

ISSUE 01  
*complimentary*

# KHITON

CULTURE. CRAFT. CARPE DIEM



## THE SOLACE OF CRAFT

Local makers reviving ancestral techniques & the heritage of making as healing.

## WRITERS IN OUR BACKYARD

From their kitchen tables to our night stands. Meet them. Love them.

## MEMORY AND MATERIAL

The architects who build for permanence in a world that prefers the disposable.



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## CONTRIBUTORS

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*We are grateful to the writers, photographers, practitioners and makers of all sorts that bring beauty, depth and breathe so much soul in our pages.*

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#### Photographer

Mark is a Barrington-based photographer drawn to natural light, quiet detail, and the beauty of the unguarded moment. His work is thoughtful, understated, and rooted in the poetry of everyday life.

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#### Writer

Skylar is a multidisciplinary musician, writer, and student in the Greater Boston area. He writes with curiosity and deep appreciation for the artists, rhythms, and traditions that continue to shape culture and everyday life.

### Theodora Tsevas

#### Writer

Theodora is a journalist and columnist that spans 2 continents. She covers lifestyle through the lens of culture, food, people and place. Her work has been featured in Atlas Obscura, Huffington Post, and The Mediterranean Lifestyle.

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#### Writer

Anna is a Newport based creative with two degrees from Salve Regina University. Her editorial work is published in Rhode Island Monthly and Report From Newport. In her free time, she writes poetry and practices photography.

# A Note from the Editor

"How many things would you attempt if you knew you could not fail?" I have carried this question close for most of my life until a few months ago I took the leap of faith and left the grind of a Sisyphian corporate life to attempt something that felt both ancient and urgent: to create a feast, a conversation, a symposium of ideas centered around the theme of slowing down. Enough to talk to each other. Enough to share bread and cheese. Enough to reclaim our passions and our kitchen-table hobbies. Enough to reclaim our common humanity and share the garment of our universal need for happiness, belonging, and beauty.

Which is how Khiton came to be.

In Ancient Greece, Khiton (khee-ton) was the universal garment worn by women, men, and children alike. One color - usually the natural beige of cotton and flax - worn by slaves and free men, by kings and peasants. A universal garment held by a single pin, clothing our common humanity.

This magazine is an invitation to gather at the beginning of the primordial polis, at the first hesitant steps toward community. It is an urgent idea: to have faith in the goodness of our works and our shared destiny; to step off the Sisyphian climb of consumption, isolation, and online living and simply sit at the table.

A table set with the work of dreamers, architects, farmers, chefs, makers, and holistic practitioners where the ancient wisdom still holds, where the body knows, the soil remembers, and the ruins have something left to say.

We did not set out to argue against the modern world but to offer a feast of slow living, where the table, as Milena Pagan reminds us, has room for one more.

Issue No. 2 is already growing. We are turning toward the children and toward what it means to raise them unplugged, unhurried, and unapologetically rooted in the moment.

With gratitude,

Anna Amoiradaki

Founder & Editor, Khiton Free Press Rhode Island, 2026





ELIN JOHANSSON AND SARAH VINCENT AT THE LIVING ROOM COLLECTIVE  
PHOTO: MARK AMUNDSON

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**LISTEN. READ. EXPLORE.**

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TELONEIO PROJECT, ETSI ARCHITECTS

# The Solace of Craft

*by Rebecca Grunkemeyer*

There is a particular quality of silence that settles over a person at work with their hands.

Long before wellness was an industry, people healed themselves by making things. They spun, wove, shaped clay, and stitched by firelight — not as therapy, but as life. Across New England, a quiet revival is underway.



SUE McFARLAND'S  
WOOL FELTED BASKET

# *a craft to hold you*

## **SARAH AND ELIN – HANDBAG MAKERS**

A day in the life of a mother in the 21st century—perhaps you can't relate, perhaps those days are far behind you, or perhaps you're in the thick of it right now. But imagine for a moment the stress that comes along with caring for both yourselves and tiny humans. Maybe your toddler threw a temper tantrum over eating asparagus; maybe you rushed from an oil change to a hair appointment to a kid's soccer practice; maybe you vacuumed the carpet only for it to be dirtied within minutes by goldfish crumbs. You sigh. You need a break. So later in the evening, you leave the kids at home with your husband and drive over to a sanctuary on 64 Church Street to seek some solace. The joyful banter of women's voices swells as you open the door to the studio.

