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“There I stood, encircled by women whom I had just met, from a community where I had lived for 23 years, sharing this intimate moment. I felt encouraged.”



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Welcome to Flourish! A magazine from The News Reporter family of publications dedicated to women of all ages and interests. Our talented staff and freelance writers, photographers and graphic designers put their hearts into showing us the many levels of depth, compassion and inspiration found in Columbus County.

News Reporter staff writer and resident wordsmith Diana Matthews gets credit for naming Flourish, which I think perfectly conveys beauty and strength without boundaries.

Isabel Humphreys, summer intern and rising junior at Whiteville High School, brought Flourish to life with her illustrations and colorful cover design of a real "steel" magnolia with flair.

With this new project, friendships, discovery and appreciation have flourished among the many collaborators. Amy Ransom said in her story, "We are better together." I believe it has been true for us, and I hope it's true for you, too.

— Stuart High Rogers



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# September Krueger

## Igniting fine arts at SCC

story MARGARET HIGH

photos by JUSTIN SMITH and courtesy of SEPTEMBER KRUEGER

Art instructor September Krueger works quietly on a painting while Dave Matthews Band plays softly in the background. She's taking advantage of summer break; of the few periods when she has enough free time to pursue her own work.

She's drawing a wren, the king of birds, for a silk scarf. The small bird flits around in repeating patterns, boasting about his cunning victory over the eagle. Using blues and purples, Krueger illustrates the legend of a time when all the birds of the forest held a parliament and agreed that whichever bird could fly the highest would be crowned king. The wren hid on the eagle's wings, jumping off when the eagle couldn't fly any higher, and won the competition.

"I love the myths that go along with birds," Krueger says. "I like the opportunity for not just the bird itself but the story that's inside. It's coming from our own relations."

Part of Krueger's creative process is bird watching with her husband, Curtis Krueger, who is a photographer. September finds inspiration in nature and takes advantage of her husband's photography while creating.

Curtis is the reason September moved to Wilmington, migrating from her hometown of Harrisburg, Penn. A lifelong learner, September immersed herself in classes at Cape Fear Community College in Wilmington before becoming an art instructor at Southeastern Community College.

*The Wren and the Hawk, a quilt by September Krueger*

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“She brings to the classroom her background in textiles and a passion for always learning.”

She brings to the classroom her background in textiles and a passion for always learning.

Krueger attended Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, a quick drive from her hometown, Harrisburg, and from her mother.

“She absolutely encouraged anything in arts,” Krueger says. “She never said you can’t do that, or you can’t try that.”

Summers were spent in dance camps, taking art classes, or doing gymnastics. Krueger’s mother worked tirelessly to keep her three children happy and in the arts, never allowing her single-mother status to hinder their opportunities.

“Looking back as an adult and thinking back on my teenage years and I know what my mom was doing for us,” Krueger says, “I know how hard she worked for us. I know what it took to put kids through school, working full time, dinner all the other duties of being a parent and doing that on her own I just put her on a pedestal.”

After undergrad, Krueger moved back to Harrisburg and worked at a handmade clothing company. She met Curtis at a fine arts festival in Charlotte while working for the company.

Krueger took advantage of the change in scenery and started graduate school at East Carolina University.

“I actually went back to graduate school because my past had been so technical,” Krueger says. “I really wanted to explore the fine arts side of textiles. I hadn’t looked at textiles as vibrant art. To me, for the longest time, it had just been fabric, clothing and functional things.”

One summer in graduate school, Krueger traveled with her class to Thailand to study silk and weaving traditions.

Away from the bustling, busy cities in Thailand, the northeast region houses silkworm farms and wooden looms. Thai silk is coveted around the world and comes at a premium. Women still harvest silkworms by hand, a delicate job that requires feeding the worms mulberry leaves, using bark and leaves for dye, and boiling thousands of cocoons to extract the silk.

*// Woodstorks on lithograph // Silkscreen painting a scarf*

Interested in weaving traditions, Krueger marveled at the history and craftsmanship in Thailand.

History and art intersections are some of the things Krueger teaches at Southeastern Community College, where she has been on the faculty since 2011.

“It’s so wonderful to think about the intersection with any form of art and all of the other things of the world. I teach art in change all the time,” Krueger says. Every work of art can be a starting point to “think about how it was made, what’s the history of it, where does it come from. That’s the most important lesson.”

Becoming a teacher was always in the back of Krueger’s mind. She comes from a family of instructors and was inspired by art instructors along her career.

Her inquisitive mind and tender nature make her a steady and reassuring instructor. She uses her classes as an opportunity to expose students in other majors, like chemistry or journalism, to the vast possibilities art provides.

Curtis has come into September’s classroom to do a pinhole photography workshop. Many of the exhibiting artists in the Wyche Gallery have also offered workshops to students and faculty at SCC.

“It’s an excellent opportunity for students to interact with practicing artists” Krueger says.

September finds value in exposing her students to different perspectives and ideas through her art appreciation course.

“Everyone in the community that’s coming to the college gets exposure to new things,” Krueger says. “I think people are warm and receptive to things they get exposed to (in art). Art can be more than one interpretation, so you can hold on to what you know, but it always expands your mind.”

Krueger says the college has provided its students opportunities in arts to transfer to a university in a Fine Art or Art Education degree. A portfolio class has recently been approved by the North Carolina Community College system, which will help art majors develop their portfolios to increase their chances of receiving scholarships to additional programs or have a more competitive job application. September says it would greatly help art majors at SCC if it becomes a course.

In particular, Krueger hopes to expand technology at the college and partnerships with local artists and arts councils to provide real-world applications.



// Krueger gives Leika McLaurin instruction in her Drawing I class at SCC



Recently, two of Krueger's art students received scholarships to continue pursuing arts at the university level. For a teacher, that's great success.

As an artist and a teacher, Krueger has never prioritized money over creativity. To her, money doesn't define success.

"I think about someone like Kate Spade," September says. The late designer achieved "great success in fashion and design, and yet you wonder what it was she was struggling with. That sort of greater wealth still doesn't guarantee that it's the happiness you need. Success is tied into things like family, community and having an outlet for your creativity."

The community at Southeastern has greatly contributed to her students' success, Krueger says. The small size of the college and its history allow Krueger to get to know her students on a personal, individual level. She knows when a student would benefit from a nudge, or when a student needs extra time on an assignment.

While fostering her students' creativity, Krueger makes sure to continue feeding her own. She looks to artists like her husband, or Andy Farkas of Asheville, and draws from their need to create.

"Over and over again I meet people who make and create, but it's not about whether or not they sell it," Krueger says. "They still make art work because they want to and they need to."

Maybe not all of her students feel a need to create, but Krueger instills in them the wisdom of looking beyond mere job necessity to personal necessity. Another motto she imparts is, "Just get on with it."

As it was for the wren, not allowing assumed circumstances to get in the way of success is crucial to Krueger.

September hopes her students will keep on "pursuing and acknowledging that desire for knowledge. Never let that go. The things that define success don't have a dollar sign."

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# Should vs Could

## A mid 30s freakout

story SARAH CRUTCHFIELD

“I think all women, from an early age, have a vision of what their lives should look like in the future.”

Getting older can bring up powerful emotions at any age. For example, my 16th birthday was one of the happiest days of my life: that freedom of being in the car by myself for the first time—there was nothing like it. However, this last birthday didn't have the same feel to it.

I turned 35 over the summer. A week and a half before my birthday I had one of the biggest panic attacks I have had in a long time.

It was a Monday. Work was going well; I was busy. I went over to Sophie's to pick up lunch, and as I was waiting, I started to feel shortness of breath and some chest pains. In a complete panic, I drove to urgent care, which immediately sent me to the hospital.

Needless to say, I ended up at the ER, where I hadn't been since I broke my arm in 5th grade, hooked up to monitors, getting a chest x-ray and the sweet doctor coming back and telling me everything was excellent, and he thought I was going to make it another 40 or 50 years. I drove home from the hospital utterly embarrassed about the afternoon's events and wondering what had just happened. I had panic attacks a lot in my teens and 20s but hadn't had them much lately, and this one felt different. I believe, after consulting the reliable and completely accurate resource of Google, that my diagnosis could be described as a mid 30s freakout.

So it got me thinking, “What just happened to me? Am I the only one that this has happened to?”

I had been having a lot of self-critical thoughts going through my mind at the time: “I should be married. I should have kids. I shouldn’t be back home living with my parents at my age. I should be at a different place in my life right now.”

I think all women, from an early age, have a vision of what their lives should look like in the future. My “shoulds” looked like attending N.C. State, joining the same sorority as my sister, married by 28, a job I love, first kid by 30, charming home with a dog, etc. It was a very specific list of the way things should look. Life has a sense of humor and never allows things to play out exactly the way you want it to. However, you can see how we set these expectations of how our lives “should” look, and when those dates, milestones, or ages roll around, we are let down because we are not where we thought we “should” be.

“My freakout early this summer was strictly due to the word “should.”

In case you didn’t notice, I used the word “should” a lot in my last paragraph. We live in a “should-filled” society. Our lives “should” look a certain way. We “should” look like the models on the covers of the magazines. We “should” eat healthy every day and work out three to five days a week. We “should” know what career we want when we are entering college. We “should” know who we are by 30. We “shouldn’t” care what others think of us. We “should” be confident adults, who have everything figured out. We “shouldn’t” allow our children to play on their iPads when we have had a long day.

“Should” is a loaded word. It is a word that is full of pressure and expectation. It also isn’t an action verb; it is a modal helping verb. It is full of potential action with an accusatory tone. Should, unlike could, is full of pressure. Read the two following sentences out loud. “I should go for a run.” And, “I could go for a run.” Do you feel the difference? Should sounds like something you don’t want to do, but feel like you need to do. Could feels like a choice between things you are free to do. “Could” feels like pressure being lifted. “Should” is telling ourselves we are not good enough right here, right now.

Why do we put that pressure on ourselves? If we live with “shoulds,” then we are focusing on what we haven’t done or what we lack, not on what we are doing and what we have. If we are focusing on the “shoulds,” we aren’t appreciating the perfectly imperfect beings we already are.

We all have an inner critic. That voice in our heads that tells us that we are doing things wrong, that we won’t be successful, are a terrible parent, we won’t be happy, find the right person, etc. That voice usually stems from in-

fluencers we have come in contact with throughout our lives. It could be a parent, “friends,” teachers, coworkers, bullies, etc. We internalize those negative messages and replay them on loops in our minds throughout our lives. It eventually turns into the voice in our head, and we begin to believe it. That voice turns into all of the “shoulds” in our life, and then we beat ourselves up about them.

Let us change the conversation, though. What about the “wants” in your life? We only get one shot, as far as we know, on this journey called life so why not spend it doing things you “want” to do instead of “should” do?

My freakout early this summer was strictly due to the word “should.” I “should” be at a specific place at 35, and I’m not. I was telling myself that, approaching 35, I was not enough, in my current position in this world. Now I know that is not true and, trust me, with the amount of therapy I have had in my life, I “should” know better. However, sometimes our humanity slips up on us, and our “shoulds” come back up. That is okay. It is an excellent reminder that we are still on a small rock, circling a ball of gas, in the infinite universe.

Whether it is listening to a friend having a tough time, cooking your family a healthy meal, or praying for a sick friend, these are great examples you can focus on to give the shoulds a rest and give the wants a chance to flourish.

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April Watson

# MOVERS & MAKERS

story SYRITA MILLS

photos by JACKIE LEWIS & courtesy of APRIL WATSON and DONNA MOODY

April Watson and Donna Moody look just like your best friend next door. By day, these thirty-somethings hold down nine-to-fives, raise kids, volunteer, and tick off to-do lists. But in their off time, they are tapping into gifts that have paid big dividends and are making room for them. For most women, the idea of adding another activity to an already hectic schedule sounds like a recipe for burnout. Yet these women have discovered that engaging their creative talents is the secret sauce that lubricates the parts of their family machine.

### A Shot at Ministry

Step onto the property of April Watson, home to her family of four, and the first thing that overwhelms you is its beauty and the sense that it was made for the budding photography endeavor April started this past spring. It was May when we caught up with her -- peak graduation season. The dogwoods and azaleas were on parade, serving as the perfect backdrop for cap and gown shots. Clad in jeans, cowboy boots and manicured fingertips, April moves around the spacious county acreage like a woman in control, yet peacefulness follows her like a warm breeze. A 30-minute graduation photoshoot spills into 90, as April's creative eye takes over, setting up rustic shots and perfecting prop placements for a local student's graduation shots.

“April says her primary desire is to help people with her gifts.”



Donna Moody

This photoshoot was one of twenty done on her property as part of a project she was inspired to undertake to raise money for her youth group's week-long camping trip. One hundred percent of the profit from the photoshoots went towards the trip. It's a lot of work. Yet you can tell that April is lost in the process of creating. The weather was ideal for the early evening shots. “I have a family coming tomorrow afternoon”, she said, eyeing the clouds. “I'm hoping it doesn't rain. “The weather's behavior was crucial, as all four of the picturesque spaces where she takes her photos are located outdoors.

When April set out to do capture family portraits and special moments for people in the community, she didn't expect a huge response. The mother of two, ages 3 and 6, office manager, and the wife of a minister had very limited time. Still, April felt encouraged to pursue the project. A small announcement in an employee email was all it took to have inquiries pouring in.

“Art is something that I always wanted to do, but never took the time to. This year when it became part of ministry, it was really a blessed thing. It just fit where I was at.”



