocks throughout, ticking in unison. She and the

children had arrived at 3 a.m., and Penelope and William were now sleeping in the canopied double bed. She could see their messy cottony white hair through the covers

and pillows. William had his pink blanket covered with lambs bunched up under his chin and Penelope had one hand under her chin and Sparky in the other. Abbey was in the bathroom in her pajamas. She looked in the mirror. She looked different. She had dark circles under her eyes, and she was abnormally skinny. It was the kind of skinny that happens under duress.

"You look like death warmed over," she said to her reflection. "What is happening to you?" she wondered.

She was tired and stressed, but that wasn't what made her look different. She was losing faith. She was becoming hopeless. She was a failure. She felt worthless. What she did not realize yet, was that she was becoming an active participant in her own demise, and what was becoming her victimization.

She turned off the light. "I am just going to stop looking in the mirror," she said to herself.

She tiptoed to her parents' computer. She had checked out a book called American Artists in 19th Century Paris Salons written by Lois Marie Fink from the UVA library. With the book in hand, she sat down and pulled up Google. She opened the book to the back index and thumbed to the W's. And there was Sadie in black and white. She was listed as an Illuminator. All of her entry listings in the Paris Salons from 1890 to 1899 were listed with their specific titles. The painting of Jane Hading was included as well as Adriana Van Der Meyde. There were 14 listings for her illuminated miniatures and Abbey had 12 of them. Her heart jumped with excitement. She turned to the computer and typed Sadie's name into the Google Bar. Much of the information that she already had dis-

"She had to do something this time.  
She had never followed through before  
when he threatened her."

covered came up. Abbey felt dismayed. Instead of clicking on News, she decided to click on Images. Amidst the generic random pictures that come up when you google a name, was a photo that caught Abbey's eye. She clicked on it. She was taken to what looked like a cemetery. It was some sort of graveyard game that people play on the Internet. The gamers were in Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis, taking pictures by mausoleums, obelisks, and sarcophagi. The photo in front of Abbey was of a beautiful bronze sarcophagus. It was of a life-size woman stretched out in full, ornate dress with a long flowing ponytail trailing like Rapunzel's down her side. Her hands were crossed at her chest, and she was wearing formal lace up boots with pointed toes. On the side of the bronze were the words Beep 1900 as well as a relief of an artist's palette and paintbrushes. The woman's face and hands were delicate and alluring. And then Abbey saw it. At the base of the sarcophagus chiseled in marble in bold letters was:

Sadie Waters: Birth unknown, Death unknown.

Abbey's heart felt like it would burst. Below the photo was a question written by the graveyard gamers.

"Beautiful Sadie, who are you? Beautiful Sadie, what happened to you?"

The same questions Abbey was trying desperately to find the answers to.

Abbey peered into the screen at Sadie's memorial and noticed something else. There were additional words chiseled into the side of the marble.

"Ars Longa, Vita Brevis"

Abbey typed the words into Google Translate. "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis" meant "Art is Long, Life Short." She immediately felt an opaque melancholy overtake her.

In a moment of trying to avoid or escape her own messed-up life, Abbey had ended up with Sadie's paintings. These paintings were Sadie's legacy of a life that was cut short far too early. On August 13th, 1900, Sadie had died in Versailles, France. Her mother had retrieved her body and brought it back to St. Louis to be buried. From that moment, Sadie's paintings were laid to rest just like Sadie herself.

Then, a hundred years later, Her legacy was just thrown into a box and put in a junk store. Thrown away because they were worthless to the owner, or in this case, Darrah Waters' "caretaking" friends. It seemed such a waste. The paintings were not worthless to Abbey. She felt a sincere desire to find out more. She wanted to give Sadie recognition; a voice. The world needed to remember Sadie. The world needed to know her and her work. Sadie was not worthless.

Abbey sat back in the chair and sighed. The pink early-morning light was coming through the windows, and her eyes were heavy from lack of sleep and the strain of the day before. The kids would soon be getting up, and she was going to have to deal with the mess that she'd left back in Virginia.

To be continued...



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# BOOKS OVER BRUNCH

story Syrita Mills

food styling Naeemah Hall

photos Naeemah Hall & Jackie Lewis

In a world of bossy smartphones, bustling schedules, and binge-worthy TV shows, a book club may be the perfect way to build both a reading habit and lasting friendships. One local club gives Flourish an intimate look inside their monthly gathering.

## A Novel Friendship

Lisa Richey of Lake Waccamaw, struggles to remember when she joined the Novel Friends book club in Whiteville, but she knows what they were reading about at the time—midwives. She wasn't alone; the close-knit group counts the club's existence by book titles and children's ages versus time. After a casual survey, they finally settled on twenty years. In that time, the club has evolved; members of the all-women's group have pursued careers, raised children and welcomed grandchildren. New faces have been warmly received, while old friends have moved away, and the once mostly Whitevillean

crew now hail from all over the county.

Susan Deans, secretary of the book club, says flexibility has been key to their longevity. "We're pretty loose," she says. However, there is one cardinal rule: "You cannot recommend a book you haven't read yourself." It prevents picking a book that falls flat with everyone. Still, some books really resonate with the group. Last spring, after reading *The Book that Matters Most*, by Ann Hood, they adopted the fictional book club's format for their own club.

No topic is off limits for Novel Friends. History, fiction, non-fiction, classics, even children's books are included on their 2019 master reading list, like this month's featured book, *Charlotte's Web*. Picking up on the cookbook trend in book clubs, the group recently enjoyed reading and sampling recipes from *Deep Run Roots* by celebrated N.C. chef Vivian Howard.

## DOUBLE CHOCOLATE CHIP BUCKWHEAT WAFFLES

### Ingredients

- 2 cups buckwheat flour
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder
- 1 cup canned coconut milk
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/4 tsp baking soda
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt or to taste
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 chunk chocolate chips

### Instructions

1. Preheat waffle iron.
2. In a small bowl warm honey in microwave for 30 seconds to soften.
3. Add coconut milk and water to the honey and stir until well blended.
4. In a large bowl sift cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder, salt and buckwheat.
5. Add the honey-sweetened coconut milk to dry ingredients, until just blended.
6. Spray waffle iron with non-stick spray.
7. Add batter according to waffle iron.
8. Cook until crisp.



Serve warm with raspberry sauce and whipped cream. (May be prepared ahead of time and frozen)

Serves 4

### Raspberry Sauce

- 1 cup fresh raspberries
- 1/2 cup sugar

### Instructions

Puree raspberries and sugar together in a blender until smooth. Strain to remove seeds. Serve chilled.

When it comes to how Novel Friends digest their reads, the group agrees Kindles, Nooks and Audible subscriptions are all welcome. While some e-read exclusively, others use both e-readers and books. Former schoolteacher and author Eleanor Tatum's books have to pass the device test before winning coveted space on her bookshelf. "First, I listen to it on audible. If I like it, I'll get it in paperback, and if I really like it, I'll purchase it in hardback." More than once, e-readerspeak made its way into the discussion; members would reference key passages by percent completion in their Nooks rather than by book pages.

The members read widely beyond their book club selections. Susan keeps newspapers and magazines on hand for her free moments. "My mother was a prolific reader—she usually had four and five books going at once—and she encouraged us to read. I didn't become a reader [for pleasure] until I was an adult." She says she reads to learn new things. On the other hand, long-time member Ellen Steinberg reads for "pure entertainment." But that doesn't mean her selections are lightweight. Last month,

in addition to what she read for book club, Michelle Obama's memoir *Becoming* was on her nightstand.

At the club's last monthly meeting, the women caught up with each other during an extended greeting time before settling down to the business of books. After the questions were read aloud, the serious tone gave way to colorful discussion, one participant relating parts of that month's book *Little Fires Everywhere* by Celeste Ng to scenes from NBC's "This is Us."

At dinner, the women continued to chat over a laid-back meal and easy laughter. The book weaved itself into the conversation throughout the night. But the women seemed most at ease in the moments when they weren't talking about the book. The conversation made agile pivots from the Grammys to millennial girl power to politics before landing softly on grandchildren, the group taking a moment to wave hello via facetime to a daughter and grandchild as the evening dwindled to its end. And so, in two hour increments each month, these women share more than books; they share their lives.



*The Novel Friends Book Club: Anna-Marie Inman, Lisa Richey, Margo Wright, JoAnne Biser, Paula Smith. Standing, Susan Deans, Carol DeFelippo, Eleanor Tatum, Tara Bullock, Ellen Steinberg. Club members not pictured: Ginger Littrell, Sandy Mullins, Sue Jordan.*

## PASTEL MIMOSAS

**Ingredients**

- 4 oz sparkling white grape juice
- 2 oz choice of Raspberry Lemonade, Orange juice, or Pineapple juice
- Fresh raspberries, pineapple chunks or, orange slices to garnish

**Instructions**

Chill all ingredients. In a glass flute, add fruit juice, top with sparkling grape juice. No need to stir. Serve immediately.