As the sound of voices rises, so does the heat in this cozy space. The light grey windows are swung open, bringing in the peaceful sights, sounds, and smells of the marina. Glorious rays of light, the intoxicating scent of sea salt, the gentle lapping of the waves against the shore, the tweeting of the birds in the trees. You grab your leather handbag in progress from the table and pick up where you left off from last week—stitching the strap onto the body of the bag.

Alongside other women, you cut and stitch, measure and attach—singularly focused on the task before you of creating a beautiful handbag. You hear a collective deep breath, a sigh of relief.

Here, women are invited to step out of the stress and anxiety for a moment, and to embrace

Elin's vision for the studio:

*"Forget anything that's happening outside.*

*There is no space outside this room."*

*Elin Johannson*

**A**t the Living Room Collective, a female-owned wellness studio, Elin has created a space for holistic healing of mind, body, and spirit for women.

And not just busy mothers, but women in every season of life—those navigating pregnancy, hormonal shifts, postpartum healing, or simply seeking space to reconnect with themselves. After the pandemic, she noted how many spaces which brought women and mothers together had quietly disappeared. As a mother of neurodivergent children, Sarah longed for such a community where mothers could come together to share each other's joys and struggles. So she decided to do something about her desire. And that's how the Living Room Collective was born. Inside the studio, they offer a variety of wellness-oriented classes and workshops, such as birthing classes, weekly prenatal yoga, baby & me yoga, and barre classes, even child's CPR classes. All of these programs are rooted in principles of functional health, supporting women through education, movement, and community. One specific way they cultivate community is through craft—specifically, hand-bag making.

Hand-bag making isn't for the faint of heart. As Sarah said: "you need to put some umph in your work." But despite its difficulty, handbag making offers restoration. Through the rhythmic, therapeutic movement of craft, women can restore their mind-body connection. One woman who attended a class said: "When I came and worked here, I realized I need to do more with my hands." Leather-bag making offered her what she had been craving—a space to slow down and create, outside of her busy schedule. Many women (I plead guilty myself) sacrifice slow, mindful practices for hurried habits—like my tendency to chug morning coffee or tea from a to-go cup in the car, burning my tongue as I taste before it cools at the stop light.

So why should women who don't even have time to sip their morning coffee from a ceramic mug choose to spend over an hour crafting a non-essential leather handbag? Perhaps because they experience something at this studio which neither practicality nor productivity could offer—an awe-inspiring sense of self-awareness and appreciation.

Throughout the day, our fingers frantically comb serums and sprays through frizzy hair, deftly peel apart oranges eaten on the way to work, reflexively type dozens of emails on laptop keyboards, impatiently drum against the side of our legs during board (bored?) meetings, mindlessly scroll on Instagram reels to find a satisfying cake-decorating video—our fingers propel us throughout the day, yet we often don't even think of them, much less thank them.

But at this studio, fast-paced fingers must slow as they work with smooth, worn leather—the skin of a once-living animal. Something real, something raw. With each stitch, with each snip, women become aware of the soft, nimble flesh and joints of their own hands. And they can experience a newfound awe for their body's own intricacy. In a world where women often sacrifice self-awareness and appreciation in favor of practicality and productivity, Sarah and Elin encourage women to slow down and become more attuned to their own bodies as they make handbags. She stresses that "the goal isn't so much about getting back to yourself and maintaining who you were before, but understanding, accepting, and allowing for positive change. How do you feel now, and how is that changing?" With this mindful approach, Sarah and Elin ensure that each woman feels grateful and aware for where they are right now.

*I want to reach out to women who would typically not reach out to search for help, who don't even understand they need someone."*

This studio offers more than just a personally enriching experience. After all, many wellness clubs offer workout classes for personal strength and diet plans for personal nutrition. What makes The Living Room Collective different? It offers a space for women not just to attend a yoga class or an infant CPR class or hand-bag making class. Given the very architectural design (as the name suggests, it's shaped like a living room), it invites connection. Women are encouraged to connect with one another, especially through the joys and struggles of motherhood. Crafting together provides a communal space for deep connections to form among mothers, at a time in life when women may need it the most.

As Elin said: "Motherhood can be so lonely. I don't think anyone can understand the transformation of becoming a mother—you can't prepare for that.