In addition to her photography, April began to paint. One late night, inspiration struck her to add this to her fundraising efforts. “I had supplies packed away and I thought I could paint. I just started while everyone was asleep and before I knew it I had 10 canvases the next morning. I got into and I really enjoyed it.”

When it comes to adding things to her plate she takes the long view, realizing some seasons are better than others. “Early on when I was more active, I didn’t have as many responsibilities. You do have stages when your kids need you more [but] then they get more independent. Sometimes you need to sit back and soak in, and ask what kind of ministry brings me joy? Really be in tune to what you’re inspired to do.”

April says her primary desire is to help people with her gifts. “Although photography could potentially take off as a business, right now it’s a ministry to others--and to me.”

#### From Donna Moody to MrsHairToday

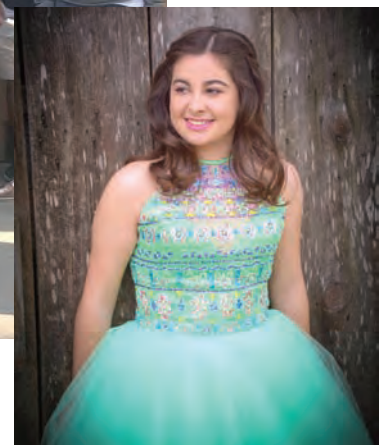
What started out as a vlog documenting hair growth has turned into a major enterprise for Donna Moody. YouTube influencer, brand ambassador and owner of natural haircare line ABEDA Curls, the woman who travels across the country challenging the mainstream beauty aesthetic and promoting girl power introduced herself to the world on a webcam from her kitchen table in Loris.

“Today, Donna is moving full throttle toward her creative and entrepreneurial goals.”

Under the moniker of MrsHairtoday, Donna shares tips and encouragement from her social media pages to women in the growing natural hair community, a movement that empowers women to embrace the curly textured hair they were born with. After razing her own mane to one and a half inches, she charts her growth, which extends far beyond her tresses. Over the past eight years, she has used her platform to touch on inspirational themes, healthy habits, and self-esteem.

The groundswell of social media voices like Moody’s has changed the way the beauty industry does business. Major cosmetic players such as L’Oréal and Unilever have sat up and taken note of the demand for curl-friendly products, rolling out merchandise with high quality ingredients and labels marked silicone-free, paraben-free, and any other criteria their customer base demands. And for credibility with consumers, they look to vloggers like Moody for a yea or nay on their newest brands. In 2011 when Donna won a billboard contest with Dark and Lovely, she saw the power of what social media could do.

Eventually, Donna’s YouTube channel caught the attention of hair companies requesting her partnership as brand ambassador. It is a ride that has taken her to major hubs such as Atlanta and New York as a contributor at hair shows and conventions. But Moody, recognizing the market demand and knowing from experience what curly girls need, soon set out to build her own brand. In September of 2017 her haircare line



// April hosted a photo shoot on her property, as part of a project to raise money for her youth group’s week-long camping trip. Pictured above is the youth group on their trip. // To the right is one of April’s photo portraits.

ABEDA curls hit the market.

Yet behind all the notoriety, Moody remembers her start as a small-town girl. “I didn’t have the glitz and the glam; I didn’t have anything. God took me from my bathroom recording on my cell phone to standing in a penthouse overlooking New York City as a brand ambassador. You can’t be scared to put yourself out there”

Today, Donna is moving full throttle toward her creative and entrepreneurial goals. Her husband and three children, 11, 14, and 20, motivate her to work even harder.” Even though I have kids and I still give them as much as I can, I don’t want to neglect myself

so that I can show them the process. I want them to see before they leave home that God is going to do it.”

Despite all of her accomplishments, Moody believes she’s still learning. But she also teaches. At the second annual Women of Excellence Beauty Boot Camp, held in Whiteville in July, she schooled girls ages 8-18 on how to start businesses for themselves by leveraging social media. “It’s all a learning process. I hope I’ll be able to give back to young girls and people who are sitting on gifts and dreams and don’t think they can do it; I can say, ‘yes you can.’”

// Donna Moody taught girls ages 8 to 18 how to start a business at Women of Excellence Beauty Boot Camp in July.



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# CAN YOUR FISH CLIMB A TREE?

How your little learner might learn differently from their best friend

story ELIZABETH DeLOUISE, DO

photos JACKIE LEWIS

As summertime comes to end and just the faintest hint of apples, crunchy leaves and cool nights feel inevitably around the corner, we know that a new school year is upon us. Hopefully you got enough Vitamin D soaked into your bones to last you till next summer. A new school year can be full of promise as well as full of anxiety, sometimes at the same time. The promise of new adventures, friendships, and ideas can often be mixed with the uncertainty of what's to come with potential lingerings of last year's performance. If your school-ager struggled with parts of learning in school, we hope you will find peace of mind in this article that all children learn differently. Here, we thought we could offer a few tips and tricks to help get you and your little one set up for a successful new school year.

Learning starts even before school age. From birth, you can begin reading to your baby. Your baby can recognize your voice and is soothed by the sound of your

voice and being close to you. Babies can first see contrasting light and dark, so from birth to 2 mos consider reading your baby books that are black and white. Columbus County residents are lucky to have a resource for free books to help promote good reading skills and literacy called the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. When you sign your little one from birth – 5 years old up for the Imagination Library, he or she will be mailed an age-appropriate book to their address monthly until they are 5 years old. This could help grow their personal library up to 60 books! Interested participants could contact Selena Rowell at the Early Learning Facility in Whiteville.

Hearing the sound of your voice, pointing to the pictures, saying the names of animals, making the sound of the animal all helps to engage the senses. Pediatricians recommend no screen time for babies younger than 2 years old. To promote learning in these young



// Beeziona Fleming, 19 months, reads with her mom, Stephanie Fairfax. Beezonia enjoys receiving her books from the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

children, engage as many of their senses as possible, making learning a 3-D experience. Playing with blocks helps promote spatial-visual intelligence whereas swiping on a screen does not.

We know that all children learn by different methods and that learning styles play an important role in the learning process. Of course children are wonderful, unique individuals and often do not fall into a single category, but there are a few commonly accepted styles of learning. Understanding these learning styles and where your child is coming from may help your child, and by extension YOU, have a successful new school year.

In general, learning style refers to how a person perceives and interprets new information and how they interact with the learning environment. This is a broad field with many approaches. While a comprehensive review of educational paradigms and learning styles is out of the scope of this article, we hope it brings awareness to what learning style might best suit your little one to help maximize their learning. The learning styles that most people are familiar with include visual, auditory, hands-on (or kinesthetic), print, and interactive. Again, take these in the broad sense and, if you need to learn more, contact your favorite local educator!

Visual learners might be considered to learn best by visual stimuli such as graphs or pictures. If your child is a **VISUAL** learner, encourage them to sit closer to the front of the classroom both to bring them closer to the information and to limit what else crosses their visual field. They may need concepts and words transformed into illustrations to help solidify learning.

“Even amongst family members, learning style preferences can vary.”

For example, take a cue from Isabel Humphreys, an 11th grader at Whiteville High, who likes to color code her notes. “I put the bulleted stuff in bright, cool colors like blue or purple. And I put quotes in red. I like having everything organized like that.” She says using symbols and colors helps her ace her exams. “When I’m taking a test, remembering the shapes helps me remember the answer” if she uses clouds and circles to illustrate concepts. “I am absolutely a visual learner,” she says. Illustrating and color coding her notes “helps me understand more and keeps me entertained in class.”

Even amongst family members, learning style preferences can vary. Isabel’s brother has quite a different style of learning. Evans Humphreys, a 14 year old sophomore at Whiteville High, might fall into the hands-

on or **KINESTHETIC** learning style. “I love putting stuff together; I just put a foosball table together for my uncle.” He likes to assemble model trains, and when he was 5 years old he completed a tricky Lego masterpiece all by himself when the adults were distracted! The hands-on, or kinesthetic, learners will likely absorb information best when they can be physically involved with whatever subject they’re learning. They tend to like to work with their hands, piece things together, and keep their hands busy underlining information as they read or are read to.

“We all know that one size does not fit all when it comes to learning.”

Of course it is entirely possible your child has his own personal mix of preferred learning styles. Evans says, “when I try to learn stuff, I have to write it down. I’m not big on using the flashcards afterward, but it’s the writing-down that helps the information stick. If I can write it down, I can remember it.” Someone who learns best by the **PRINT** modality would absorb information best when they can read it or write it; they would tend to do well in group discussions and may talk aloud to themselves when studying.

**AUDITORY** learners might learn best by listening; they will likely benefit from lectures and even listening to music. My husband calls me the human tape recorder, so this might be my learning style. When you have an auditory learner, consider helping them by having them read their material aloud while you record it. Then they can replay the recording over later as many times as it takes for the information to sink in. This can work when trying to study history facts or scientific concepts alike and can also be helpful with learning an instrument.

Honoring these various types of learning methods might help shed light on a student who seems to be labeled as a “Chatty Cathy” but really is just an interactive type learner. We all know that one size does not fit all when it comes to learning. While the authorship of a favorite quote of mine is definitely suspect, I like the quote: “[I]f you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” We must keep in mind our young learners’ ability to work hard and learn new things, given the proper encouragement and learning environment suitable to their learning styles.

As the school year progresses, some students may present with symptoms of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). While ADHD is a diagnosable disorder that medication and behavior modification can greatly help, there are many considerations to make before diagnosing someone with an attention disorder. Consider



all the elements that factor into a healthy learning environment:

**Sleep:** Sleep is so important in learning and helps information process from short term to long term memory. One study tip for older school agers is to read whatever material you are being tested on the next day immediately prior to falling asleep. Don't save ALL your studying to do in bed! Just the one concept or math equation or French verb conjugation you keep missing; this will ensure you ace it the next day. This study tip has applications for all styles of learning and for all stages of childhood/adulthood. We also know that restful sleep is crucial. Does your child snore? Are they restless, thrashing sleepers ending up with their heads where their feet should be come morning? Are they falling asleep in class or acting more hyper than other kids? When kids are not getting restful sleep, they often act hyper, which is opposite to how adults respond to lack of sleep. When adults are sleep deprived, they feel slowed down. When kids get sleepy, they can act more hyper and seem to act out, so work closely with your teacher and pediatrician to come up with a treatment plan targeted to your child's needs.

**Nutrition:** We know that what we eat can affect the way we feel, and it is not a new notion that food affects the function of the brain. Insight into the "gut-brain axis" is evolving with more research from doctors and scientists but in general it is safe to say there are some dietary principles that can surely help everyone feel more mentally sharp and tackle a long school day:

- Decrease intake of sugar. Pediatricians recommend that children's intake of added sugar be less than 25 grams per day. Check your kid's juice box; how much added sugar is in that one drink?
- Increase intake of fresh fruits and vegetables. Berries especially are high in polyphenols, which are micronu-



trients that have antioxidant activity. I tell my kids berries are like superheroes blasting away the bad stuff. The Farmers Market in Whiteville is an excellent source of local fruits and vegetables, and if you sign up online you can have delivered fresh to your email inbox new and delicious recipes to try with all the fruit and veggie goodness.

- Increase your intake of nutrient-dense foods, including dark greens like kale or collards, salmon, avocado and beans.

More than likely, your child prefers a combination of some or even all the styles of learning. Promote restful sleep, fuel them with fresh nutritious foods, cut back on the sugar, read books every day, and if you find a strategy to encourage your child's learning "to thine own self be true and good will follow thee like night the day" (Shakespeare). If a method seems unconventional but you see it being successful for your child and their learning process, go for it. Here's hoping this is your best year yet for your little, or big, learners!

*This article is not intended to provide medical advice. If you have concerns about your child and any learning issues, talk with your pediatrician and your educator. Contacts: Selena Rowell at Early Learning Facility 910-212-6352.*

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# ABBEY AND SADIE

*story & illustration KATHRYN OGDEN HUMPHREYS*

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

“Her eyes were longing and sad. She had a full mouth and pale skin. In the background were pale blue mountains and pale blue birch trees. An empty path lay behind her. Abbey turned it over to see the back. ‘Self portrait by Sadie Waters’ was handwritten on the verso of the metal.”

Abbey gripped the steering wheel as she drove in the pouring rain. The traffic was backed up. Cars with their lights on at midday made the landscape a blur of trickling water gray with glowing, floating blobs of red, green and yellow. All was silent in the car with the exception of the continuous hum of falling water hitting the roof. Abbey stared straight ahead as his voice resonated in her mind. "You are worthless." Abbey felt worthless. Or was it hopeless? She had discovered the drugs in the right hand drawer of his desk. When she tried to address it with him, he came at her with his finger pointing in her chest, arms flailing, and his face distorted as he shoved her to her knees into the corner of the kitchen. He stood over her for what seemed like an eternity. And then, there was the collect call from the woman from the ski resort. He had tried to take the phone from her. He said it was a joke. It was an accidental call.

"Get over yourself," he said with an ever-charming, non-flinching smile.

He laughed it off as Abbey took the call. The woman on the other end said she knew him well. Then there were the emails.

"None of this is real. It means nothing," he said.

She had gotten to Richmond. She was leaving. He called. He said, "I'm sorry. We can go to counseling." And Abbey turned around. She couldn't do it. Why couldn't she leave? Abbey was just a few blocks from home. Oh yes. Then there was the fact that she was 6 months pregnant.