## MINI SPINACH POTATO FRITATTAS

### Ingredients

- 1 cup eggs beaten
- 1/2 cup Gouda cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1/4 cup reduced fat milk
- ½ cup frozen chopped spinach
- 1/4 cup red bell pepper, diced
- 1/2 cup potatoes, small dice
- 1/4 cup onions, diced
- 1 tbsp All Purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1/8 tsp salt

### Instructions

1. Heat oven to 350F.
2. In a small bowl, slowly stir milk into flour to create a slurry. Set aside.
3. Sauté diced potatoes in oil until fork tender.
4. Add onions, spinach and red bell pepper to potatoes and cook until tender and slightly browned.
5. In a separate pan, sauté shallots, broccoli and red bell pepper until tender and slightly browned. Season with salt and pepper according to taste.
6. Heavily coat a mini muffin baking pan with cooking spray.
7. Add about a tablespoon of sautéed vegetables to each.
8. Sprinkle a small amount of gouda and cheddar cheese in each muffin cup.
9. In a medium bowl, lightly beat eggs. Stir milk and flour slurry into eggs. Add salt and pepper.
10. Pour egg mixture over the cheese and sautéed vegetables to fill each cup about 2/3 full.
11. Bake for 10 mins at 350F. Let cool slightly.
12. Remove frittatas from the muffin cups and
13. Serve warm.



### Book Club Starter Kit

*We've put together everything you need to have a book club up and running in time for brunch next weekend. Just add friends.*

*Look to Your Library: The Lake Waccamaw Book Club meets every 3rd Monday at 11 a.m. at Rube McCrae Memorial Library at 301 Flemington Dr., Lake Waccamaw. The New Hanover Public Library has six book clubs free and open to new members. Or, start your own club from their Book-Club-in-a-Bag and Grab and Go programs, which lend sets of 15 books for 4 to 6-week periods. For details visit <https://libguides.nhcgov.com/readwrite>.*

*Go Virtual: When distance and convenience pose a problem, add Facebook to the mix. Create a club Facebook page, which can serve as a place to post announcements, tidbits from the web about your books and authors, and even host a virtual discussion via text or video.*

*Books and Brunch: Prepare a brunch that's sweet and savory, with the easy make-ahead recipes featured in this article.*



# YOUR BEST WEAPONS

story Diana Matthews & photos Jackie Lewis

Karate practitioner Vince Patrick has led 132 students to achieve black belt status in his 23 years instructing at Champion Karate in Whiteville. In addition to the classes that are his livelihood, he occasionally offers a one-session self-defense class for females age 13 and up free of charge, sponsored by Karate Parents of Whiteville (KPOW).

Patrick said he does it to give women “a toolbox” of ways to protect themselves from violence. “We all know how the world’s become. Kindness is out the window.”

When he hears about a tragic abduction or a woman who is afraid to leave her home, Patrick can’t help thinking, “What if someone had taught her a few skills?”

A brief self-defense class “won’t make you an expert,” Patrick said. “It’ll teach you a little something, and with more practice, it’ll click.”

## A versatile toolbox

In a self-defense class in February, Patrick presented simple moves to gain leverage, escape an attack and if necessary fight back. When fighting, he recommended a first strike to the attacker’s soft tissues, with a decisive follow-up.

Patrick taught the women ways to strike a attacker’s

face, groin and legs, giving themselves time to escape. He showed them what he called the “turtle” maneuver to use if knocked to the ground. Students were surprised to discover just how much they could reduce an attacker’s power over them by lowering their center of gravity.

Patrick urged his students to practice at home until the moves become second nature.

Patrick’s teenage black belt helpers assisted the class by holding padded boards the students could punch, push, grab or kick. “Great,” they said as the women fought their targets. “Good job.”

Patrick pointed out that an everyday object such as a pencil can become a weapon if needed. He said he was glad to see more women carrying tasers and zappers in recent years.

One simple tool that is easily overlooked is a yell or scream, said Patrick. “Your voice can be one of your best weapons.”

Even a cup of coffee can be a weapon. One of his students, while using an ATM inside a busy McDonalds, found a man leaning in close behind her in a threatening way. When he refused to back up, “she coffee-ed him in the face,” Patrick said. As the guy staggered backward, he

tripped, fell and knocked himself out.

Someone desperate enough to use threatening body language at an ATM inside a restaurant is not going to respond to reason. "You don't know what they'll do," Patrick said. "You have to be in constant 'what-if' mode. Stay aware of your surroundings. Turn off your phone. Take out your earbuds. Check your backseat and cargo area before you get into the car."

The woman with the coffee didn't use any karate moves, but she was alert to a threat and she decisively used what she had handy. Physical blocking and striking skills are of little use if you don't train and prepare your mind as well. In that sense, Patrick said, "Your mind is your best weapon."

### Attitudes

One mental habit Patrick recommends is to "Be unpredictable. If you always drive to work the same way and park in the same place, change your habits from time to time."

Would-be attackers gauge a woman's appearance and behavior for signs of weakness. Bullies go after an easy victim, Patrick said. Someone who looks energetic and in control sends a message that she'll likely put up a fight. While walking from work to the car, Patrick said, "Have your keys in your hand."

While wearing earbuds makes a woman less aware and more vulnerable to attack, a cell phone can be useful, said Patrick. "If you come out to the parking lot and see someone acting odd, get on your phone and start talking."

If you find yourself in a situation where someone is threatening you for your wallet, purse or keyring, said Patrick, one option is to "throw it down the street and tell them, 'Go, get it.' Then use the time to run away."

A crucial attitude shift is to decide in advance that, "You're going to fight back for 30 seconds with everything you've got," said Patrick. Most attackers give up in the face of 30 seconds of resistance, he said.

Patrick has seen time and again that, "If you stand up for yourself to a bully one time, he doesn't know what to do. It throws his whole game off."

### Muscle memory

A friend at church told Patrick about the skills she had been practicing at home since attending his self-defense class.

As she demonstrated, Patrick moved to counter her, and, "She popped me in the mouth," he said. The woman apologized for her split-second reaction, but Patrick told her, "That's exactly what I want you to do. You've practiced until it's your first instinct."

In Patrick's traditional karate classes, students learn ba-

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sic moves by repetition, then combine them in routines called katas that can be adapted to an attack from front, back or either side. The same diligence and flexibility help a woman prepare to defend herself against a criminal.

“When someone’s grabbing you from the side you didn’t expect, the last thing you want is to have to say, ‘Hey, can you please grab me the other way? I didn’t learn it like that,’” Patrick said.

Knowing and practicing self-defense is “like insurance,” he said. “You hope you won’t need it, but you’re glad you have it.” In fact, he said, “it is insurance for your wellbeing.”

### Don’t kid yourself!

Reading this article has not equipped you to escape an attacker. Looking at videos of self-defense training is not enough, either. You need to take a hands-on class, then practice continually to develop your physical and mental skills and keep them strong. For information about the next free class sponsored by KPOW, call 910-642-8288.



*Charlene Bush of Whiteville demonstrates Damsel In Defense items women can use to protect themselves and their families.*



*Cate DeVane holds a padded striking target for students to practice on.*



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# Dream Again

story & photos DONNA MOODY

In life, we face many tough challenges and we make mistakes, but we have the opportunity to correct those mistakes and do better.

After having a child in high school I felt that I'd messed up really badly. I watched many of my friends go off to college and pursue their dreams and aspirations while I had to change all of my plans.

I never ever thought that my child was a mistake, but my irresponsible decisions did cause me to change some of my dreams. That's when I grew up, accepted reasonability and became wiser. I worked hard to become the best mother that I could be and for my son to have a great life. I went to school and, even through hardships, I achieved my associate degree.

It is not your place to beat up yourself in your mind, feeling as though you are not good enough or that you will not succeed. Your job is to believe in what you want to do and to dream again.

Dream again? Yes, dream again. God loves you and he wants nothing but the best for you. He has given you something special that no one else has. If you never share it with the world, you are holding up the person who needs it.



Donna Moody is CEO of Donna Kay Naturals. A company that curates organic hair and body care products.



Using social media as her platform, Donna Moody talks about beauty and confidence as MrsHairToday in her Curlkit Facebook Live series.

For example, who knew that one little decision would influence women all over the world? The idea came from my best friend, Alexia Hunter, who wanted me to cut off my hair and start my natural hair journey. I thought she was crazy but I let her cut all of my hair off to about an inch and a half. Afterwards, I felt like, "OMG, WHAT DID I JUST DO?" Then I felt very refreshed. After seeing so many videos on YouTube, I decided to go and purchase a web camera. At the time, you could purchase one for \$19.99. I went home and placed the camera on top of my laptop. The distortion

was real but I was so excited to record myself that I overlooked it all. I started a YouTube channel and titled it, "Mrs-HairToday." I uploaded videos as if I knew what I was doing, but in fact, I did not. This was the beginning of how I even became a Brand Ambassador, working for many multimillion dollar brands, promoting hair products while styling my hair. From 2010 to 2017, I have traveled and met so many great people, all from recording in my little bathroom. Now, I'm CEO of Donna Kay Naturals. I rebranded my brand to my very own name because my brand is who I am today. It is a lifestyle

brand focused on bringing transformational products to market in the areas of hair care, body care and eventually clothing. We create and curate products for women and men with high quality organic ingredients that transform their image and uplift their spirits.