You will need a community. You will need other moms to join your community to go through this transition with."

But Elin doesn't just want this community to be for those who seek it—she wants to extend it to those who may need it most, even if they don't realize it. With a heart of compassion, she says: "I want to reach out to women who would typically not reach out to search for help, who don't even understand they need someone." Elin's dream is to ensure that every woman, even those who aren't seeking it, can find a space to reconnect with themselves and a female community through hobbies and activities like hand-bag making.

As a twenty-two year old college graduate preparing for the next stages of life, I have been pondering how to "keep my whimsy," as I like to say, whether it be in a career, or motherhood, or both. How can we make time for the hobbies and activities that inspire self-awareness, creativity, and joy despite the daily burdens and responsibilities that come with careers and motherhood? The Living Room Collective offers answers. By offering both mother and child movement classes, but also mothers-only hand-bag making classes, they hold in balance both the dignity and importance of motherhood, as well as the need for women to have passions and interests of their own apart from familial and societal identities. So to women looking to reconnect with themselves and other women, look no further. Whether you are pregnant, post-menopause, or anything in between, you have a seat at this living room table. When you step into the Living Room Collective, you will find restoration, self-awareness, and connection—and you may find yourself again.

*"When I came and worked here, I realized I need to do more with my hands and how much I miss it and need to get back to it."*

Sarah Vincent

*"The goal isn't so much about getting back to yourself and maintaining who you were before, but understanding, accepting, and allowing for positive change. How do you feel now, and how is that changing?"*

Elin Johansson





## *the thread back home*

### JAYNE BABINE FLOOR LOOM WEAVER

**S**he steps on the floor pedals, as if playing a grand piano. She lifts the wooden shaft in the center, revealing colored threads merging together.

She throws the boat-shaped shuttle between the shaft—left to right, right to left. She beats the shaft against the bottom of the frame— a gentle thump of wood against thread. And she repeats. With each repetition, she whispers to keep time— 1, thump, 2, thump, 3, thump, and so on. Complete absorption, total concentration. As a floor loom weaver, Jayne is engaged in work that seems to be almost sacred, almost ancient— because it is.

Some people pray. Some people journal. Some people run. Jayne weaves.

To clear her mind, to ground herself, to meditate, Jayne turns to the loom. The peaceful, tedious rhythm of weaving helps Jayne to feel at peace. But it took an unexpected detour from the height of her career for her to realize that.

Before weaving, most of Jayne's time was spent in the hustle and bustle of a 9-5 job in digital advertisement and data technology in New York. But then came the pandemic, and it was as if emergency breaks were slammed on a car running 100 miles an hour. Her small family moved back to Rhode Island, stepping into a slower pace of life in the suburbs.

But with this change came a feeling all too familiar for many people during the pandemic— loneliness.

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*Not only did Jayne carry the torch of weaving from her grandmother, but Jayne is fanning that flame for the next generation as well. Jayne is now teaching her own daughter to weave.*

So after covid restrictions had lifted, she began to seek in-person community in various places— a local yoga studio, a neighborhood block party. But nothing felt quite right. Until she found Woven Seas Studio. She was drawn immediately to the warmth of the community that made her feel so seen and welcomed. And she was also drawn immediately to the act of weaving itself. Perhaps weaving felt right because of its colonial history in Rhode Island.

But she sensed it was deeper. Deeper than history, deeper than geography. And after a revelatory conversation with her mother, Jayne realized her intuition was right. The connection went as deep as her very blood. The unbeknownst family lore was this: Jayne's grandmother was a Thai master weaver.

It all started to make sense. Jayne remembers that "when she first sat on the loom, she felt there was an ancestral root [she] was tapping into." She now knows that the practice felt ancestral because it truly was. With this newfound inspiration, she began to blossom in her work, eventually commissioning a piece for the Newport Harbor hotel to commemorate Rhode Island's weaving history. After that project, she was left with lots of yarn in the loom, and decided to use it for a project that would be even more meaningful for her: a piece in honor of her father, who was dying.

With her dad having moved from the USA back to Thailand, it would have been easy for her to despair, to spiral. She may never see him again since he lived on the other side of the globe in the midst of a pandemic. But FaceTiming him and sharing pictures of her work made the tragic distance seem surmountable. Through sharing in the beauty of weaving, Jayne and her father stayed united. Weaving offered Jayne a connection with her late grandmother, and her father; her pursuit of craft linked generations across time and space. It also offered her solace— comfort in a time of distress and desolation.