Waiting at the traffic light, Abbey noticed her hands. Her knuckles were white and clenched to the steering wheel. Her wrists had begun to tingle with the loss of feeling. Lightheadedness overtook her and tunnel vision was setting in. She couldn't breathe. Was her throat closing?! She felt panic kick in.

"You need to get out of this car!" she said surprisingly loudly to herself.

Instinctively, Abbey hit the blinker. Silence, then, Click... Click... Click... and she turned the car right. The little consignment shop on the corner would offer a temporary refuge before she had to face what she was running from.

The dusky smell of the old store filled her senses. She had always loved pawn shops and antique stores. Her parents had always taken her to places like this. Treasure shops, as her father called them. Musky and overloaded with stuff that was no longer important to the generation that inherited it. Put out to sell to bring in money so that the seller could buy the newest appliance or dish set from Pottery Barn or Pier One. A sense of calm set in as she wandered around. There was a beautiful old leather chair, Victorian and ornate, with carved lion heads on the arm rests. A five piece sterling silver tea set that was beginning to yellow and blacken with tarnish sat perfectly centered in front of a giant, French

gothic mirror. There were old, darkened oil paintings in massive gold frames, antique embroidered linens in individual plastic baggies, rolled up oriental rugs, and side tables with Limoges and Herend trinkets displayed on top. Abbey walked by the quiet old man with his white hair and readers resting on the end of his nose. His eyes looked up and followed her from his paper behind the checkout desk. Right at the foot of the bookshelves attached to where he was sitting was a beat-up, water-stained cardboard box with no top. Small gold ornate frames were piled on top of each other, haphazardly tossed like old toys going to Goodwill. Abbey knelt down to investigate. She was drawn to them. They spoke to her. Notice us, pick us, they seemed to say. Abbey reached in and pulled out one small painting after another. She knew immediately that they were watercolor on ivory. They were each signed with a delicate and precise signature and dated 1890, 1893, 1892. The beautiful faces captivated her. The painting style was exceptional and academically rendered. Being an artist herself, and having a degree in art history, she knew that the hand that had painted these small miniatures was special. These were the work of a trained artist. She gazed at the woman with reddish blond hair. She had a strong, aristocratic profile with the name Clothilde Moulin, Savoie written in the top righthand corner. There was a tiny purple crocus, a profile of a small black child, a formal painting of what looked to be a powerful and confident lady of aristocracy in an elaborate lace corseted gown with her hand resting on a baroque side table, her stare one of strength, power, and fortitude. Abbey turned it over to look at the back. "Portrait of MM Jane Hading" was written on what appeared to be a formal label with a Jewish star, then an address: 54 Bedford Gardens, Kensington, C/O Alfred Parsons. Abbey knew who that was! He had been an English painter who was a member of the Royal Academy and had specialized in painting fauna and landscapes. He also had illustrated for Harper's Weekly. How did she remember that? There was a small oval painting in a detailed ornate gessoed frame of a haunting, blue-eyed, tow-headed girl in a brilliant blue smocked dress. There was a young woman wearing formal ceremonial clothing with multicolored bead necklaces at her throat and a brilliant lace headdress. The name Adriana Van Der Meyde Zealand 1892 was written in the corner. There was another, smaller blond, blue-eyed girl with Russian lettering in the top right hand corner. There was a portrait of a dark-haired woman with disheveled hair and what looked to be a barmaid dress. This was in a large gray frame with elaborate gold scrolls around the opening. There were three pictures in ornate gessoed gold frames of angels. One was a profile, the other a full face with a metallic gold halo, and one with two angels dressed in lapis blue and crimson red robes descending from the heavens. The final three were of a round glass vase of pink and white peonies, a grapevine that appeared to be unfinished, and a white seawall with a cascading rose bush overlooking the sea with a white sailboat far away in the distance. Each painting was in pale pastel blues, pinks, and lavenders. Behind each

ivory was what looked to be a piece of sterling silver foil. They were delicate and painted with a light, precise touch. Each had an ethereal quality that beckoned to Abbey. She felt an uneasy sense of peace gazing at them. It was then that she pulled out the one encased in metal. It was of a golden haired woman dressed in a gauzy white empire-waisted gown with a ruffled lace collar: the woman was holding a rose in her hands and the petals were in full bloom, as if it were right before the moment when the rose would begin to wither. Her eyes were longing and sad, she had a full mouth and pale skin. In the background were pale blue mountains and pale blue birch trees. An empty path lay behind her. Abbey turned it over to see the back. "Self portrait by Sadie Waters" was hand-written on the verso of the metal. The painting itself was signed but not dated. Abbey placed it back in the box. She then picked the box up and placed it in front of the storekeeper. There were about 16 small miniatures. She had just received some money from her parents as a gift. She knew she could buy them. Abbey spoke. "How much for all of them?" A crinkled smile came to the old man's eyes. "Let's see what I can do." A minute later, Abbey walked out with her arms wrapped around the full box, her heart flutter, temporarily distracted from the stress that she was going home to face.

### Wednesday nights

Abbey placed her hand on her huge stomach and felt the morphing movement of the little boy inside. Her 15 month old daughter Penelope crawled in her lap with a bottle in one hand and her fluffy polar bear stuffed animal in the other.

"Oh, my goodness! There is still room for you, missy! Barely!" she laughed to herself.

She breathed in the smell of Penelope's soft blond angel hair. It was that wonderful clean, baby shampoo smell.

She looked out the window at the giant boxwoods and rolling mountains in the distance. She had stayed with him. They had gone to counseling. They had bought this 6 acre farm with 100 year old house. There were still "episodes" but she had learned to stay silent and not ruffle any waters. The last big episode happened while they were trying for a second child. Abbey had Penelope on her hip and he had a shotgun screaming he was going to kill himself. Abbey was terrified. She couldn't figure out what had triggered it. They were talking about his business and she was explaining Social Security to him and he just went crazy. She didn't realize at the time that she was already pregnant. The next day, as always, he acted like nothing had happened and found a way to make Abbey feel responsible for his behavior. She had learned to let him alone, to let him do what he wanted. She was a little scared of him. He cycled. He would be absolutely charming and wonderful, and then a little dark, and then he became angry, then explosive, then black-out psycho. Then they would go for days without speaking. And then, he would be



nice, and cry and make Abbey feel sorry for him. Her married life was spent figuring out the bell curve and how to navigate through it. To hide the chaos from Penelope was becoming harder and harder to do. So, it was sweet relief when he stayed out till 3 a.m. on Wednesday nights with his drinking buddies. There was quiet. She could cuddle with her little girl and escape into some movie on TBS and fall asleep. She didn't like any of his group of friends. She didn't like their wives either. His friends were the wealthy, entitled kind. Some worked for SNL Financial, some were teachers, one was an architect and some worked for a music management agency. They lived in the right neighborhoods. They wore Joseph Banks and LaCoste and the wives wore Lilly Pulitzer and Et Cetera. They read *The New Yorker* and *The Onion*. They dropped names and were invited to all the insider, elite parties. They were cavalier as they pulled out their home grown weed and handrolled their joints with the finest rolling paper or used their 300 dollar bongs. They always got really drunk. They were the worst kind of phony. Consequences simply did not apply to them. She had no patience for the wives as they drank their wine and inhaled the THC as their free range kids ran around at their feet. Recently she had learned that one of the wives, Cassandra, kept a stash of cocaine and they would roll it into the joints and smoke it. Why was this OK? If they had been any other group of people, or the neighborhood had been any other neighborhood, the police and social services would have been there in a heartbeat.

To be fair, the others didn't like Abbey, either. She had gotten mad at a dinner when all of the men spent the night discussing how to pass a drug test in order to get life insurance. She had said with total disdain, and a little too loudly "How about not doing drugs? Seems

pretty simple to me.” She then walked out to the car and stayed there until he came out. He was fuming. In his deep, smoke- and alcohol-damaged voice he said, “Well aren’t we Little Miss Judgmental? I can see why they don’t like you.” Abbey couldn’t understand how she had married someone that spent his time this way. This wasn’t her. She had dated him long distance so she she really didn’t see this side of him until their honeymoon in Mexico when he bought pot off the street from some random market worker. Her heart had dropped in fear of ending up in a Mexican prison. Afterwards they missed the bus to take them back to the hotel. They had to walk a mile on a dark road to get back. He cussed her out the entire way. When it happened, Abbey thought, “What’s the big deal? It is just one mile.”

They could have spent the time laughing and having a good time. Instead he went crazy. That moment was the onset of her chronic anxiety. She also knew that he complained about her to all of them. They saw Abbey as the uncool ball and chain that tried to control her ‘great guy’ husband’s behavior. So, whenever she saw them in social situations, they had this knowing, smirking look. The wives always asked in their condescending tones, “How are you?” They also flirted with him right in front of her. She hated them. So she chose to stay away, keep her privacy and focus on her little ones.

When Penelope came, her entire understanding of her own existence changed. Penelope come before everything. And now, the little fellow that was due in two weeks had joined his older sister in being the center of Abbey’s thoughts. They were her core, her soul, and her heart. There were no more gray areas of what was acceptable behavior. With these two precious children, her world had become black and white.

His college buddy Adam had spent a week at their farm sleeping on the couch and working for him to make extra money. Every morning the two men would smoke pot out in the yard, then load up heavy mowing equipment and go mow people’s yards with 15 of his employees. Abbey was horrified at the risk that he took and his total disregard of the liability. She was starting to think that maybe he was just stupid. His other college buddy, Nelson, had come up from Richmond and had gotten so drunk going to the ritualistic Wednesday night outing that he came home and peed all over her guest room. Abbey was nine months pregnant cleaning it up as they all laughed it off. “I’ll buy you new sheets and a mattress,” Nelson said. (Of course he never did and she had been cussed out in private for following up on Nelson replacing the bedding.) Abbey reached her limit when she found Penelope holding something in her mouth. She asked Penelope to spit it out and there was the tip of Adam’s bong that had rolled under the couch. She all of a sudden became filled with clarity and control. “You are out. Get out of my house. You have to go. You have worn out your welcome,” she stated matter-of-factly. “Lighten up,” Adam said. “You are acting crazy.”

Abbey looked at her husband. “My sister is coming tonight with her two kids. Get both of them and their

drugs out of this house or I am calling the police. They cannot come to this house again!” Abbey was shaking as she went upstairs to check on Penelope. “I can’t do this anymore” was a ticker tape running through her head as she sat at the top of the steps. She started crying. It was a brief explosion of full-on tears.

“Get it together, Abbey, Charlotte is coming. You cannot let her know what goes on this house,” she said to herself.

Through her tears, she looked down the stairs at the two of the 4 panels she had painted in the entranceway. Both were placed beside an inner stained glass window that she had installed after they tore down a wall. One had a mother holding her baby in a windy field. The other was a distant landscape with a white farmhouse. She had copied them out of her favorite magazine, *American Art Review*. Her eyes landed on the Sadie Waters pictures hanging in the hall that she had painted pale yellow. It wasn’t long before she heard their cars on the gravel pulling out of the driveway. A door slammed and her heart jumped. Someone screamed, “Abbey!”

### 100 years to the date

Abbey and Charlotte had picked all of the Crisco icing off their birthday cake. All that was left was a skeleton of yellow and chocolate sponge crumbs. They had put on a Disney movie for the kids and sat in the kitchen chatting. Charlotte was 36 and Abbey was 33. Their birthdays were 1 year and 51 weeks apart. They tried to always celebrate their August birthdays together. He was out working. He never wanted to be around her family, so every time they came, he had to “work.” Charlotte was getting her Ph.D. in history and she was talking about how her advisor made it difficult to get anything done. The subject turned to the Sadie paintings.

“There has got to be something out there on her.” Charlotte said.

Abbey thoughtfully nodded and went to the computer that was open on the kitchen counter.

“I have searched 100 times but I have never found anything. Let’s google her again.”

Abbey and Charlotte had been shocked. After all this time and searching, there she was. Sadie Palmer Waters. She had come up in something called *The Project Gutenberg*, which was a volunteer effort to digitize and archive cultural works. Sadie was listed in a book called *Women in the Fine Arts* written by Clara Erskine Clement. There she was. Birth 1869, death 1900. She was from St Louis. She was student of the French master M. Luc Olivier Merson. Abbey immediately knew who that was. He was a French painter who had been commissioned to design all of the French currency. He also painted the famed *Notre Dame de Paris*. “Charlotte you know this painting! It was the one in Daddy’s old book and we were always scared of the gargoyle.” Abbey screamed with excitement. “Oh yeah!!” Charlotte said as she remembered. “That was Sadie’s teacher? Incredible!”

Abbie continued reading, “Her portrait of MM Jane Hading was much admired.”

“What? That is the portrait on the wall in my hall!” Abbey said with excitement. Her heart jumped when she read the quote about Sadie by Carl Guthertz. He was another artist Abbey remembered. He was an expatriate American painter who had served in the Confederate Army and established the St. Louis School of Fine Art. He was a contemporary of William Adolph Bougerou and Merson. Guthertz was committed to large paintings depicting the horror of battle as well as paintings of religious and mystical content. One of his greatest contributions is the ceiling of the House Reading room in the Library of Congress. Abbey’s heart jumped higher when she read the second quote by Paul W. Bartlett. He was an American Sculptor whose work, *Poetry*, stands at the entrance of the New York Public library. His most famous work is on the House of Representatives pediment at the U.S. Capitol building, *The Apotheosis of Democracy*, begun in 1908 and completed in 1916.