I thought it would be all about hair but God had other plans. I receive so many messages from women all over the world stating how inspired they are because of the things I post, having platforms young girls can look up to without conforming to the world, sharing God's message for him to get all the glory, sharing personal stories to help other ladies who may be facing trials in their lives or conquering fears of speaking in front of large crowds of people. I have become a better me throughout the entire journey.

Your special gift is attached to your purpose. Your purpose is what you think about all the time: you go to bed with it, you wake up with it, you doodle it in your notepad, and you can do it all day without worrying about the time. It's something you know like the back of your hand. For me, that purpose was helping women by inspiring, motivating, and uplifting them. I know what it's like to not have support, to not have enough money for a certain project, to have dreams and keep putting them on the shelf, having a voice that needed to be heard but being silenced, to sit around thinking of amazing things that you want to see fulfilled and never step towards those aspirations, to want more in life and feel like you're settling, or even crying because no one understands how you feel or what you want in life. I was that person. I want to help others. I want God to trust me to do what is right by making a difference in the world. I do not need fame or materialistic things because grinding without it has taught me a lot. Yes, we all want nice things and yes you deserve it. It should not become the focal point of "WHY" you're doing what you're doing.

### The Removal

There will be times when persons may not agree with you and what God said about you. Guess what? It is not for them to understand anyway. If I had listened to the naysayers who told me that going natural would not work for me, I would not be MrsHairToday.

When I ran with the idea, others saw how well I was doing and wanted to do the same. I didn't look like ev-

eryone else, but I loved it and rocked it so well that it changed how others viewed natural hair. That's how you do it.

Do not give anyone the power to discourage your dream. That is too much power. How do you know if you have given this power to someone? Check out the following signs:

- You feel timid around that person when you talk about your dreams.
- You question what you are doing.
- Lack of confidence or self-esteem.
- You allow others to make decisions for you.
- Compromising all the time.

That trip is now over. Hop into the driver's side rather than the passenger's or the back seat and take charge in your life.

Listen to people who will pray for you, support you, and push you straight towards your destiny. Stop explaining yourself and your ideas to those who do not care anyway or those who will steal your ideas. Wait and cultivate your vision and present it to the world when it is ready.

### Execute The Dream

When was the last time you wrote down your goals? I created a business vision board with ideas and dreams that I wanted to see happen for me this year. When I had to change the name of my business from ABEDA CURLS to Donna Kay Naturals, I cried and was very frustrated over the

effort and expense, but eventually I got myself together and said, "Get Over It" and "Get Back To Work." I had to remember why I started my business in the first place.

Learn to take some risks in life or in your career. You won't always see what is about to happen but you have to do it even though you're afraid. Execute the dream that you have buried. Reveal it and put things into action.

- Take classes and check out mentoring programs.
- Don't just think about it. Do it.
- Get rid of distractions.
- Remain focused.
- Have a credibility partner.

You are going to rock this thing called life. You are great, strong, powerful and successful. You are more than enough. Let the world know what's inside you. Be encouraged.



*Inspiring and uplifting others is what motivates Moody.*

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# BRIGHT AND COLORFUL *days ahead*

by JANNA SASSER



Photo courtesy anthropologie.com



Photo courtesy anthropologie.com

Maximalists, it's your season! This spring, infuse your personality into your space with all the bright and bold excess you love. See floral patterns in a new light with exaggerated proportions and contrasting patterns. Old-fashioned decorative accents can feel fresh again with updated colors and materials. Mix and match to your heart's content! In this case, more is more.

**ART:**

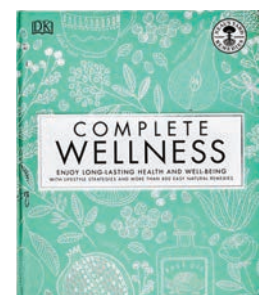
Bright colors and graphic patterns are becoming more prevalent, says Sandra Chandler of Art.com. "Don't be afraid to mix colors, patterns and textures. Instead of worrying whether your art matches your furniture and your wall color, try thinking about what you really love and hanging that in your room."

**COLORS:**

Muted colors can help avoid making spaces feel overwhelming, but designers think 2019 will be a year when bolder colors are preferred. Richer hues throughout the home can make more muted furnishings and decorative accents pop! Look out for statement pinks, rich blues, mustard yellows and organic greens.

**WALLS:**

Wallpaper is the word! Floral, geometric agate — you name it, expect to see more of it. If the walls are a plunge, an easy way to incorporate this statement look is with textured throws, rugs or layered artwork.



# KENTUCKY BRED

## PART 1 - A BOY AND HIS DOG

story & illustrations ISABEL HUMPHREYS

It wasn't too long ago that I found myself reflecting on the series of events that led me to who I am today. I began to think how funny it is, life I mean. When you're living it, you're stuck in the moment. You have to live a lot of years to be able to look back and truly appreciate it. And all the experiences you live through and the people you meet are nothing but mere memories that are waiting to be forgotten. Being the age I am, which is a soft 72, I've lived through many events in my lifetime and met many people, most of which I've forgotten. However, there is one weekend I've never been able to forget and a certain friend that will forever be a part of me despite that he has long gone from this lifetime. I won't deny that I am old, which is probably why I'm taking time out of my fleeting life to share with you this story. The story of the bestest friend I've ever known — the only friend I've ever known — and the most memorable weekend we ever spent together.

Let me start you out with some family history. I came from a middle class family, my father made his living out of selling truck tires and his father before that was a coal miner that died at the age of 70 from black lung. Pop never even thought of being a coal miner, despite the fact that it paid much more than his small daily tasks. My father would do small services for people outside of his actual job to make pay. Services like fixing old pipes or putting together picnic tables for fine goods like fresh bread from Mrs. Colvern or a basket of apples from Mr. Halden. Mama always criticized him for not getting an actual job. She came from a wealthier family but left her old life behind to start a life with my father.

We lived in a small two story house in the higher part of Harlan County, Kentucky, just outside the main

town. Upstairs sat just two rooms that were connected by a bathroom. My room had a window overlooking the Kentucky mountains. At night I'd watch that moon rise until I fell asleep. I had a single bed with a quilt Mama made out of a box of rags and next to that was a small bedside table that doubled as a dresser. Downstairs was primarily the kitchen. A round table for three people sat in the center of the room. That was where Mama, Pop, and I shared most of our meals. On the walls hung antique plates and pans and an old photo of my grandfather on my Mama's side. Most days I would eat outside on the doorstep looking out at the coal miners on the side of the mountain; smelling the smoky mountain air all

by myself. I didn't have friends. But then again I didn't want friends. We lived in a town where everyone knew everyone and their brother but I never became close with anyone but my parents. I was a scrawny kid. At that time, I wore the same pair of overalls with a dusty red button-down, my dad's old cable-knit sweater when it was cold, a ripped-up corduroy jacket, and lace-up sneakers. I had brown messy hair, because I didn't feel the need to make myself look decent, and I was covered in freckles from head to toe, which is why most people called me Speck. Yep, that was me. Peter "Speck" Olden, the most mischievous kid in town. I stole caramels from the drugstore and threw gravel at the bookstore windows. My biggest problem, though, was that I always got caught. I can't remember a day when Deputy Roberts wasn't dragging me home by my wimpy little arm and watching me pick out my own switch to get whipped. I know it made Mama upset when she had to whip

me, but I never felt any remorse; I just kept misbehaving. It was more addictive than smoking cigarettes. Maybe it was the adrenaline I got out of doing it, or maybe I just did it out of pure boredom. I don't really know. Anyways, my parents could never discipline me.

My behavioral problems continued throughout my life, I had no supervision, and nothing was stopping me



so I took advantage of my complete freedom. Looking back on it now I realize how lonely I was. When I wasn't causing trouble, I went down to the train bridge that crossed the river. I would kick stones, or just sit there; looking at my reflection. My freckled face and crooked smile staring back at me. I know it sounds sad but I was never unhappy....never. However, back then I had no idea that my life was about to take a drastic turn for the better.

It all started the day I met him. It was my 10th birthday, 1956. Pop had worked so hard in the past year just to save up enough money to buy fresh ingredients for a real cake. And I've got to tell you, Mama could make a cake like the best of 'em. That birthday was the happiest day of my life because, since I was going into double digits, I was rewarded with actual gifts, not just a hug and the occasional "happy birthday." I remember it like it was yesterday. After Mama had sliced all of us a piece of cake, my parents and I sat at that little round table. It was quiet....a little too quiet. Finally, being the restless 10-year-old I was, couldn't take the awful silence any longer. I lifted my cake-smearred face from my plate and asked why they wouldn't talk. Pop looked down at me, his greasy brown hair parted on the side and his weathered face smiling more than I had ever seen. His solid brown eyes had this teasing glint in them that filled me with so much excitement. What on earth did he have planned for me? I shifted my gaze over to Mama, who was nervously twiddling the loose strands of hair that had fallen from her bun. Pop finally opened his mouth.