There Sadie was in black and white, being praised by these two influential male expatriate American artists. Abbey and Charlotte spent the weekend repeatedly searching the Internet trying to find more information, but to no avail. Abbey promised Charlotte she would go to the UVA library and scour. Two days later her water broke, and into the world at almost 8.75 pounds, came William. Sadie would have to wait.

It happened like clockwork. every night at 3 a.m. William would awaken with his little gurgles and baby noises. He never really cried in the night. He just stirred enough for Abbey to hear. Abbey slept in the room that Penelope and William shared. She didn’t want to wake her husband, and she didn’t want to sleep away from them. It was easier this way. Abbey would get out of bed, so excited to see him. It didn’t matter that they should all be in the middle of a REM cycle. She would pick William up and go downstairs to the kitchen to feed him. If Penelope woke up as well, Abbey would take both of them. William would be swaddled in her arms with Penelope’s tiny hand in hers. There were always little treats of oatmeal cookies and a bottle with milk on hand for Penelope. Every night, at 3 a.m., it was a little party with just the three of them. Abbey lived for these moments. All was quiet and right with the world. These nights were also spent searching the internet for Sadie. On this particular night, with William in the baby wrap, and Penelope at the table, Abbey found an obituary listing. It was through the Albemarle Historical Society. It wasn’t really an obituary, it was more of an update on the society page of the paper. It stated that Sarah G. Waters had traveled to Versailles to retrieve the body of her daughter, Sarah (Sadie) P. Waters. She had then gone to St. Louis to bury her and then returned to reside at Tallwood in Albemarle County. “Amazing,” Abbey thought. “Now it makes sense that the paintings were here. She died in Versailles? Maybe she was an expatriate? Of course she was if Merson was her teacher. All of the great American painters studied in France... What was the date of her death?..... How did she die?”

“Mommy, who you talking to?” Penelope asked.

Staring at the screen, Abbey answered, lost in thought. “I am talking to you, little boo.”

Then it hit Abbey like a lightbulb over her head. “I will just write to Versailles and get her death certificate!” she said matter-of-factly to Penelope.

With her sleepy eyes, messy blond hair and bottle in her mouth, Penelope looked at Abbey, took the bottle out for a second and said ‘OK.’

The fog had covered the morning like a blanket and the rain was coming down in sheets. Abbey was in the kitchen trying to fix him breakfast. She hated rainy days. That meant he didn’t make money. That meant he would torture himself for not having a job. How could he afford health care with a family of four? Rain meant he had to pay his employees that showed up, yet he got paid nothing. He would storm around the house and slam doors. Abbey hated the sound of his muddy steel-toed boots walking down the stairs. She had made pumpkin muffins, eggs and bacon. She had set the table with mats and napkins and silverware. She had poured his coffee in his silver travel mug. Everything was perfect. It smelled good, it looked inviting and her heart was in her throat, fearful of his mood. As soon as he walked in the kitchen, it was as if the children picked up on his stress. Penelope wanted more *Coco Krispies*. Her bowl was not full enough. She began wailing “Mooooore!!! moooooore!!!!” Abbey stayed calm and said, “Eat what you have, and then I will give you seconds.” At that moment, William began screaming. Not crying, screaming.

He stood there and looked at Abbey. “You need to take care of this. Get them quiet!” Penelope wailed louder, William’s cry became bloodcurdling. He yelled at Abbey, “Do your job. Get these kids under control!” In that moment the kitchen became an overwhelming tornado of whining, yelling and baby crying. She couldn’t think straight as she turned to pick up William from the baby seat. “Okay, everyone calm down. We are all fine...just calm down.”

Penelope screamed and cried, “More, I waaannt moooooore!”

Abbey turned to look at Penelope. He stood over her like a raging bull, took the box of *Coco Krispies* and dumped the entire contents in Penelope’s bowl. Penelope froze, staring at what appeared to be a giant ant hill of cereal. He screamed with a finger pointing at her fluffy haired head, “Eat it!” And then he stormed out. He slammed the door and went to the bottom of the hill, got in his truck and drove away. Silence.

Why had he done that? Why had he dumped the entire box on the table? Penelope was only 2. Why had he pointed at Penelope like that? He did that to Abbey. Abbey had seen the fear in her child’s eyes. It was just weird. Would he hurt them?

“No. It was just a stressful morning. One of those mornings. Let it go. This too shall pass,” she said to herself.

She put the kids back down for a nap at around 1 p.m.

All Abbey wanted to do was fall asleep. If she fell asleep maybe this would all go away. She always felt better after she woke up. She could keep going. She could get through the rest of the day. She went downstairs and lay on the big leather couch. She looked out the picture window over the boxwoods to the mountains. The sky was gray and raining even harder than before. The air was getting colder. Her thoughts went back to the morning episode. "What is wrong?" she thought. "Is there something wrong? How could I do things better?" She stared, lost in thought and in the hum of the rain on the tin roof. Her eyes became heavy and then... she sat up like a bolt of lightning.

"Has the mail come? I have to get the mail!" she said.

Abbey had written for the death certificate weeks ago. Maybe it would get here today. She jumped up ran out the door with no jacket and went to the end of the gravel driveway to the mailbox. Amidst the Sundance catalogues, bills and coupons, there it was! She ran inside, soaking wet. She pulled the envelope out and carefully opened it. There she was. Sadie Palmer Waters. Death, August 13, 1900, Place of death: Versailles, France. Cause of Death: consumption of the bowels. Sadie had been only 33 years old when she died. The hair on the back of Abbey's neck stood up. The date that she and Charlotte had found her in the Project Gutenberg was two days before Charlotte's birthday. August 13, 2000. They had discovered her 100 years to the date of her death. Sadie had come to Abbey exactly 100 years to the date of her death.

To be continued...

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# FIND YOUR STYLE

story & photos JASMINE SINGH

*Jasmine Singh is a German freelance fashion journalist and makeup artist with close ties to Columbus County. She first came here as an exchange student at East Columbus High School in 2002-2003. Jasmine now runs her own company, called Jazz Brown Concept. She also founded a non-profit organization that helps needy children both in Europe and in Africa. While visiting in Hallsboro in July, Jasmine shared a few words on fashion.*

- 1⇒ I would always advise to go for quality instead of quantity, meaning buying only the things that are absolutely perfect and last a long time instead of buying on low deals that in the end don't last a long time.
- 2⇒ Supporting local businesses is a good idea, not only for the economy but also for the environment.
- 3⇒ Also, when it comes to makeup, it might be a good idea to make the effort of buying a good and healthy foundation that tries to avoid mineral oil and silicone.
- 4⇒ I know it's not easy to buy many different things in Whiteville since the city is not as big as others. I would advise everyone to try to find out their absolute favorite style and not copy whatever others are doing.
- 5⇒ When it comes to fashion, individuality always wins. But if you would rather wear from top to toe black, that's also fine as long as it defines you. Love yourself and show it by the way you look.



*An article in The News Reporter will feature more thoughts from Jasmine about her work in the fashion business.*

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“There I stood, encircled by women whom I had just met, from a community where I had lived for 23 years, sharing this intimate moment. I felt so encouraged.”

# BECOMING BETTER TOGETHER

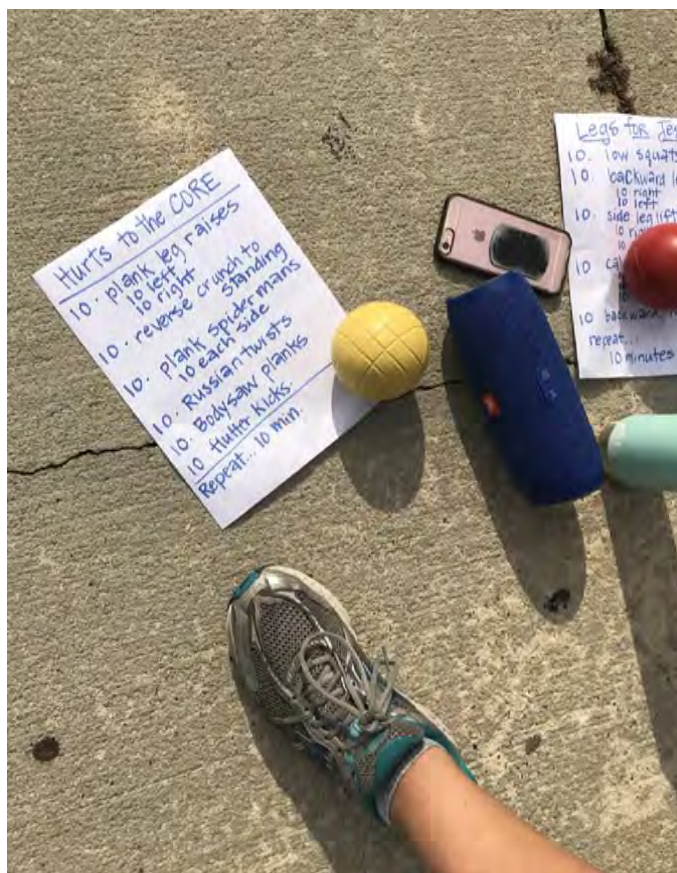
story AMY RANSOM  
photos courtesy of FiA

I used to pride myself on being a strong and active woman. My mom instilled in me a love for the outdoors; in my childhood home being sedentary was not an option. After I left for college, I learned that physical exercise could also function as a positive form of stress management. I found that a long power walk or a good workout made me a much kinder person. It made me feel physically strong and mentally healthy. I carried this practice into young adulthood. After a long day of work, or during life's stressful situations, nothing helped me to decompress like exercise...of any kind. I made it part of my weekly routine and felt better for it. But with all routines comes the potential to get off track. Days without exercise can turn into weeks. Weeks can turn into months. Months can turn into years. At 32 years old, I was walking a 12 minute mile while six months pregnant and pushing a stroller. By 46, I was spending my evenings and weekends sitting...wherever I was. I found myself feeling tired, depressed, and deflated.

I had been invited several times by a dear friend to join her for "FiA," Females in Action. I asked all about it, renamed it "FEMA" because I couldn't remember the acronym, but never went. Last June, after a mother and son adventure in the Rocky Mountains, my physical inactivity caught up with me. I was allowing my sedentary ways to interfere with happy and healthy living. I agreed to my friend's request, and decided I would try this "FEMA." After all, my body was in desperate need of disaster relief!

My first workout with FiA was in July 2017. It was a hot and humid Saturday morning, and if there was shade anywhere, I couldn't find it. I was one of about 11 women, but I was the largest and the slowest. As we gathered in the parking lot of Whiteville High School, our leader for the day announced that we would be doing a "12 days of Christmas in July" workout. For the next hour, I ran from station to station doing exercises that were so very difficult for me.

That morning I was my own worst enemy. I kept telling myself, "I can't do this." Then, just as I would tell myself this, someone would cheer me on. "Good job Amy!" "You got this!" "One is better than none." On and on it went until I had completed a full one hour workout that was more difficult than I would have ever attempted on my own. It was a new day for me.



At the end of a FiA workout, it is customary to circle up and do a short devotion, inspirational reading or motivational exercise, then take prayer requests and pray together. There I stood, encircled by women whom I had just met, from a community where I had lived for 23 years, sharing this intimate moment. I felt so encouraged.

I have maintained a steady course towards improved health and wellbeing since that day. I am not at my goal weight, but I am a stronger, healthier version of myself. I do my best to attend both workouts each week. For me, there are several factors that have helped me to stay motivated. I love that FiA is free and that it is available to all women in the community regardless of their shape or ethnicity. The timing of the workouts does not interfere with my work or family responsibilities. I love that it is outdoors and that no fancy equipment is used. I love that everyone comes as they are and that becoming "better together" by working hard is the only emphasis. Finally, each member has the opportunity to lead, which creates a constant variety and provides ever-changing challenges for me.

*FiA is a national organization with chapters in many cities in the United States. If you would like to learn more about FiA, or to search for a group, visit their website [fianation.com](http://fianation.com). In Whiteville, we meet in the parking lot in front of the WHS Gym on Tuesday (5:30-6:15 am) and Saturday (8:15-9:15 am).*

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## 15 MINUTES WITH JENNIFER HOLCOMB

story MARGARET HIGH photo GRANT MERRITT

*Jennifer Holcomb has served as director of the Columbus County Chamber since 2012 when the Columbus County Tourism Bureau and Greater Whiteville Chamber of Commerce converged. She was born in New York, has two boys, and is married to Michael Holcomb. Flourish sat down with Holcomb to get her take on being a powerful woman in the workplace and how to make everything fit in one day.*

### **What is it like to be a working mom?**

**B**usy. In my experience, it was twofold. Not only was I working and raising children, I also went to school. At one point I was working full time, I was working on a master's degree and living at the ball field, taking my books out to practices and stuff like that. That was the biggest challenge, just adding another dimension of busy-ness. But what I have found is you have the time to do the things you want to do. So while I had a lot of requirements of my time, being a busy mom and having a career, you make the time to do what you want to do. It's possible. My family always came first and I was blessed that the chairman and different people I had worked for on the board of directors understood that. As long as it wasn't taken advantage of, which I would never do, my family was able to come first. But there was a good work/life balance with what I've done. I have a lot of flexibility. I work a lot of hours, but they can be flexible when I need them to, so that was always good. And now

both my children are in college so I'm an empty nester. I think sometimes we overburden ourselves by just the perception that we're so busy, when we choose what we want to do with our time. I believe that there can be a work/life balance. I think it's something you have to be intentional with and I did it to the best of my ability. It's not easy, but it's certainly possible.