"Peter, you've gotten old enough now that I feel you need to get yourself a hobby." I sat there; bright eyed and filled with excitement. I still had unchewed cake sitting in my mouth, I had to hear what he was going to say. "Give me a second," Pop said. He got up from his chair eagerly and reached behind the door where Mama kept our dry food. I was on the edge of my seat, chocolate frosting covered my cheeks but I didn't care, I wanted so badly to see what Pop was about to hand me. All of a sudden my jaw dropped, I finally understood why Mama was so nervous. In Pop's hand was a brilliant, polished Winchester rifle. Ahh!....I can remember how gorgeous it was. It was made with the most beautiful wood I had ever seen. Pop handed it to me with the utmost of care. It had a leather strap fastened to it and as I ran my bony little fingers across it I could see where my father had burned my name into the leather. I had never been happier. I never knew how Pop had been able to procure that gun, but I didn't really care. I leapt from my seat and hugged my father for the first time in years. I dug my fingers into his jacket and rubbed my cheeks into his shoulder. I then quickly went back to my rifle to admire all of its beauty....but my admiration was cut short by Pop's troublesome tone in his voice. "Hold on Peter, I've got one more thing for you, but you've got

to follow me."

What could he be leading me to? A race car? I had already been given a huge gift; what more could I ask for? I enthusiastically pushed myself through our



kitchen and out the back door where our old tire swing sat at the foot of an old pine tree. But, I didn't see a gift. Everything seemed like it had always been, dingy, dusty and useless. Then, at that moment, when I thought all was lost, Pop stepped out from behind that old tree; a rope trailing behind him. I stood at that door with mass anticipation and then....I saw him. Tied to that rope was a perfect, wobbly English Pointer puppy!

His wrinkly little face was filled with wonder and his fat paws were trotting with excitement right towards me. He was the most amazing little animal I had ever seen. He had reddish brown fur around one of his eyes and his ears and legs were freckled with little brown dots, just like me. I picked him up and held him right under his armpits, for a tiny little thing he sure did weigh a lot or maybe it just felt that way because I was so weak. I pressed my face up against his and stared into his eyes. Our gazes locked and I was so sure that our thoughts were synced. The tiny pup lifted his head just a little and licked me right on my nose. I began to giggle and I think he took that as validation to continue to lick and nibble at me. Together we knew, right then, that we belonged together; that fate had brought us together and that we were going to be the best of friends.

\*\*\*

It had been a few months since my birthday and my new friend and I had grown very close. Everyday, I would wake up to him licking my nose and then we would head into town together. I remember feeling so wealthy when we strutted through those streets. I thought we looked like the best-looking duo in town, I mean, I had never had so many girls come up and talk to me before. One day we were strolling on main street when a group of girls a little older than me came up to us. Among them was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. Amy Walters was her name. She had springy

blonde hair that she tied up with a bright red bow. Her father was a mine owner so she had a lot more money than I did. When I got to be around her though, I felt like the whole world was spinning around us. She had the most amazing smile. I had never said more than two words to Amy before I got my dog. Now, she had to talk to me. I remember that day so clearly because it was the day I named him. We were strolling downtown when Amy and a few of her friends came barreling up to my pup. They were all screaming in that high pitched voice that can break glass. Anyways, while my little partner was enjoying all the attention, Amy stood up and started talking to me.

“So you’re Speck, right?” she asked me in that irresistible Southern belle way. I remember it so clearly because I couldn’t take my eyes off her pearl earrings and blonde hair. I can’t even remember if I answered her. She was wearing a blue skirt that reached her knees, saddle shoes, a yellow cardigan loosened around her neck where a gold chain was fastened and a long grey wool overcoat. The other girls were still gawking over the pup but she was staring straight at me. After a while I got nervous and looked down at my shoes; after all I was only 10 and she was 12. I kept to myself until one of Amy’s friends looked up

at me and asked what his name was. By God, I’d had that dog for a good three months and I still hadn’t named him! I didn’t answer her. The girls must’ve thought they weren’t gonna get a lot of information out of me so they grabbed their school bags and left. The last thing Amy did before she left was flash me a smile and giggle. Now I had another problem, I had to figure out what to call my best friend.

Some time had passed and we had long left downtown and started on our way home. I think it was the first day I hadn’t caused trouble in about a year. We made our way down to the old railroad bridge and spent about an hour there. During that time, my little buddy had found a large beetle. Its shell was a shiny emerald green and its head was fashioned with two large pincers. That pup was sure amused by it. He barked at it, trying to seem tough, but he flinched every time it made a move towards him. I was sitting on the track, dangling my legs over the side and tossing stones into the creek. When

we both got bored we headed down to the sandbank. Sometimes I would see drunks and winos down there drinking themselves blind. The shore was littered with bottles. We sat on that shore and watched the creek pull the water across stones and logs. I looked over at my dog who was digging in the sand. His wrinkly face was perplexed and intensely focused on whatever he had found. I got up from my comfortable spot on the beach and shuffled over to him. His chubby paws were having a little trouble getting into the clay underneath the sand. I knelt down beside him and dug my bony fingers into the clay, pulling it out in chunks. He was digging

for an old bottle that had probably been there since before either of us were born. When we finally got it out, I spit on my hand and rubbed off the extra dirt that was covering the label. The bottle said....PARK & TILFORD KENTUCKY BRED STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY. A picture of a jockey in a red coat and his brown colt were sitting square in the center of the label. That was it. It came to me. KB....Kentucky Bred. I looked down at my pup and simply said “KB” and he went insane. I can’t help but think to this day that KB knew exactly what he was doing when he was digging up that bottle. I was so excited when I found his name. I remember we jumped up and down and chased each other around the creek bank. I wasn’t watching what I was doing and I tripped and fell into the water. KB followed me

without hesitation. It was probably 45 degrees outside and we were playing in the creek; it’s a miracle I didn’t fall ill from pneumonia. When the cold actually started to get to us I picked him up and carried him home with great anticipation. We lived high up on the side of the mountain in a heavily forested area. I hiked up those hills in wet overalls and a soaked puppy in my arms, I must’ve looked like some sort of ghoul marching up those hills. Pale skin, dark hair and wet clothes. I either looked like a ghoul or some sort of Irish peasant. When I had finally reached the house I remember so vividly myself busting through that screen door soaking wet, KB slouched over my arm, and the look on my mother’s face when she turned around....Ha!

“Peter, you are soaking wet! You’ve been down by the creek again....I swear one of these days you’re gonna catch some horrible illness and not be able to get into trouble like this ever again.” Mama was livid. KB was staring up at her from my arms. I was holding him right under his armpits and he had his tongue hanging out





Whiteville Primary School

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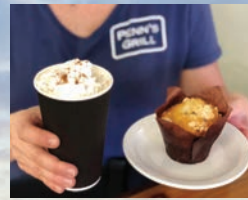
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of the side of his mouth. She gestured both of us to sit next to the fire place against the wall in the kitchen then she fetched a towell and draped it over my shoulders, but I just took it off and wrapped KB in it. I sat criss crossed on the floor with him in my lap, then Mama spoke again.... "Peter, you best start to answerin' my questions or else I'm gonna let you stay wet."

"Mama, I finally found a name for him!" I said with clear enthusiasm. I was rubbing the towel behind KB's ears and around his head trying to get his blotted fur dry.

"Oh yeah, what's that" she said. Her hands were on her hips and the expression on her face was the picture of unamusement. When I began to tell her about how I named KB, she couldn't help but smile. I told her about Amy and her friends, I told her about the beetle at the bridge, and how we went treasure hunting in the clay at the creek which lead to the discovery of the bottle. Her anger soon turned into laughter and she knelt down next to me and KB. Her white, flower patterned dress draped over the floor and her apron was tied firmly around her waist. The loose strands of hair from her bun glimmered in the firelight in the most majestic way. From where I was sitting, she had never looked more

beautiful. Her angular face and high cheekbones only made her look more angelic. She took her hand and ran her fingers through my hair and then rubbed KB's wrinkly little head.

"I think you two better go take a bath" she said. Her voice was soft and smooth and comforting. KB and I ran up the stairs and jumped into the tub, which had already been filled with warm water. We took a short bath, scrubbing the sand out of our hair and ears. Then we slipped into my room where Mama had set my same pair of PJs; they were blue. KB and I were so worn out from our day of adventure, we didn't even notice that Pop hadn't come home. We snuggled into my quilted sheets, KB nestled right at my chest under the covers, and we were asleep within five minutes.



To be continued...



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# The Power of Silence

story & photo SARAH CRUTCHFIELD

We live in a world full of dings, dongs, chirps, updates, notifications, friend requests, and news feeds. All tailored to our liking...whatever our heart desires...kittens playing with yarn inside a shoe, people falling in public places, again, whatever your little heart desires. We are also bombarded at every turn with things to buy that will promise to help us lose weight, be happy, live longer, get taller, longer hair or whatever someone can think up.

The one thing we get very little of is quiet, a real quiet and space. The space to allow ourselves time without stimulation, inundation and pressure to be doing something, anything to stay busy.

Our society and thus our minds demand that we are productive, engaged, and always striving to be the one who can do everything. In such a stimulating and demanding environment, our minds literally don't know what to do with downtime and the need to disconnect, disengage and unplug.

In the fall of 2017, I embarked on an amazing weekend of quiet time and reflection with an amazing group of women. We spent from dinner on Friday night until breakfast on Sunday in silence. This didn't mean that we were alone, but sharing space together in the comfort of silence.

To be honest, the first evening was uncomfortable for me. I had never spent time around others without speaking and using non-verbal cues to communicate. My mind was racing with thoughts like, "This is super uncomfortable and weird," "How in the world am I going to do this for the WHOLE weekend?" My monkey brain was going crazy! I decided to go to bed early. I drifted off to sleep that night with my mind just chatting away, with no real direction or purpose, just needing to fill the silence with something, even if it was only between my ears.

I woke up Saturday morning early, more relaxed. My thoughts were sleepy and slow to stir. Throughout the day, the endless chatter, rambling really, in my mind would get louder and quieter. I started to notice that I was enjoying the time with myself. Taking the time to hear the thoughts I push out because they are softer and thus more easily drowned out by the noise of everyday life.

The uncomfortable thoughts, the ones we all know are there but seem to ignore because we don't really have time to feel them started bubbling to the surface. I made friends with those too while looking out across Bogue Sound in a rustic outdoor chapel with a cross made of driftwood. I looked down at my feet as I watched them swing back and forth like so many years ago as a camper at Camp Trinity. I became so comfortable with the silence that Saturday it became like a warm blanket on a cold winter day. My mind was calmer and my spirit was dancing.

That Sunday morning, looking to the end of the silence I felt a tinge of sadness. I had become quite fond of my friend "silence" and the time we had spent together. A new appreciation for quiet and stillness was upon me.

Now I know, not everyone has the time to go on a weekend silent retreat, however, there are ways in which you can have one at home. If a whole weekend doesn't fit with your busy lifestyle or kids or husband or whatever might come up at home, an hour, afternoon, evening or ten minutes might be a good place to start.

*Here are some ways to have your own silent retreat at home.*

1. *Put away the electronics, smart phones, and smart watches. Anything that might take you away from the time you are intentionally setting aside for yourself.*
2. *Expect a busy mind to list all of the reasons you do not have time to be taking this time for yourself. Trust me, your thoughts will run wild and try to be very convincing that there are a thousand other things you could be doing at this moment.*
3. *Give yourself some structure when you first get started. Create a vision board for yourself for the year, journal, draw, paint, etc. Whatever helps relax you and brings you back to center.*
4. *Be gentle with yourself. Whether you have a day long silent retreat or try and can't stand the silence and idle time, envelop yourself in love. There is no right or wrong way.*

# Living a life full of love, ambition & courage

story Jenny Clore  
photos Celeste Walker

In mid-January I received a message from Les High, publisher of *The News Reporter* (NR), telling me there would be a group of 40 homeschoolers visiting the NR for a tour. He further explained he had a scheduling conflict and asked that I lead the tour. This simple scheduling conflict gave me the incredible honor of meeting Lily Walker. Lily is a seven year old girl, who when she saw me, immediately walked up to me and gave me the biggest hug. From that moment, she was my new buddy. She walked with me around *The News Reporter*, sometimes holding my hand or my arm. You could tell this little girl's heart was full of love and ready to express it to those around her. Reese, her 9 year old sister, was also in the group. During the tour, I asked Reese if her family was able to go to the Columbus County Fair. She replied, "No. My sister (Lily) has leukemia. But she just had her last treatment and is in remission! Soon we can start going to places like that!" She continued with excitement in her eyes, "Our family also was awarded a trip to Disney World from Make a Wish! I can't WAIT to go there!" I immediately connected to Lily and Reese Walker. These two little girls were filled with such love and joy! I was able to meet with the Walker family in late January to hear more about their story and felt com-

pelled to share their incredible journey with you.

Three days after Lily was born, they discovered she had Down Syndrome. I say "discovered" because it wasn't immediately apparent Lily had Down Syndrome. After a few tests and ensuring Lily was in great health, the doctors released the Walker family to go home.



*Lily Walker shares her smile in late August 2016 before she was diagnosed with Leukemia.*

Jim and Celeste Walker, Lily's parents, explained to me that they'd had a sense of peace being at the hospital; it felt as if the around-the-clock check-ins by medical staff helped them feel as if they had a "safety net" for the unknown. But after a conversation with the doctor, Jim realized that the way they love and care for Lily is no different than what they did for their first daughter, Reese. Just like Reese, Lily will have developmental milestones and like every child, the sisters would each move at their own pace. The doctor suggested Lily might be one year behind developmentally, but overall, she was a healthy and very capable baby girl. And that has been proven to be true over and over.

As the two sisters have grown up together, only 21 months apart, Reese continues to be instrumental in Lily's progress. Lily is consistently meeting and exceeding doctors' expectations. "We didn't have to push Lily because

Reese was pulling her.” Jim said. As many younger siblings, Lily wants to be just like her big sister. And even today, Lily wants to stick close to Reese’s side at all times.

In August 2016, Lily began showing signs of being uncomfortable and in pain. She fell to the floor and was in complete agony. Celeste took her to the doctor who ordered an x-ray. Everything was clear and in place. The next day, Celeste noticed Lily had limited range of motion in her elbows and they were swollen. Another x-ray but nothing to explain her discomfort. A blood test was ordered by the pediatrician which determined Lily’s sedimentation rate (indicating inflammation in the body) was nearly 125% higher than normal. They began to consider Lily might have juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. One day, Lily passed out in her carseat and Celeste drove her straight to the Emergency Room. They were immediately sent to UNC Chapel Hill Medical Center for more extensive testing. After four different rounds of blood work and a full body x-ray, none of the typical leukemia markers were present. However, the body x-ray did expose five compression fractures located in her spine, which explained her lack of enthusiasm to walk or move.

With still no answer to what caused these fractures, physicians decided to run one more round of blood work and sent the Walker family home. Lily’s endocrinologist called Chapel Hill and asked the doctor to run one more test. This was the test that would dramatically change Lily’s treatment plan for the next two years.

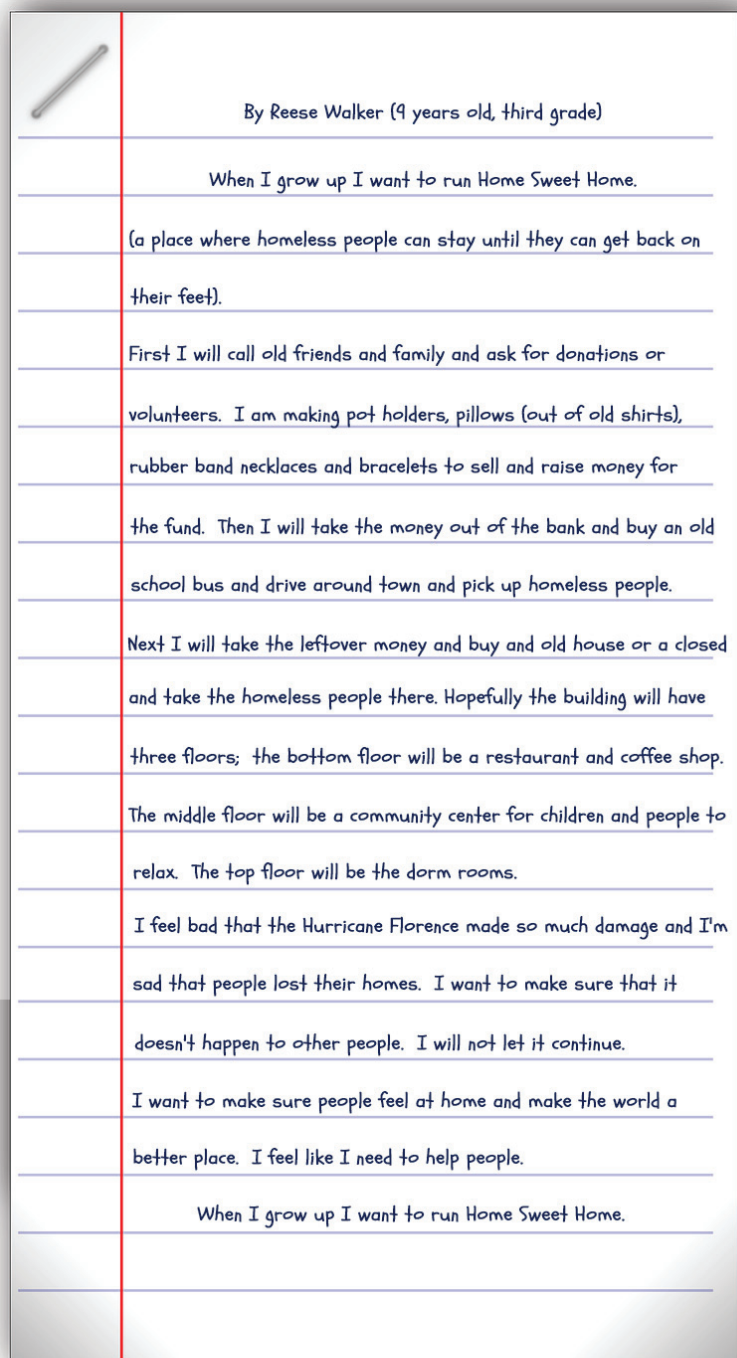
They received a call later that evening from Dr. Stuart Gold, the lead oncologist at UNC Chapel Hill, who told

them he wanted to see Lily at UNC that evening. He provided no other information. Without knowing the results of Lily’s test or why they needed to get to UNC that night, they quickly packed up their family and headed back to UNC.