### **Have relationships ever forced you to reconsider your career?**

No, I wouldn't say so. Though personal relationships are impacted by the nature of what I do. I have a very public job, and so just being out to dinner, someone's coming over to talk about the Chamber. Whether they're the business owner, or other people. And that's kind of had an impact on relationships; I'm never off work. And then on the social side, a lot of my social interactions are business social.

### **How do you balance time with your husband, who serves in the military?**

I've learned over the years that my marriage is one of the most important things that I have, and I have to be very intentional to keep that relationship solid. We make the time for each other. We also love being together, which helps (laughs). We want to hang out. We want to be together. He's my best friend.

### **Have you ever experienced any workplace discrimination because you're a woman?**

I have seen it, most certainly. I think, especially in a rural community, it's probably more prevalent. There's still a perception that a middle-aged man is more qualified for certain positions, positions that I've either been in or been interested in. To some degree, that's been a challenge. But it gives you more ambition to overcome it.

### **What is your advice for ambitious women?**

Twofold. One, embrace that ambition. But also don't lose your femininity because that's powerful and I'm proud of that. I want to be respected and recognized in my field just like a man would, but I'm very different at what I do because I'm a female. I bring a different perspective to an issue or a topic or to this position than a man would, and I embrace that. And I think that if you come at it in that way, other people will respect you for that as well. I don't come out guns blazing, I'm-the-same-as-a-man, because I'm not. I'm very different. And the difference is some of the value of what I think we have as women.

“I bring a different perspective to an issue or a topic or to this position than a man would, and I embrace that.”

### **What did your career path look like?**

I took the road less traveled. I got most of my education as an adult. I came through entry-level positions and didn't really understand what I could accomplish. I wasn't that ambitious. I was always a great employee. I worked hard and I was dedicated, but I didn't see myself accomplishing great things. I always was kind of status quo, at an entry level. That's the family history. With a couple great influences, I saw that I could go on and be something more, and that's when I got my education. That's when I realized that I could be in leadership roles, that I could develop my career above and beyond what I thought I had. It was the road less traveled, very much so. I wonder where I would be if I had done things a little different. I didn't have the same family influence or the support to go to college. I went and worked and I waitressed, which was invaluable, because I helped to write my own paycheck when I waitressed. I understood customer service. It impacted my income, so I refined that ability to anticipate people's needs, and that's supported me through my career now. And I still love waitressing. I did it for many years. I

respect it very much. My husband, being military, says that all men should spend four years before going on to become whatever he becomes. I think that every single human being ought to be a server for a period, because it'll change who they are and help them to see the importance of customer service and treating people kindly. I saw every table as an opportunity. Some people might look down on people in entry-level positions. I loved what I did and I did it well. There was a motivational speaker that always said, “No matter what you do, do it with excellence because you don't know what you're going to do later.” It doesn't matter how high you are in a company or if you're at the bottom, if you do that job well, you have an opportunity to advance. If you're a barista at Starbucks, be the best barista you can be. And I think that's helped my career, because I embraced that when I was at the lower, entry-level positions.

### **What do you think influenced that mentality?**

The influences were varied. I had a stepdad that was successful and he instilled in me that I could achieve what I wanted to. My family was all in the service industry, in restaurants, so they worked hard or they didn't eat. That was part of it. Then I watched other people that I respected. There was a head waitress when I worked for TBoyz in Myrtle Beach. She was the best at what she did. She could motivate people to do things that they wouldn't do for any other manager that was there because of how hard she worked. That was inspirational for me.

### **Proudest accomplishments?**

Ah, well my two boys (laughs). Career-wise, I'd say the pinnacle was the successful merging of the Columbus County Tourism Bureau with the Greater Whiteville Chamber of Commerce. It was a long process and it was one that needed careful attention, and to some degree kind of kid gloves, because we were doing something that was unprecedented, and in some small pockets, unpopular. So it was important to be able to express the desired goal and the reason why as we went ahead and met different obstacles and challenges that came forth.

### **How did cooking become your passion?**

I had an aunt that was the cook of the whole family, and I loved to be in the kitchen and help her when I was young. I've always loved to eat (laughs), that's a great inspiration. I just started developing that desire to want to learn how to cook, and it just kept growing and growing. I would say it's not just a desire, now it's a passion. I do not like to shop, but I love to grocery shop. Trader Joe's is my favorite place in the entire world. I'm just happy when I'm in there. If I'm cleaning the house or chilling out for a while in front of my TV, Food Network's on. I love food videos. I could do away with all of Facebook except for my recipes and videos. I most recently started teaching cooking classes at Southeastern (Community College), which was fantastic. I have no regrets in my life, I've made a lot of mistakes but I've

learned from them, but I think, career-wise, if I could go back and know what really motivates me now, back then I would have become a personal chef. I think that would be cool. It wouldn't lend to my lifestyle right now, but when I was young if I could do that over again, and again I wouldn't want to change anything, but if I had to choose a different path, that's what I would choose.

“This community is part of me.”

#### **Favorite meal to cook?**

Anything ethnic. For the whole family, I'd say the one thing they love the most is Japanese. I'm probably most known for my bang-bang shrimp. Again, just influences of different ethnic varieties. I'm on a Thai kick now and I'm starting to explore African food: Moroccan and South African cuisines. I bought a tagine recently.

I'm very indulgent. I make everybody what *they* like. Could be frustrating for my husband, but that's how I please, that's how I show love. When somebody's glass is getting empty or someone's wanting seconds, I'm the first to jump up. I like to serve. I think any position that I would be in career-wise, or outside, that's what I do. That's the motivation behind why I do it. I teach Sunday school, and I like to serve that class. I like to be a part of the learning process.

#### **What are your selling points of Columbus County?**

It was a fantastic place to raise my kids. So a personal testimonial, I think, is better than any marketing brochure. I've lived from coast to coast, from New York to California, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I love North Carolina. Columbus County has its challenges, but we have to be mindful that every community has a challenge, they're just different challenges. So our urban areas we may look upon like the grass is greener, but they have problems too, they're just different ones. I think we have a great community. I think we have a caring community. We have a philanthropic community. We have a faithful community. Those are the components of where you would want to build your life, with people who are going to care and do life with you. My church family has been as much a part of my life as biological family. And that's why I love living here. A lot of people say that there's nothing to do here. If you say that to me, I'm going to get offended, and I'm going to prove you wrong. I always come back with, 'Follow me for two weeks.' If you get ingrained in this community, you will find your niche and you can enjoy it and you can like it. If you don't, if you sit at home, waiting for someone to knock on your door to invite you to take part in a community event or to sit on a board or a committee or to take part in something, it's not going to happen. When new people move into the community, it's the first thing I want to help facilitate them in

is to get involved in something, something that's outside their family and their job. That's where connection comes in and that's where it can be a resting place and a home. That's what I've made it. I mean, this community is a part of me. I don't know if I'll die here, I don't know what life holds, but this community is a part of me and I'm glad I'm here.

#### **What do you listen to on your drive to work?**

K-Love. K-Love is the only music that I listen to, for about four or five years now. It's always positive, their slogan is "positive, encouraging." I love that. It also keeps me focused. I'm a woman of faith, and the day can get real, and life happens and bad things happen, and people can rattle your feathers and push your buttons, and listening to that music and how much God loves me it's going to be okay, and I can push through. It makes the day go well.

#### **Favorite movie?**

I could go so many different directions! So, *The Godfather* is one, I'm Italian. And I would say *Pretty Woman*. I don't watch a lot of movies repeatedly, but *Pretty Woman* is probably the one movie I could watch over and over again and never get tired.

#### **Favorite Food Network show?**

I'd have to say *Chopped*.



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# FINDING MY VOICE

story JENNY CLORE

photo JACKIE LEWIS

My husband and I had been married for two years before considering having children. He was in seminary; I was finishing school. Our seminary housing was far from spacious enough to accommodate all the perceived ‘necessities’ that come with a newborn.

As the seminary chapter of our life was coming to a close, we began dreaming of life with a baby. Almost simultaneously, anxiety and fear of infertility flew over me.

I grew up as the middle of five children, with five and six aunts and uncles on either side of my family; it was a beautifully chaotic childhood. The topic of infertility or miscarriage never surfaced in conversations among my family members and me. As far as I knew as a young female adult, the problem was nonexistent in our family circles.

But sadly, as we started our journey in the ministry, Ryan and I began to see the heartbreak of infertility and miscarriage through many of our friends’ eyes. While walking alongside them, talking through many tough conversations, sharing lots of tears and prayers,

it became vividly clear to me no woman is exempt from this potential pain. Infertility or miscarriage could happen to me. I carried this fear and anxiety alone. I didn’t share these concerns with my husband or any of my family, as I didn’t want to disturb anyone else’s ‘normal.’

One evening in the mountains of Virginia at a youth retreat, I was setting up the worship space for 300+ youth and youth leaders. The lead singer of the worship team, Kimberly, approached me. I could tell she was nervous and uncomfortable. She asked, “Are you and Ryan trying to have a baby?” You can imagine how shocked I was by this question, considering I only knew Kimberly through annual youth retreats at which her band played.

Puzzled by her question, I responded, “Actually, yes.”

She continued, “This is uncomfortable for me, but God told me to tell you something and I need to tell you. He told me to tell you not to be afraid. You’re going to have a baby and you don’t need to be worried.”

I was immediately filled with so many emotions, the only thing I knew to do in that moment was weep... big, messy tears. Looking back, I see that the tears represented a sense of peace and comfort knowing that we were not alone on this journey. Not only was God walking alongside us, He was aligning our journey with friends and a community who would walk the path of uncertainty, fear, joy and happiness with us. We were not alone, and He didn't want us to feel alone.

Since God wrapped His arms of peace around me that evening in the mountains, we have become the lucky parents of Luke (5) and Shannon (4). The last few months I have been holding on to this story, remembering the peace and comfort God provided then and that I know He will provide now. In March of this year, we were thrilled to find out we were expecting our third little one. All the joyful emotions that come with this news filled our hearts and consumed our thoughts. We decided to tell only a few people until our first appointment at 8 weeks. Little did we know we wouldn't make it to that appointment.

I was six weeks when we lost the baby and our visions of a family of five evaporated into the thick, unbreathable air. For the next two weeks my husband and I tried to navigate how to deal with this unforeseeable loss. I was filled with questions and self-doubt. What had I done wrong? Had my birth control after having my daughter made me barren? Maybe I exercised too hard in the early weeks. Will I be able to have a third child? And the questions spiraled downhill from there.

These questions remained unspoken and we grieved silently, while our busy lives continued. The church Easter egg hunt had to be planned and carried out, interviews at work had to go on as scheduled, and our closest friends and family, including our church family, had no idea what was happening in our lives. Those two weeks were painfully lonely. One Saturday morning with my workout group, Females In Action (FiA), I couldn't choke back the tears any longer. At the end of our workout we circled up to share prayer requests, as we do after each workout, and it was then the tears began to fall. While I cried, they embraced me in prayer without knowing the secret I was keeping bottled up inside.

“I share my story in hopes to continue to promote change and empower women's voices.”

I returned home that morning with a heavy heart. I told my husband I couldn't be silent any longer. I couldn't pretend everything was fine while my heart was breaking inside. My soul needed to talk about the pain and heartache. Not for sympathy, but because I believe to my core we were created to experience life in community; to celebrate, to grieve, to comfort and to embrace one another. That next day, we spoke to

our small group at church about what we had experienced over the last two weeks and healing began to take place.

Sadly, even though humans were built to live in community, society has deemed certain life experiences taboo and “inappropriate” to share publicly. Miscarriage and infertility, alongside sex education, religious and political views, top the taboo list. For centuries, women have been told to “save face” and keep their personal experiences to themselves; so as not to embarrass those whose ears it falls upon. With 10-20 percent of pregnancies ending in miscarriage and 12-15 percent of couples struggling to conceive, we need to break the silence and reverse this taboo. Women are the most incredibly strong and resilient individuals on earth, but nothing will deplete a woman's soul, or any human's for that matter, faster than the feeling of loneliness and isolation.

In recent years, women around the world have begun to share their stories and not feel forced to hide their pain in the shadows. I share my story in hopes to continue to promote change and empower women's voices. I want women who may have found themselves on this scary journey to know they are not alone. As a community, we need to work together to create safe spaces for these conversations to take place. One way to start is to educate ourselves and one another about infertility and miscarriage, and help remove the shock factor.

Contrary to my belief as a young woman, I've learned that some of the closest women in my life have struggled with infertility and miscarriage. My family's silence may have been to protect me from the pain they were experiencing, maybe the pain was too much to share, or maybe the women weren't given the opportunity to share openly.

We need to become people who listen first and talk last, giving others the space to speak their heart when they're ready. My FiA friends loved and embraced me without having to know exactly what was causing my heartache. They offered many hugs and prayers, and allowed me time and space to share when I was ready to find my voice.

Pause. Listen. Love. You never know when a friend, daughter, niece, or neighbor will be ready to share and will need a listening ear and a hand to hold through a journey on which she didn't ask to embark.





# PRINCESS NEALEY GRANTHAM

## A creative force in Columbus County

story ISABEL HUMPHREYS

photos courtesy PRINCESS NEALEY GRANTHAM & TARA NEALEY GRAHAM

Being a new intern at *The News Reporter*, as well as being a teen and trying to find out what I want to do with my life, I figured that when I agreed to work on a magazine that I would have to interview someone. Little did I know that the person whom I was interviewing ended up being an incredible person whom I'm now proud to call a friend.

Princess Nealey Grantham grew up as one of four children born to Terry Nealey, a preacher, and his wife, Robin, in Tabor City. With three girls, Kandi, Tara, and herself, and one boy, 'Little' Terry, life was simple but also a little eclectic. Grantham described herself as always being the "oddball in the family" due to the fact

that she was the only left handed child among her siblings. "I was usually looking for a quiet place to draw or read a book," Grantham says. She and her siblings did not grow up around television, so to pass the time they would find fun and joy in playing music, practicing daily, and learning to play instruments. Grantham's parents did most of the singing, as well as playing guitar and piano, while she played bass and her brother played the drums. When she was 14, Grantham's family formed their own band, traveling to other churches as well as their own, and recording their first album in Asheville, N.C. Her sisters played piano and guitar and sang. Traveling often helped Grantham unleash and work on her other artistic abilities such as drawing. Traveling also

made it hard for her to keep up with her school work, however. Grantham says, "I was always a determined kid, wanting to push through to the next thing. Traveling never stopped me from getting stuff done. I always had the idea of success on my mind. I always wanted to grow up and be successful," she says.

When Grantham was 21, her 17-year-old brother was killed in a car accident, causing painful ripples in the family's band as well as emotional ties. "It was the hardest thing I've ever faced," she says. Grantham told me that the family band quit singing a while after that and stopped traveling as much because of the emotional trauma that his death inflicted. Being the determined person she is, Grantham did not allow herself to drown in sorrow and grief; instead she enrolled in Southeastern Community College and later went to the Art Education program at UNC-Pembroke in hopes to become an art teacher. Inspired by her high school art teacher, Grantham had always wanted to help encourage creativity into the children around her as her teacher did with her.

Around the time she became an art teacher, Grantham was blessed with her son, Seth, who is now 20. "Teaching really made life easier for me. It helped me pay the bills as well as it allowed me to be around my children on holidays and summers," Grantham told me. She has now been an art teacher for 12 years and has a daughter, Hannah, who is 17. Both of her children are very talented and artistic, just like their mother.



// Grantham's late brother Terry Nealey II // Nealey CDs // The Nealeys at The Yam Festival





*// Library reading of Silly Nilley Wet The Bed // With husband Monroe Grantham // Children Seth and Hannah Nayle*

After recovering from the death of her brother, Grantham's family went back to playing music and has since recorded four albums, the last of which was recorded in Nashville with a Grammy award-winning producer. The album features four of Grantham's own songs which she had written. Ten of the family's songs have been released to radio and a few of them have ended up on Christian-country music charts and Southern-gospel charts. "My whole family writes music so I have to credit them as well. My parents and sisters are also fantastic song writers. Writing is part of the family blood. I was blessed to be part of such a talented family. I owe a lot of who I am today to my family," she told me. Their band now mostly sings and plays live at their home church, Holiness Tabernacle Church in Tabor City.

Trying to get to know her better as a friend and a person,

I asked Grantham how she would describe herself and her lifestyle in three words. She said to me "faith, God, and family." Those three words describe who she is as a person. Always having faith, even in hard times when there seems to be no hope, always trusting in God the Father, and honoring family ties and bonds. I also asked Grantham what inspired her to work with children. I was generally curious because I, as well as many teenagers, have trouble with handling younger children.

Grantham said to me, "When I was four years old, I went to the last day of kindergarten with my older sister because I would be coming to the school next year. I sat down with the older kids and began to draw a little picture. The kids looked at me and asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. When I responded with 'I want to be an art teacher,' they all started to laugh at me." Grantham continued to tell me how towards the end of

the class, while wanting to prove herself, she asked the teacher if she could go up and draw something on the board. She actually ended up teaching the class how to draw a picture. Keep in mind that she was only four at the time. Grantham told me that since that moment, she wanted to share her talent and help other people, especially kids. "I love kids, I love to work with kids, I love to challenge their minds, It's just always been a desire of mine. I know that if I can make a difference in any kid's life, that is very important," Grantham says.

Combining her love of kids and her artistic abilities, Grantham decided she would write children's books, her first being *Silly Nilley Wet the Bed*. I asked Grantham what writing children's books brings into her life. She responded without hesitation "Happiness." She also went on to say that, "I feel like I'm sharing part of my heart with people, as well as helping children and bringing smiles to their faces." Grantham's book is the first in a series of books which helps children deal with difficult situations that they face as young kids, such as wetting the bed. Her books also combine life lessons with comedy and lighthearted fun. Her son illustrated her most recent book. She tells me that he too is a very talented artist and musician. Grantham told me that the ideal of family definitely transfers into her work as a writer and a teacher, "so much so that sometimes my students call me 'mama,'" she says. We shared a good laugh about that. "I feel like, as a teacher, I need to be able to help these kids and be near them as a mother or father should be because you never know if these children get the love and affection they deserve at home. So I always try to be a motherly figure in my work as much as possible. Even if a child can't draw, I always find something for them to do so they can feel like they've accomplished something, so they can be proud of themselves."

I also asked Grantham about living and teaching in Columbus County, the little, unnoticeable speck on the map that anyone would overlook, and I asked how living here affects her writing. "Well, there are a lot of times that we, as residents of Columbus County, feel confined to this place. And there are kids who've never been able to leave this county and who've never really been on an adventure, and for me to be able to take them on an adventure in my classroom or in my book, it like gold." Religion plays a large part in Grantham's life. Being the daughter of a preacher, she tells me that she was at church every Sunday with her family growing up. "My parents raised us to always do right and to be gracious to others and help others when they needed help." She also told me a very incredible story which really sparked her connection with God. "When I was two months old, I had a crib death. My mom walked into the room and I was not breathing. I was dead. My father picked me up and took me to this altar in our house where he would pray and he prayed and prayed to the Lord and I came back to life. Hearing that story really made me believe that there is a bigger power in the world and that I will always have someone to trust in." Grantham also told me that from hearing about her crib death that she now always tries to find the good in any situation, "because if you focus on the bad, you are going to live a negative life." Grantham demonstrates her value of religion in

her church, where she plays her bass as well as teaches her Sunday school class. Grantham has raised her children on the same ideals that she was raised on; however, she says she doesn't want to push them but she's raised them the best she could. "Honestly, I could never compare myself to my mom and dad; they raised us very well. But, I have tried to raise my children to help others and to always be loving and affectionate and I believe that they have grown up to be very fine people."

Today, Grantham continues to work as an art teacher at Tabor City and Chadbourn Middle schools and plays music with her family in church. She spends time with her husband, Monroe, and children. Grantham says that Monroe, whom she met in 2009 and whom she had a crush on in middle school, "is one of the best things that have ever happened to me. He's hard working and has been very good to me. Despite thinking I'm crazy sometimes because of my endless ideas for new things, he's a good one." Monroe works as a commercial sales rep at Lowes. Grantham was also very excited to share with me that she and her daughter are now working on a new book together, which her daughter will illustrate. I was so glad that I got to meet such an incredible human being. Before I ended our interview I asked her for a bit of motherly advice.

Grantham told me "Always follow your dreams, no matter how crazy they are or how many ideas you have." When I heard that advice, all I could do was smile. I can only hope that you, the reader, take that advice to heart as well.

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# FARM TO STREET FOOD

story & photos SYRITA MILLS  
illustrations ISABEL HUMPHREYS



“DRIVE DOWN ANY CURVY BACKROAD IN COLUMBUS COUNTY AND THE LUSH CROPS WILL GREET YOU THERE...”

**D**rive down any curvy backroad in Columbus county and the lush crops will greet you there, evidence of the rich variety of vegetables at our culinary disposal. Yet for all their glory, these simple ingredients may get short shrift at the dinner table, often overlooked despite their abundance.

Fortunately, that doesn't daunt area growers and produce markets in their efforts to get fresh foods to our plates. At Livingston Creek, an outdoor produce and seafood complex in Bolton, local seasonal foods shine. Okra from Maxton and zucchini from Chadbourn peek out of bins on a sleepy Sunday morning. Just twenty minutes from Wilmington, shoppers from that direction make the short trek to find offerings unavailable at

Whole Foods or more posh outlets.

Owners Danny and Yolanda Graham had Zephyrs on display this particular morning. The two-toned summer squash resembling zucchini has a soft buttery hue at the neck with a pale green base. The Grahams play an active role in getting everyone to eat extra veggies, including leading by example. “We had squash last night” said Danny. “We eat out of here every day because I am a firm believer that you are what you eat.”

And with that admonition we're giving perennial players like okra, watermelon and sweet potatoes a second look. But for added appeal, these staples were given a street-style makeover with flavors and techniques reminiscent of an urban food truck.



### SWEET STREET TACOS

This meatless option features a vegan chorizo that packs big flavor. Subtly sweet bites of sweet potato and cool slices of avocado tame the heat.

#### Ingredients

- Two medium sweet potatoes peeled and diced
- Trader Joe's Soy Chorizo (or substitute taco seasoning)
- 15 oz can black beans, drained
- One small onion
- Two large garlic cloves
- 12 corn tortillas
- Smoked paprika
- Salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- Olive oil
- One avocado sliced
- One jalapeño sliced into rounds
- Cilantro
- Lime

#### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, gently coat diced sweet potatoes with a small drizzle of olive oil, smoked paprika, and salt and pepper to taste. Spread potatoes evenly on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Place in oven for 25 minutes, or until tender and browned, turning occasionally.
3. Drizzle ¼ cup water in a large heated pan. When water begins to dance, add diced onion and sauté on medium-high heat until softened, adding small amounts of water to deglaze pan. Add 2 tsp. olive oil, garlic, chorizo and black beans, stirring until all ingredients are incorporated. Reduce Heat.
4. Spray a skillet with nonstick spray and warm corn tortillas, lightly browning on each side.
5. Assemble immediately with chorizo filling, diced yams, sliced avocado and jalapeño rounds. Garnish with cilantro and lime wedge.

Serves 4

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### CRISPY OVEN-ROASTED OKRA WITH SEA SALT AND CHIPOTLE MAYONNAISE

This snackable version of a Southern favorite serves up all the sweet, earthy flavor of okra with none of the slip.

#### Ingredients

- 1 lb okra, halved lengthwise
- Olive oil
- ¼ tsp. sea salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 1 tsp chipotle powder
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1 large garlic clove minced
- A dash of Liquid Smoke
- Lime juice

#### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees
2. Mix chipotle powder and mayonnaise in a small bowl. Add minced garlic, liquid smoke, salt and the juice of one lime. Stir. Adjust salt and lime juice ratios to suit taste. Set aside.
3. Line a single layer of okra halves on a baking sheet. Lightly drizzle with oil and cracked sea salt and roast for 20 minutes until crisp.
4. Remove okra from the oven. Allow to cool slightly and serve with Chipotle mayonnaise.

Serves 2

“And with that admonition we’re giving perennial players like okra, watermelon and sweet potatoes a second look.”

### MUMBAI MELON CRUSH

Served up in the street markets of India, this drink is a light, sweet, thirst quencher.

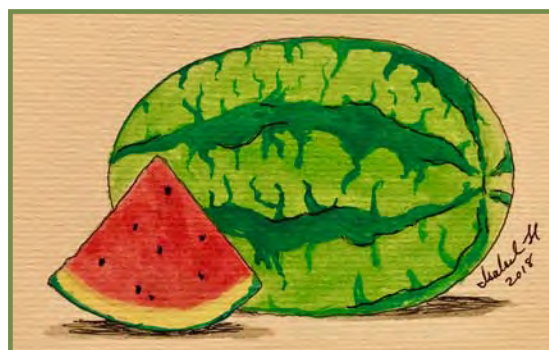
#### Ingredients

- 3 cups chilled watermelon cubes
- 1 cup ice
- ¼ cup sugar or to taste

#### Instructions

Combine all ingredients in blender, reserving 1/3 cup of melon cubes for later use. Blend on high until smooth. Remove pulp with a strainer and serve in a tall glass along with reserved cubes. Garnish with basil or mint. Serve immediately.

Serves 2



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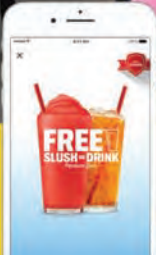




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A photograph of a male mechanic in a dark blue uniform smiling and handing a set of keys to a smiling female customer in a red top. They are standing in front of a dark-colored car. The background is a bright blue sky.

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# SMALL BOXES MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Columbus County



story DIANA MATTHEWS  
photos GRANT MERRITT & courtesy of MARIE FAULK  
illustration ISABEL HUMPHREYS

## **Bolton native Marie Simmons Faulk may be the only person in Columbus County who thinks about impoverished children on the other side of the world when filling out her NCAA Men's Basketball Championship bracket.**

Faulk entered The News Reporter's March Madness contest with the plan of giving away anything she won through Operation Christmas Child, an outreach of the Boone, N.C., Christian ministry Samaritan's Purse.

"To be truthful," Faulk said, "I was just picking the teams that my husband wasn't picking in some of the brackets to start with. Then as it got closer to the finals, and I was in the lead, we both tried to make sure my picks were the best. I really picked the underdogs for the most part, but that team with the nun as their chaplain was the one that helped me the most. I think my intention to use the money for shoeboxes was the reason God allowed me to win."

### **Huge needs, small boxes**

In 2017 Samaritan's Purse delivered over 11 million boxes of gifts to needy children between 2 and 14 years of age in more than 100 countries.

Even if the relief agency reaches its goal of 12 million boxes in 2018, it will touch only a small fraction of the world's impoverished children. Most of Africa's 507 million children will receive nothing.