Jim said the first time they went to Chapel Hill for tests they were sent to the seventh floor for general pediatric services. When they arrived the second time, they were sent to the fifth floor. He recounted that it didn’t take long to read the posters and see the other kids, to know the fifth floor wasn’t the floor you wanted your child to be on. They met with Dr. Gold and he explained that Lily had leukemia. Jim said the next few minutes of their conversation felt like an eternity. Trying to process everything Dr. Gold was saying was almost impossible. Dr. Gold then went on to explain that UNC’s program had a 97 percent success rate and he would personally be monitoring and customizing Lily’s treatment so it would be most successful. Lily’s treatment began immediately, and Celeste and Lily didn’t leave the hospital for five weeks. The next two years consisted of three month-long stays and three shorter visits at UNC to receive treatments.

“Every time Lily has shocked us with a diagnosis, we’ve had to kind of pause and reset our perspective and take in what that means for the future. But also understand it might not mean anything for the future,” Jim said. There is a sense of magnetism that draws

you to the Walker family. Their positive outlook on life and optimism for the present and the future radiates from them. In the midst of their world being turned upside



*Lily’s sister, Reese Walker wrote an essay to explain her dream of opening a non profit named Home Sweet Home.*

down, they continued to evaluate the situation and move forward. Celeste went on to explain how they felt after they learned of Lily's official diagnosis. "I don't think either one of us got mad or questioned why, but we both just said, okay, what do we do next?"

Throughout those two years, Lily never ceased to amaze her family and the doctors. Her incredible love for people and life made her treatments so much more bearable. Lily had some kind of test or treatment every day for the first five weeks, and many of them hurt or made her sick. Yet she seemingly never remembered how much it made her sick or how much the procedure hurt; rather each day she greeted each person who came to treat her with exuberant love. One beautiful characteristic many children with Down Syndrome have is their huge heart and optimism for each day. It's this optimism that helped Lily to not once be scared nor allow her treatment to faze her in the slightest. Before Lily was very far into her treatments, the ache in her bones lessened. It was obvious to her parents that Lily was happy to be feeling better. It seemed to Jim and Celeste that she knew the doctors and nurses were helping her get well.

Toward the end of her treatment, Lily began physical therapy to learn to walk again and regain strength. After two years of doctors' appointments, chemotherapy, spinal taps and body scans, Lily completed her treatment on January 11, 2019. With her family, doctors and nurses surrounding her, she was able to ring the bell signifying her completion and success of treatment. For the first time, Celeste said, "she was nervous about all the attention, so Reese rang the bell for her!" Lily is back to being a typical 7-year-old girl who gets to play with her big sister and live each day to the fullest.



*Treatment completion bell that Lily rang after two years of treatment at UNC Children's Hospital on January 11, 2019.*



*The Walker family living a life full of love, ambition and courage.*

In the midst of pizza and conversation with the Walker family, not only did I get to hear about Lily and her journey, but Reese was excited to share with me what she wants to be when she grows up. I was expecting to hear how she wanted to be a teacher or an astronaut, but instead she began to tell me about "Home Sweet Home." This nine year old girl wants to open up a non-profit to help people who are homeless have a home and job. She then explained in detail her vision and I asked her to share it with you.

You may wonder why I decided to share the Walker family's story with you. I believe there are people who are brought into our lives to bring us joy and give us hope. Lily's love of life is contagious and reminded me to love life no matter our circumstances. Waking up each day to be happy is a choice; a choice all of us need to make more often. Reese inspired me to know that it's okay to have big dreams and aspirations. This 9-year-old explained Home Sweet Home as if she's starting construction tomorrow. And one day, I believe without a doubt, she will open Home Sweet Home. Her confidence and aspiration are refreshing. Jim and Celeste have an outlook on life that I hope always to have. Jim told me during our interview, "In spite of some adversities, we have been so fortunate." Their gratitude for family and life is inspiring.

All of us are faced with adversities of every shape and size. Every day we are given a choice as to how we work through them. I hope and pray that I will approach life with Lily's love, Reese's ambition, and Jim & Celeste's courage and gratitude.

I have a feeling you'll get to meet them one day... maybe at the ribbon cutting of Home Sweet Home.

# Etiquette classes, a happy occasion

story Clara Cartrette  
photos contributed



*Belle and Cinderella interact with the younger girls.*



*These young ladies are ready for the tea party.*



*Little ladies listen to the manners class speaker.*

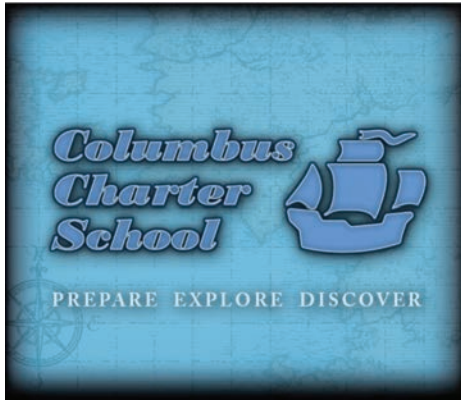
Dixie Belle Place, Tabor City's beautiful bed and breakfast, was abuzz on a recent Saturday when several young ladies came for etiquette and manners classes. Pam Byrd, who manages Dixie Belle Place, taught classes as well as her daughter, Alex Byrd and Miss South Columbus Caroline Garland. Charlotte N. Norris, owner and operator of Once Upon A Fairy Tale entertainment business was responsible for an appearance by Cinderella and Belle.

Pam Byrd saw a carriage outside the window in the afternoon, and then discovered that Cinderella and Belle were there to greet and entertain the girls. There were two groups, morning classes for ages 8 to 11, and afternoon classes for ages 4 to 7. All participated in the etiquette and manners classes, learning such things as how to sit properly, stoop, wave, put on and remove gloves and a number of other things.

The older class also worked on Girl Scout badges and were served lunch. The younger girls, many of them dressed in little ball gowns, enjoyed their etiquette classes and the mom and daughter tea party later in the day. Obviously they learned a lot, as their moms reported back to Pam Byrd that their little girls were correcting their parents when they went out to eat Saturday night.



*Cinderella and Belle pose with the younger girls.*



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# THE JOURNEY TO ME

story & photo SAMANTHA SINGLER

**D**escribe yourself in six words. A simple request that I would love to answer and will soon. If you were to ask me around two years ago to do the same though, I would simply lie. I would look you right in the face and be too afraid to admit I thought very little of myself. I had no idea who I was. Having a tough time in life, I simply wanted to give up.

I was a fresh single mother who had been worn down after 10 years of just a lot. I was having to meet with Families First, go to court, doctors diagnosing me with anxiety and PTSD, and all the while I was pretending to be ok. All the while trying to make it one more day and be strong for my kids, trying to normalize our new life in our new home. Having to get up every day and smiling for family, work and the world. You would not know any of this by simply looking at me. I was full of faith, no matter how battered it was at this point; this is all I had to fight with. I was a smiler, a helper, the one who made sure everyone around me was taken care of and happy because I wanted everyone to feel love, simply because I felt none because of my situation. I had been the faithful wife, the loving mother, the all around great person and this....this is my life???

Whoever I was, this was me??

So to describe myself in six words that short time ago would have been ashamed, failure, alone, unsure, lost, damaged. Harsh words I know. I cry every time I read them. I felt so alone. I could not find anything out there that told me everything was going to be ok, no matter how many articles I read. I could not find someone who knew what I was going through. I wanted so badly for anyone to just snap me back to reality and make me believe them when they said, "What you are going through is normal. I've been there, it will get better."