Faulk would like to see 200 boxes go out from her collection point at Cherry Grove Baptist Church this year.

In 1993, a group of Christians in Bosnia made contact with Franklin Graham, head of Samaritan's Purse, asking for help to comfort the country's children during their region's civil war.

Graham found a church in Charlotte to help, Faulk said, and they chose to send gifts in shoeboxes as a doable, practical gesture to bring "something nice" to the region's boys and girls of all religious and ethnic groups. Operation Christmas Child was born.

Hubert and Shirley McClenny volunteered at OCC headquarters and told Randy and Marie Faulk about it. Cherry Grove Baptist Church members got involved shopping for gifts and packing boxes in the mid-1990s. OCC asks givers to provide a mix of practical and fun items for a boy or a girl in one of the following age groups: 2-4 years, 5-9 years or 10-14 years.

Faulk includes school supplies in every box she packs. Other practical items that she recommends include small flashlights with extra batteries, toothbrushes, washcloths, clothing items and soap. Faulk asks people to save prescription bottles to hold sewing and fishing kits.

Fun gifts that do not take up much space could include a bracelet or necklace (or a make-it-yourself kit), a Hot Wheels car, a small stuffed animal or a wooden toy or puzzle.

"They suggest you pack one 'wow' item," a fun surprise for the child, Faulk said, but it does not need to be extravagant. "Anything can be a wow item. You never know, so you pack whatever you feel led to pack."

### **Wow!**

To make things easier for givers, OCC can provide inexpensive red-and-green plastic or corrugated boxes. Hobby Lobby stores will also stock the pre-decorated boxes in the fall.

For one little boy Faulk heard about, a pair of boots was his 'wow' item. Another boy had specifically told OCC volunteers that he was hoping for a blue button-down shirt.

"The volunteers handing out the gifts didn't want to discourage him," said Faulk, but they knew a button-down shirt was not a typical shoebox gift.

"When he got his box," Faulk said, "there was a blue button-down shirt in it, and it was his size."

Not every child's wish is met that dramatically, but Faulk said, "I could tell stories all day long" about the thrill the children get from knowing that someone, somewhere chose gifts with them in mind. She emphasizes that, "Prayer is the most important thing to send with your shoebox."

Faulk encloses in each box a photo of the children at Cherry Grove Baptist Church, so that the recipients can see the faces of some of the people who care about them.



// Cherry Grove Baptist Church children enclosed this photo and a friendly message in each box they sent last year // "You can fit a lot into these boxes," says Marie Faulk

### "The Greatest Journey"

When the boxes are delivered, volunteers distribute a picture and story booklet (in the local language) describing Jesus Christ as God's "Greatest Gift," and they offer the children a chance to participate in a follow-up Bible class called "The Greatest Journey" if they want.

"Sometimes children are more excited about the book than they are about the box of gifts," Faulk said. Since 2009, 14.9 million children have opted to take the class, and 6.9 million have come to faith in Christ.

### "The boxes are very powerful," said Faulk.

OCC asks givers to include a donation of \$9 per box to cover the expenses of shipping, producing the "Greatest Gift" booklets and training local volunteers to teach the follow-up classes. Compared to mailing a shoebox individually to a child on another continent, said Faulk, the OCC cost is a bargain.

Anyone from outside the congregation can drop off their shoeboxes and donations at Faulk's church November 12-19. The other two drop-off centers in Columbus County are at Piney Forest Baptist Church and Whiteville United Methodist Church.

### The next step

The Faulks have volunteered three times at the Char-

lotte processing center, one of eight in the U.S. “It is a huge place,” she said. “They process shoeboxes for about three weeks starting at Thanksgiving and going until about the third week in December. They were sending out 20,000 boxes a day when we were there.”

At the processing center, Faulk’s job was to look through packed boxes and take out items not allowed by the strict protocol that OCC follows. Even though donors are told what to include and what to leave out, a few well-intentioned mistakes make it to Charlotte before being found.

“We removed any money, war-related toys, breakable things. Candy and toothpaste aren’t allowed anymore; that’s a customs rule. We take out sharp items like razors or anything that’s damaged or used. We don’t remove anything except those things.”

OCC volunteers do not throw the unusable items into the trash, Faulk said. “We send them elsewhere in the U.S.”

Well, actually one item that Faulk found may have been trashed.

“I opened a box, and there laying on top of everything else was a pair of old, used tennis shoes. I wondered, ‘What did they think they were doing?’” Faulk removed the grungy footwear and filled the space with items from the center’s supply of spare goodies provided by corporate donors. Processing center volunteers stop work every

hour to pray for the children who will receive the boxes. From the processing center, OCC boxes journey to areas where local Christians have identified needy children. The local churches recruit their own volunteers, Faulk said. “They get the boxes to the children by all modes of transportation: cars, bikes, boats, camels, donkeys and on their backs.”

She said that, “There is no way to get all the gifts out to the children by Christmas,” so OCC is really a year-round operation.

### Getting started

Faulk happily admits that she is among those who have developed the mental condition called “OCD for OCC;” she thinks constantly of ways to fit blessings into “just one more” box. She taught herself to sew in the last year so she could make zippered pencil pouches.

And now even March Madness is part of her method. Her unique Marie Faulk cheer-for-the-underdogs approach paid off for children whom she loves — although she has never seen them — all over this big world.

Faulk invites prospective helpers to call her at 910-653-3676, and she will point them to volunteer opportunities. Pre-decorated boxes and gift suggestions are available at [www.samaritanaspurse.org](http://www.samaritanaspurse.org).

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# LEAP OF COURAGE

A VISUAL SHORT STORY FOR THE YOUNG & YOUNG AT HEART

story & illustrations ISABEL HUMPHREYS

Lucky was a lot different from the other dogs that frequented Lake Waccamaw. Most dogs that lived there were blessed with long legs and/or athletic builds such as Labradors or spaniels. Lucky, however, was the exact opposite: fat, short, stubby, and not proportional. His ears were larger than his head and his tail was longer than his body. His fur was a very unattractive brownish, black and gray and was long and scruffy looking. His muzzle gave the illusion of a beard, aging him by many years and failing to hide his poor dental work. His nose stuck out from the rest of his body because it was colored a tremendous dark pink. The only beautiful part of the animal was his sparkling bright blue eyes, which reflected the gorgeous color of the lake on a clear day. His name, "Lucky," reflected his good fortune of being adopted despite his looks.

Lucky lived with two tall, long-legged, well-built Labradors, one black and the other chocolate-brown. They were both very talented and loved showing off at the lake.

They would run down the flight of stairs that led to the dock and leap off the edge, landing in the water with a great splash. Ginger, the chocolate Lab, could jump twice as high than any other canine in the vicinity. She had a sleek but sturdy build and her well-groomed fur



Lucky



Ginger



Max

glistened in the sunshine. Her dark brown eyes gave a very serious and confident stare, which could instill a sense of warmth or of fear in any dog she came across. But she was also the sweetest dog that had ever bothered to be friendly to Lucky. Max, the black Lab, on the other hand, had an incredible strapping and brawny body. He was the largest of his litter and had strong muscular legs. He was a bit headstrong and thought very highly of himself due to his handsome looks, bright white teeth, and piercing gray eyes. Lucky had grown up with these two alongside their owner, Alex, a popular college graduate who worked at the local newspaper and used his life savings to buy a house on the lakefront for his dogs.

Being the "ugly child" compared to his pure-bred counterparts made life hard for Lucky. Not to mention he had an intense fear of water. Day after day he would stumble down the steps and waddle down the long walkway of the dock. Once he got to the end, he'd find a nice warm spot, directly in the line of sunshine. He would

sprawl out while watching Max and Ginger leap and splash in the cool water, fetching sticks and tennis balls. While they were playing, they would try to coax Lucky into the water, trying to get him to join in the fun. Ginger would use her looks and her flirtatious and friend-

ly personality to entice Lucky into playing while Max would start to name call, challenging Lucky's courage by barking, growling, and calling him "scaredy-cat" and "fearful little scrub." Hurt and sorrowful, Lucky just sat there, occasionally looking at his reflection in a quiet area of the water. His funny looking mug frowned back at himself and his crooked canine teeth peeked out from beneath his leathery black lips. His perfectly clear reflection in the motionless lake water quickly disappeared as a tear rolled down his snout and dripped off his nose, rippling the lake's surface.



to swim without sinking immediately after jumping in. That's funny," Lucky thought to himself. So he remained right where he was, in his little spot of sunshine, refusing to join in the fun with the other dogs.

\*\*\*

That night, after Alex, Ginger, Max, and Lucky had come up from the lake and everyone had dried off and eaten dinner, Lucky heard Ginger barking out the window.

"It's raining! Why don't we all go outside and play?" she said. Lucky cocked his head. Who would ever want to go outside and play in the rain?

"Come on, Lucky! The water would be so much more fun if you were in here with us," Ginger said with a wink, her long eyelashes batting rapidly.

"Forget it, Ginger; that little weasel doesn't have the guts to put his front paw in the water," Max said with a snicker and a growl, continuing to dog-paddle towards the stick Alex had thrown. The good looking and kindhearted human knelt down next to his fearful little dog, stroking his soft fur and patting his head while Lucky's ears folded down.

"What's wrong, little buddy? Why don't you try getting in the water today? I can hold on to you until you get comfortable paddling." Lucky just lay there feeling bad about himself and his inability to touch the water. How could a dog of his stature be able to swim? His legs were too short and he was so overweight that he would be sure to sink. "Okay," Alex said with a sigh, "we'll try tomorrow."

"Yeah, right, like there's any chance of me being able

"Aw, sweet! Rain means mud puddles and mud wrestling! Hey, Ginger, I challenge ya!" Max exclaimed. He and Ginger rushed to the door, scratching and whining for Alex to let them out. Lucky sauntered up to the screen door that led out to the porch, ears folded back onto his head.



"Why do you guys even bother? It's wet and cold and muggy. Why can't we just stay inside and watch movies and go back to our beds, that sort of thing?" Lucky said. He was slowly backing up from the two larger dogs and towards his fluffy beanbag he slept on.

"Come on, you're acting like a cat. You can't ever just face your fear like a real dog, and get wet! You're worse than a cat!" Max said furiously. He was sick and tired of Lucky always ruining his fun. He wasn't about to let Lucky bash his chances of rolling in a good mud puddle.

"Max, stop. Name calling won't make him want to go outside any more than he already does," Ginger said. Her beautiful and dangerous stare was fixed on Max, but her voice remained sweet and calm. Max snickered,

curling his lip and flashing his bright white teeth. Ginger turned to Lucky, her gaze softened and she spoke with her smooth voice. "Lucky, why don't you follow me out? Playing in the rain is actually kind of fun."

"I don't know," Lucky uttered skeptically. Then he lowered his head at the realization of his own spinelessness. He couldn't bring himself to look up at the bigger dogs because he could already feel Max's disappointed and angry glare.

"You're wasting your ti-..." Max was cut short by Ginger's powerful, brown-eyed glower.

"It'll be fine, I would never do anything that could put you in danger. You can trust me, I'll stay right by your side until you get comfortable, I promise." And with that comforting reassurance from Ginger, all of a sudden Lucky's fear seemed to melt away. The only things he could focus on were her kind and beautiful eyes covered by voluminous, long eyelashes that were staring at him. Lucky did trust Ginger. She had always looked out for him and been caring towards him his entire life. So, he took a deep breath, gulped down any feeling of fright, stood up, and walked towards the sleek and stunning canine. Her fur well groomed and her "million dollar" smile flashing. Lucky planted himself right next to her and prepared to face his fear for the first time in his life.

All three of the dogs turned their heads to the sound of Alex coming down the hall and towards the screen door. Before he opened it, he looked down to find Lucky standing right next to the two Labs. Surprised, Alex didn't ask any questions. Instead, he smiled at the sight of his fearful little mutt, preparing to face his fear. All of a sudden, before Lucky knew what was happening, the door flew open and Max rushed out into the rain. The power behind his shoving and pushing almost made Lucky and Ginger lose their balance. Trying to gather himself, Lucky turned his head to find Ginger standing next to him, just like she promised.

"You ready?" she asked.

"Yeah, ready." Lucky said. He poked his chubby front paw onto the outdoor porch, his jiggly and fuzzy body following. The porch was cold and wet from the wind blowing light raindrops onto the aged wood. Ginger shortened her strides so she could better keep up with her small friend. As Lucky approached the small flight of stairs that led out to the front yard and away from the covered safety of the porch, he began to slow his pace. Ginger moved ahead of him just poking her pretty face out into the storm. Lucky was thunderstruck. Never before had she looked so beautiful. Her tar-black nose was like a shiny silver button in the sprinkle of summer

rain. Her eyes were shut and little droplets of water twinkled on the edge of her eyelashes and raindrops ran down her smooth face. All Lucky could do was stare in awe.

"What?" she asked. Lucky snapped out of his daze.

"Nothing," he said with a surprisingly charming smile.

"See? Isn't the rain beautiful?" Ginger said with a glamorous giggle.

"Yeah..." Lucky said, "beautiful," but he wasn't referring to the storm. He was looking straight at the beauty with the chocolate brown fur that stood next to him. Ginger couldn't stop herself from smiling. "Okay, here goes nothing," he said. Slow and steady, Lucky prepared himself for the step he was about to

make, the step that would end with him actually touching water!

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes as tight as he could, and stuck his nose out into the rain. It was like the whole world had stopped spinning. All he could feel was the gentle drops of water trickling down his muzzle. All he could hear was the soft pitter patter of the rain bouncing on his snout. He allowed his bright blue eyes to open and a smile spread across his face while he slid the rest of his body out into the rain. Lucky began to laugh with joy. "Ha! I'm actually doing it! I'm out in the rain.... getting wet!" He began leaping as high as he could, jubilant and excited. Ginger joined





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in the fun, jumping in puddles and playing with Lucky while Alex stood on the porch, grinning from ear to ear. Max, however, wasn't impressed. He couldn't care less if the funny looking dog had faced his fear by standing in a rainstorm. That didn't prove anything. He scoffed and continued to splash around. Lucky had never had so much fun in his life; he had never realized how fun it was to splash in puddles. He and Ginger alternated throwing water at each other, laughing with joy. Water wasn't so scary after all.

\*\*\*

Once it started to get dark, Lucky and the two other dogs ran inside, tails wagging, and they all settled into their beds. Ginger was so worn out from playing that she fell asleep as soon as she lay down. Lucky remained awake with Max, unable to wipe the smile from his face.

"You know, just because you played in the rain, that doesn't mean you aren't still afraid of the water." Lucky turned to see Max scowling, clearly unimpressed. "If you really wanna prove something to me, then tomorrow, you'll jump off the edge of the pier. Otherwise, you're still a spineless little jellyfish." Max said. Self-doubt crept into Lucky's mind. Max was right. Lucky was still afraid of getting into the lake. However, a piece of Lucky wanted to prove Max wrong. Determination overwhelmed Lucky's mind, fueled by anger and resentment towards Max's remark.

"Fine, I will jump off the pier tomorrow." Lucky said, not realizing what he had just agreed to. Max smiled. He had gotten under Lucky's fur and taken advantage of his newfound confidence. Butterflies began to flutter in Lucky's stomach, but the decision was made. There was no room for fear now. Tomorrow he would jump off the pier!

\*\*\*

Lucky woke the next morning with a queasy feeling nagging at his delicate tummy. What had he gotten him-

self into? He rose from his bed and onto his little legs, slowly approaching the kitchen where his breakfast sat untouched. Ginger and Max had already gotten to their bowls and started munching on their Canine Kibbles. A nervous frown was painted on Lucky's face. He was feeling so sick that he couldn't eat. He just sat in front of his red double bowl, and stared into his water.

"What's the matter, Lucky? Aren't you hungry?" Ginger had a worried look on her face. She had never seen Lucky turn down a good bowl of Canine Kibbles. Something was definitely wrong with him.

"Yeah Luck, aren't you hungry?" Max chimed in with a sly grin. He knew exactly why Lucky wasn't hungry.

"I'm fine," Lucky growled, and his nose seemed to turn bright red. "It's just that Ma-" right before he was about to tell Ginger about Max's constant bullying, he stopped himself. That's exactly what Max would want. "I'm just not in the mood for Canine Kibbles." His face softened and he flashed the same sly grin at the big black Labrador staring him down.

"All right, dogs! Who's ready to go down to the lake?" Alex called. The kitchen erupted with excited barking and howling from the two larger dogs. Lucky was lost in his own

thoughts. A voice in the back of his mind kept telling him that he couldn't do it. Lucky shook his head.

"Stop it! You can do this," he thought to himself. Alex grabbed his three pets and led them out to the staircase that went down to the lake. Lucky was ready. He followed his cohorts out the door and across the dew-covered front yard. Then he trotted across the street and waddled down the staircase while Max and Ginger rushed past him.

When he came to the bottom, he stopped suddenly. Fear was starting to set in. The world was silent around him. The pier had never seemed so short to him. Usually, it looked like it took forever to get out to the water. Today, it looked different. His mind shifted. Maybe if he thought about something happy, he wouldn't be as



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scared. He began to think about the wonderful night he'd had with Ginger, frolicking in the rain and splashing in puddles. His eyes shot open and then squinted into a determined stare. That was it! The lake was just a big puddle, nothing to be afraid of!

"Hey, Lucky! Come on in" Ginger barked. Her voice rang in his ears. All of a sudden, the little dog broke into a sprint. He was panting hard, trying to go as fast as his little legs could take him, fresh lake breeze whooshing through his scruffy fur. Max, Alex, and Ginger caught a glimpse of Lucky running down the dock. All three stopped to stare. Lucky, however, didn't care. He was no longer doing this to impress Ginger or prove something to Max, he was doing it for himself. He was about three strides from the edge of the dock. The world was still. All he could hear were his paws on the old, splintery wood. He counted every step in his head.

"One.....two....." he was almost there. He breathed in and bravely said "three." Suddenly, Lucky opened his eyes. He was in the air! He was flying, soaring just as gracefully as Ginger and Max. He poked his tongue out of his mouth, tasting the sky. The next thing he knew, he was submerged in the clear water. He had never realized how nice it felt on a hot day.

He admired the magical beauty beneath the water. There were colorful fish and shiny mussel shells. The sand was soft as a pillow. There was a whole other world beneath the surface of the lake. Distracted by the wonders under the water, Lucky almost forgot that he needed to get to the surface to take a breath. But how was he going to get there? Lucky had never swum before. Using his large ears, he could hear the faint voice of Ginger through the water, yelling, "Paddle! Paddle!" Instinct set in and Lucky used the age-old technique that dogs had always used when swimming, the doggy-paddle. Lucky stretched his short legs as far as he could, pawing at the water and trying to get to the surface. Faster and faster he kicked and kicked and suddenly found himself moving upward.

His head broke the surface with a great splash. Despite his fur covering his eyes, he knew he'd done it. He was actually treading water and swimming. Overcome by his own pride, he released a triumphant howl. He had faced his fear. Struggling to get his fur out of his face, he looked around. His gaze locked with Max, whose jaw was wide open in disbelief.



"Told you I could do it," Lucky said with a wink and a grin. Alex was thrilled to see that his fearful little mutt had actually jumped in! Ginger was giggling with obvious glee, so proud to see that her friend had defeated his fear of the water. Lucky made his way up the steps that led from the lake to the top of the pier and shook off. He felt two large arms pick him up and twirl him around.

"That's my good boy, Lucky! That's a good boy!" Alex said with laughter. Lucky chimed in with excited barking. Ginger followed up the steps, shook off, and trotted over to Lucky.

Before he knew what was going on, he was rewarded with a big kiss from Ginger on the top of his head.

"I knew you could do it," she said. Lucky had never felt so happy; his heart melted and he couldn't stop smiling.

"I was just thinking of you and me playing in the puddles. The lake really isn't all that different," Lucky said with a shrug, and he broke into laughter. Meanwhile, Max was still treading water, trying to make sense of what had happened and feeling a little embarrassed at the fact that he'd never thought Lucky would EVER jump in. Lucky waddled over to the edge of the dock and looked down at Max in the water.

"Wow, you actually did it, I'm.... sorry. I shouldn't have doubted you," Max said. Lucky smiled. He could've used that moment to rub his triumph in Max's face, but instead, Lucky just said, "It's okay. I would have doubted me, too." And with that, the two of them started to laugh and for the first time, all three dogs played in the water together as a family.

All because a little dog, whose ears were bigger than his head and whose tail was longer than his body, decided to face his fear. The End



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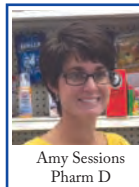
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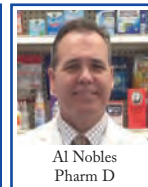
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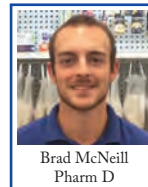
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# THE PRACTICE OF WELLNESS

## Mindfully Well: Yesterday & Tomorrow

story & photo VALERIA BALOGH

**W**hat is so special about living life in the here and now?

Many of us spend most of our time caught up in the past or wondering about the future. We brood about the things that *could* have been or fret about the things that *might* come to be and seem not to be concerned about what is going on in *this* moment.

These moments of presence are the seeds of inner calm and personal growth. Without the ability to stop and rest in this moment and notice what is happening, we are forever in the past or in the future. Before I continue, I acknowledge the beauty and solace of cherished memories and lessons learned from the past, as well as looking forward toward the openness of the future. These are important and healthy aspects of remembering and planning; however, both the past and future are places full of thoughts and emotions that do us no service at best and, on the negative side, undermine our efforts toward optimal wellbeing. Eckhart Tolle said it very well in *The Power of Now*: “*Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry — all forms of fear — are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of nonforgiveness are caused by too much past and not enough presence.*” The present moment allows us to focus, clarify, and move forward toward becoming who we would like to be and how we want to live our lives.

**How do we begin to move forward to our optimal life?**

Meditation is often viewed as a practice of sitting quietly and trying to clear away all thoughts. This is the external view of meditation and can bring frustration when the mind does not clear. The reality of mindfulness meditation is an ongoing process of bringing one’s attention to the thoughts generating in the mind, simply allowing the thoughts to move through without getting caught up and carried away in plans or dreams, and without bringing judgment to the process. That is the challenging part. Judgment. Jon Kabat-Zinn and other mindfulness authors emphasize the need for kindness and patience when practicing mindfulness meditation. This allows for genuine curiosity into the workings of one’s own mind and understanding that the thoughts that generate there are just simply that — thoughts. They do not need to be believed or followed through with, or even lingered on for any amount of time. They are simply thoughts generated by a busy mind. My favorite description of these thoughts

is that they are like clouds in the sky of the mind, shifting and floating by. They cannot be grasped, and they are constantly changing.

If only we could realize that the thoughts we think are fleeting and, mostly, reactionary and opinionated. If we could wait patiently and ask ourselves, “Is this true? Is this important?” we might create a change in our way of being that allows for more peace and less struggle. Solhaug and colleagues (2017) have concluded what others in the field have also found - that the practice of moment-to-moment awareness, whether attained by formal seated meditation or through moments of mindfulness throughout the day, creates shifts in attitudes towards experiences. These shifts result in decreased reactivity, increased curiosity, better affect tolerance, increased patience, greater self-acceptance, and improvements in the quality of relationships.

**Simple Meditation:**

So, try sitting for just 5 minutes every day, in a quiet place anywhere. After you settle into a comfortable seat, bring your attention to your breathing and notice the rhythm and sensation of the breath moving through your body. Turn your attention to your mental activities and watch the thoughts float by. Imagine the shapes they would take if they were clouds and let them go. Identify each thought simply as “thinking” and let it go. Bring your attention back to the sensation of your own breath and notice the next thought that generates. Label it “thinking” and let it go, bringing your attention back to your breath. You won’t run out of clouds or shapes, so enjoy the practice of watching and returning to the breath.

**A Moment to Yourself:**

Imagine for a moment that you have nowhere to go and nothing to do. How would it feel to be able to simply sit and look out into the world without having to do anything? Go ahead. Imagine. Right now, as you are taking the time to read this article, pause and close your eyes and see yourself sitting anywhere you love and just *being*. Without guilt or nervous energy, imagine fully what it is like to be where you are. Is it indoors or outside? Is it warm or cool? What are the sounds and the fragrances of the area? Really imagine it. I call this my mini vacation, and I can go anywhere in the world for a virtual visit.

### Walking Meditation:

This is a great way to begin and end your daily walking routine. It will also help improve your balance. Find a place where you can walk very slowly without safety concerns. You can walk inside your home to become accustomed to the practice and then take it outside. Begin by focusing your attention toward the ground about 3 or 4 feet in front of you. Begin to walk very slowly, placing one foot on the ground and then slowly swinging the other leg in front and moving forward with each step. Pay attention to the way you place your foot... heel, roll, ball, push, lift. Step... heel, roll, ball, push, lift. Then notice how you swing your leg, shifting from one side to the other. You will also notice that walking very slowly requires quite a bit of balance. As you walk, connect to your breath, and try not to look around you. Just look directly in front of you until you are ready to speed up and enjoy your normal walking routine. A fun thing to do while you are practicing walking meditation is to notice your state of mind while walking very slowly and paying close attention to your movement. Then when you start to speed up, notice the activity in the mind. This speaks volumes on today's culture of multitasking and the go-go-go pace of modern life.

### Mindful Eating Practice:

When preparing your food, whether it is a snack or a meal, be mindful of the qualities of the items you choose.

If you are making a salad, for example, notice the color and texture of the ingredients. Notice any fragrance when cutting fruits and vegetables. Think about where your food comes from. Give thanks to the farmers who grow the food and the workers who process and transport it. When you are ready to eat your food, choose one item and take the time to see, smell, and taste the food. Feel the food on the palate, how the teeth grind the food, the burst of flavor from the food. Chew the food completely and after you swallow, notice how long it takes for the food to completely clear from your palate. Then choose another bite and notice all the characteristics of that item. Savor each bite. Enjoy the experience. Then, when you are ready, return to eating normally.

I hope you enjoy these small practices and are able to incorporate some mindfulness into your daily routine. May you be safe, may you be happy, and may you enjoy long-lasting health.

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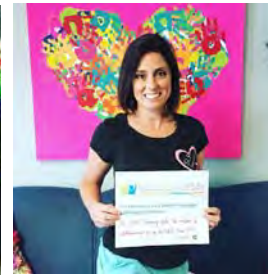
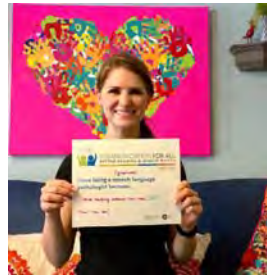
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