Yes, I had plenty of people say these things but they did not really know what it was like to not LOVE myself, to not

KNOW myself. At the time, I did not know that I had no clue who I was. I just knew I was lost and damaged goods. And I was petrified to tell someone these things because it was not normal. I was never looking for a pity party and to hear the words, "I'm so sorry" still to this day makes me cringe. So because of a moment I have come to name my "wow realization moment," I decided once I learned who I was and loved me again, I would make sure I shared my

story to maybe reach out and help even that one soul who just wants the one glimmer of hope that things do get better. So if this is you, I hope you enjoy and I hope this helps. This is my journey to me...

## My wow moment

I can remember the day my life changed forever. The day that simultaneously wrecked my whole existence and made a way for me to become me again. I am a very big believer that all of us will have one moment in our lives that will change them for better or worse. Like I previously stated, I have come to know it as a "wow realization" moment. It spirals you into a battle for your life and soul. It is up to you though, to claim your life and love. It will cause you to go on a journey only you can live and only you control. Of all places, my journey to reclaim myself began at Hill's at Lake Waccamaw in the chip aisle. You read that correctly; as with most good southern stories, mine was

brought on by food.

Since everything had been going on and coming at me like one thing after another, like a freight train, my mother had the kids for the weekend to give me time to get some stuff together and take some "me" time. So for the first time in forever I was faced with cooking for only myself. Walking through the store I slowly began to realize I was skipping certain aisles because "the ex" didn't eat those foods, or the kids didn't need those snacks. Then it happened. On the chip aisle I froze looking at what seemed like a thousand different chips and thought, "What type of



Samantha Singler

food do I like????” I called my sister and still in this aisle I was breaking down, trying to explain to her what was happening. I remember saying, “I don’t know me. I don’t even know what I like to eat. I’m alone and have no idea what to do.” She consoled me as she always did, telling me I had survived everything thus far and I was a strong woman who will get through this, too. I will forever be grateful for that two-minute pep talk. She didn’t realize how powerful those simple words were.

This was it. As simple as this moment was, this was my “wow” moment of realization. Up to that point I had dealt with so much, but to realize I had no idea who I was anymore was enough to shake me to my core. I remember checking out with a single diet Sundrop and a pack of crackers, and from Hills to my home seven miles away, I cried more than I ever have. I sat in front of my home and right then and there, decided this wow moment I would allow to destroy me so I could allow new life in me. I sat there, what seemed like forever dying, refusing to let myself out of the car until I decided I was ready. I screamed, punched my steering wheel, held myself, prayed, and then promised myself after everything I would not become what happened to me. I would NOT allow my situation determine how I viewed the world. I promised my kids they would finally have the life they deserved. I promised I would become ME again. I knew the path would be hard and sometimes impossible, but again I had faith if nothing else. When I was ready I stepped out of the car. That first step was slow motion, but I was ready. So I began.

### **The truth of the journey**

Growing up watching all these different movies about people getting their lives back after trauma, you would think learning to love yourself and finding who you are would be easy. Well, it’s not. You don’t get to wake up to birds singing and you have an epiphany about how amazing you are. You have to fight for it everyday. It is a lot of hard work. It is an ugly mess that can be terrifying and exciting all at once. Many days you have to go backwards. You’re going to try many different things and fail. You have to keep the old memories so you know what not to go back to. You heard that right. No more “new year, new me” nonsense. You should not say goodbye to your old self; you actually need those memories. You need to hold on tight without holding grudges, so those days and nights when you are breaking down, you can pull yourself back and say “I survived that, I beat that storm, with God beside me I’ll beat this one too.” My faith brought me this far, and I do not wish to be off-putting to some who are not religious. This was my strength, though. I have fought many battles in life and have had many times and even though I felt alone and had no one, I did have my faith that at some point things had to get better and that helped pull me through.

### **Feelings are valid**

Going through everything that happened was hard, I

will never deny that. Some people can not go through hard times and keep it together. I know I couldn’t. I still have my days where I want to throw things and cry; that’s just how it goes. Plenty of times I wanted to just scream at everyone, and a few times I did. The divorce part is hard. It was a struggle every day to pretend everything was ok while trying to reclaim myself. There are times you want to slip back into old thinking of you not being good enough, I must be a bad person for all this happening to me, etc. That is negative thinking that I cannot afford to have.

At times I was made to feel that I shouldn’t be upset. If I showed at all that I was upset, I was asked was it because I missed my husband. The answer was NO. But being thrown into single mom life is hard and it becomes very easy to let your emotions override the truth that life really is going good. The best example of this was when It was left to me to explain to my children that even though me and my ex had been separated for around six months, I had to tell them he was having a baby soon. I had to do that and not act upset. I was EXPECTED to not be upset. If I cried at all through this process, people thought I was cracking and most expected me to. I had to be single mama, supporting my children alone, thankful my family helped me if I needed it, and be ok. That was very unhealthy. I did not settle not being able to show emotions. So a part of finding myself was saying it is ok to have feelings. I explained to others as well that it is ok to be angry, as long as it does not hold you back. I can be sad, angry, worried, happy, any emotion, as long as I had control over it. And they respect me more for it. Feelings through trauma and finding yourself are valid. I cannot stress this enough. Never let anyone tell you any different.

### **Self-love and self-care**

A big battle for me came in the form of self-care. I thought that to love myself again and know myself, I had to master all the normal techniques in self-love you read about. Real talk, ladies and gentlemen, it does not always work. It actually made me want to give up. I believe that some of those self-care techniques help keep your sanity, yet when you feel like you have already lost that sanity, these articles could seem to be overwhelming as it was to me. Meditation brought on memories and fears I could not yet face. I would have an anxiety attack just thinking about meditation. I was a single mom, I had no time for long strolls through the woods.

Also since I was a single mom the whole “take a nice long bubble bath” was a joke in itself. So how did I begin to find the path to love me without these self-care techniques all the professionals raved about? I started simple. Through the whole process I did not tell many people, if any, what I was doing. I kept the whole thing to myself. I did not want to be looked at as weird, so I didn’t think I should try to normalize the self-love game. So I did the most female thing I could think of to start with. I got a haircut. Then I got my nails done. I had not done these things in years.

Yeah, maybe a simple trim here and there but I cut 20 inches off, dyed my hair professionally, and got my nails done. I instantly felt great. And people noticed and gave me compliments, which really gave a jump start to the love. Even though it was not normal, I began to take selfies. I became the selfie queen. This worked for me though. I can still look back to two years ago and say, "Wow"! I have come such a long way, I am so proud of me."

I took pictures of anything I did. I can look back and use my memories for my benefit. I found what worked for me, even though it was not conventional. It's imperative to know what YOUR self-care is. If it's staying to yourself and not talking for a few days, fine. If the usual stuff does work for you, that is great. In my situation I had to get creative. I found the importance of crying and not holding in emotions. I have become a professional cryer but it makes me feel better. I draw and journal whenever I need to. I dance around my house blasting music. I blast music driving down the road. Every kind of music. I will make my kids laugh and embarrass them by jumping out at stop signs or stores and dancing in front of the car. Everyday I get up, look at myself in the mirror and everyday tell myself "I am enough. I am a strong woman. I am not what my situation has been, but a Queen ready to conquer the world." With these acts of love and care for myself, I have created my own happiness, which in turn has created me learning more about me.

### **Appreciate everyone in your journey**

I have come to realize everyone who comes in your life on your journey has something to teach you and I appreciate every one of them, good or bad. My favorites of course are the ones who have my back, no matter what. The ones like my best friend that will be there to tell me "Ok, enough crying. Wipe your face, big head; you got this," and will forever have my back and I will forever have hers. I also love those who have shared their own journey with me. This in a way makes me a part of their story because they are helping me gain the confidence in sharing this with you. More than anything, these people have helped me see that it's ok to normalize struggles. We all have them. There is NOTHING to be ashamed of. It's ok to go talk to a therapist. It is ok to get help through the struggle. They have taught me you can choose to bathe in sorrow or stand your ground and grow to be able to help others. With that said, you must also grow with the not so fun people you cross. There are some that judge me without even knowing my past and that's ok. They only see a single mom who has been married twice, so something has to be wrong with me. At first judgment hurt, I will not lie. But part of the journey to finding me is to have the capability to say that's ok if they don't get it. No one has to get it. And you going through your journey, I feel you need to understand that as well. Not everyone will get it. Not everyone will understand you being guarded and secretive with things. The way I see it being you is being comfortable in the middle of the judgment and

all. Once you come to that way of thinking it releases so much and allows so much positivity to come into existence. It is a game changer. More importantly, those who do me wrong during my way to me will not ever take me off the path to finding myself and loving myself. This has taught me that I do have a lot of love to give and they may need that love. So there will never be a person I won't go out of my way to help and love.

### **Living my best life**

The biggest part about finding me again has been to actually living for me. I live for my kids of course, but I also learned it was crucial to be happy with all aspects of my life. When I started my journey I was in a different job, and as much as I loved it, I wanted to be able to help people. I wanted to make a difference. I'm very proud to say that I worked so hard until I got a career I absolutely love. I am able to help others and everyday I talk to those who are on similar paths as me. I have people ask me what is my secret, how am I so happy. I can share my story confidently knowing it is helping others and it is the greatest feeling. I am truly ready to live my best life. I am ready for love, to receive the love I deserve and knowing who I am and loving myself has also taught me what I deserve. I can be a mom who is unafraid of what my future brings. I can be there for my kids and show them what true strength is.

### **Final thoughts**

The past two years have been the hardest yet best years of my life. I do have my times when I get angry and still feel some things are not fair. I am still dealing with things because of the past 10 years that I will never be able to escape and I am working daily to get through them. My journey has not been about revenge or what I have gone through, or downing anyone. My journey to me has been just for me. I can look back and actually thank my struggle to be me again. I can confidently stand on my two feet as Wonder Woman, earning everything and working toward everything I deserve. Even on my bad days, I can still find there is light to shine, there is life to live. I want to seek the beauty in every day, even if that is just helping one person a day smile. I know now that there are people who know what I am going through. It is normal and ok to feel overwhelmed and to fall short. I do it every other day. I may not be mom of the year. As a matter of fact I have dubbed myself the Hot Mess Mom of the year. The key through it all though, is to never give up, never stop loving myself and life. I am forever on the journey to me and continue to learn who I am, but I love me even more every day. I live my life with no regrets because every day has something to teach me. I am so excited every day to see what life has in store for me. Sure, every day isn't the best. But you have to have some bad days to truly appreciate the good. So back to the original request... Six words I Samantha Singler would chose to describe myself: I am Me...Unique, Confident, Survivor, Proud, Loved, Unstoppable.

# YWCA IS ON A MISSION SETTING YOUNG MOMS UP FOR SUCCESS

## The YWCA Early Parenthood Program in Columbus County

story *MONICA DEESE*

The YWCA Lower Cape Fear is proud to announce their newest free community outreach program, the Early Parenthood Program of Columbus County. The Early Parenthood Program is for young women ages twelve to nineteen who are currently pregnant or who have children.

Young parents and their children are a vulnerable and high-risk population in Columbus County.

As our CEO, Charrise Hart, said, Columbus County is ranked 12th out of 100 counties in North Carolina for the highest rate of teen pregnancies. The Early Parenthood Program aims to increase support young moms have in the home and in school in order to set them up for success as women and as parents."

Our goals are to provide young mothers with the tools needed to stay enrolled in school and graduate, improve access to prenatal and community resources, reduce repeat teen pregnancies, and develop strong parenting skills to raise healthy and school-ready children.

Eligible mothers must be attending school or enrolled in an equivalent program, and residing in Columbus County. The program is free to qualified participants.

Area doctors are already referring parents and children to the program, and YWCA hopes that Flourish readers will help identify young families who can benefit from it as well!

For more information on the Early Parenthood Program, contact Program Coordinator Monica Deese at [epp@ywca-lowercapefear.org](mailto:epp@ywca-lowercapefear.org), by phone at 910-520-4819, or visit [www.ywca-lowercapefear.org/epp](http://www.ywca-lowercapefear.org/epp).

*Early Parenthood Program leaders use a curriculum called "Parents As Teachers" Curriculum, designed to help young mothers nurture their children's development and learning during the early years. YWCA created the Early Parenthood Program with help from the North Carolina Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, and the Columbus County Partnership for Children.*

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# The Drawing Board

## ALPHA

BY ISABEL HUMPHREYS

The years have passed  
His leadership stands  
But his bones are bruised and feeble

The sky this night is clouded and grim  
The moon cannot be seen  
His stomach turns with unknowing

He waits this night in spiculate brush  
His pack mates by his side  
He feels the soil with delicate grace

His ears are perked  
His eyes are forward  
His time is closing in

He lurches from his quiet spot  
His quarry, fit and fleeting  
His pack, they follow swiftly

'Tis he who must make his kill  
'Tis he who must move quick  
No longer can he feel uncertain

He huffs and heaves as he nears closer  
His strides are long and smooth  
With every leap his age grows clearer

His heart beats faster  
His focus intense  
His moment is now upon him

His pack mates watch with anticipation  
He prepares for the killing pounce  
His hind legs give without warning

His prey is missed  
It has time to scarper  
He is left to rest

His breath has left his lungs to briskly  
He is left with aching pain  
His pack mates have no time to waste

He looks on with great fear  
Shame toying with his mind  
He fears his return to sanctuary

He finds his bearings  
His body fatigued  
Yet his pride tells him to proceed

Approaching with caution  
His pack is well fed  
Yet no embrace is rewarded

Their eyes are dark  
Their teeth are bared  
No longer is he welcome

He stands his ground  
Adrenaline released  
Body seldom feels pain

His attackers approach  
Too familiar are they  
Emotionally distraught is the leader

He fights like a warrior  
He pains like a mother  
However, he will not concede

He knows too well  
This position he takes  
He will battle until 'tis secure

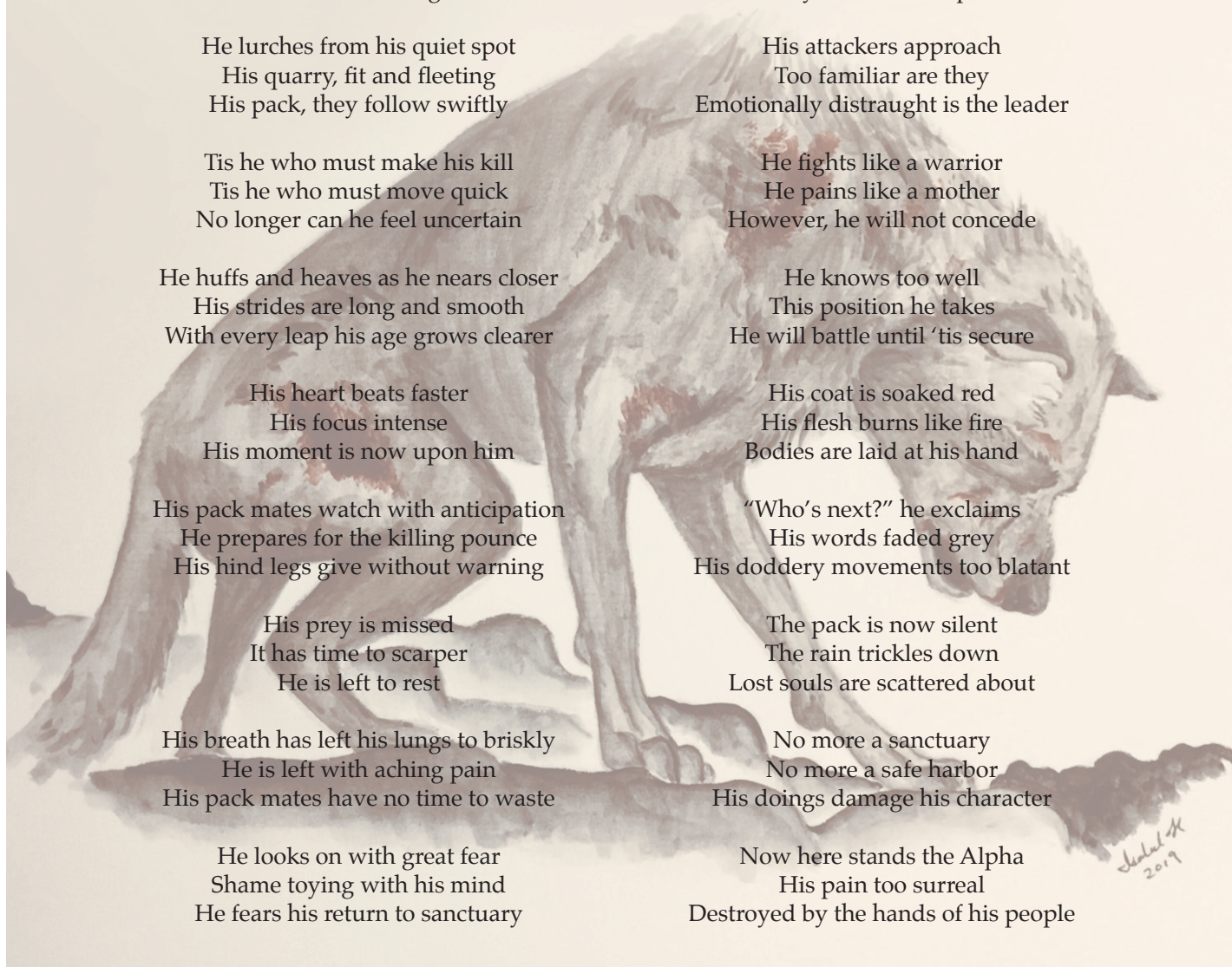
His coat is soaked red  
His flesh burns like fire  
Bodies are laid at his hand

"Who's next?" he exclaims  
His words faded grey  
His dodderly movements too blatant

The pack is now silent  
The rain trickles down  
Lost souls are scattered about

No more a sanctuary  
No more a safe harbor  
His doings damage his character

Now here stands the Alpha  
His pain too surreal  
Destroyed by the hands of his people



Isabel H  
2019



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