While Jayne often showed her love to her father through her weaving, Jayne's father often communicated his feelings through song. As he was nearing the end of his life, he would text Jayne link after link to his favorite music. Only after he had passed did she sift through the many songs that he had sent her— and it brought her to tears. By listening to the lyrics of the songs that resonated with him, she saw a side of him she never knew. She discovered more about what it was like to be a Thai immigrant in the USA struggling for his loved ones in a strange country.



JAYNE BABINE FINISHING A COMMISSIONED PIECE FOR NEWPORT HARBOR ISLAND RESORT

*when she first sat on the loom, she felt there was an ancestral root she was tapping into.*

Sorrow fills her heart when she thinks of the lyrics of one of his favorites: "Great Pretender" by The Platters. The song goes: "Oh, yes I'm the great pretender. Pretending that I'm doing well. My need is such, I pretend too much; I'm lonely, but no one can tell."

Jayne's father may have felt lonely as an immigrant. He may have felt that no one could tell. Yet Jayne has a different story. Because of the community she has built through weaving, she no longer has to feel alone in her battles. She is flourishing in a community that supports her not just in her craft, but in every area of her life.

By rediscovering her ancestral connection to weaving, she has formed a community in Rhode Island that her father would be proud to see. And she lives to ensure that this craft of weaving will not pass when she does. Not only did Jayne carry the torch of weaving from her grandmother, but Jayne is fanning that flame for the next generation as well. Jayne is now teaching her own daughter to weave.

Like Jayne's daughter, I have been impacted by the passing down of generational craft. I was taught by my grandmother Nancy how to sew. When I was in elementary school, she would make matching floral dresses for me and my sisters, which we proudly flaunted for Easter picnics and Christmas concerts. In middle school, I remember helping her sew headbands and stuffed dolls for children in Africa when my parents took us on a mission trip to Kenya.

As a college student, I have often frequented my university's sewing lab where I make circle skirts or scarves. Whenever I cut fabric, or rewind a bobbin, I fondly think back to my Grammy's dimly lit basement where my love for sewing began. She has put her heart and soul into her craft of sewing, and I'm grateful she has passed this love on to me. If I have children of my own, I can only hope to inspire them to continue to sew. In the footsteps of my grandmother, in the footsteps of Jayne, in the footsteps of her master-weaving grandmother, may we all find craft that we pass on for generations to come.

THE  
ECONOMICS  
OF  
MINIMALISM

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HOW  
SIMPLICITY  
LEADS TO  
FREEDOM

By  
Susan Dahl  
&  
Liz Darling

*There is a version of the deliberate life that stops at the front door. The home is uncluttered. The calendar is protected. The choices are intentional. But the financial life keeps running in the background — organized around its own logic.*

Owning less is a good start, clearing the decks for other things. The economics of spending less creates room for saved money to compound, growing over time. But the deeper shift happens when you simplify and focus the primary drivers of financial decisions, reorienting the process around core principles. The real inputs — how will this decision touch those I love, and impact how it feels to live?

What does it mean for my children's sense of earning their own way? Does it preserve my freedom to change direction when the moment arrives?

Does it add clarity? When those become the organizing questions, everything else — investments, cash flow, tax strategy, estate planning — has something real to organize around.

Financial decisions accumulate the way possessions do: one reasonable choice at a time, until the whole thing is heavier than it needs to be and harder to see clearly. The goal isn't to optimize the pile, it's to build something that is clear, well connected to your values, and intentional about impact. Here are three stories. Different people, different moments, different starting points. What they share is a movement toward clarity, clarity on how financial decisions connect to core values that are bigger than vacations or second homes.

*“The pieces hadn't changed. What they were organizing around had.”*

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#### A CLIENT STORY

### Caroline

#### *The gap between fine and yours*

Caroline builds carefully and deliberately. A professional role she believes in. A small cottage she loves. Two children she is raising with intention. By every measure, she has it together.

What she brought to us was harder to name. Not anxiety — more a quiet sense that her financial life had drifted.

That decisions made in the background were shaping things she cared about deeply: how her children understood their own path, the trust between generations, her own freedom to change course when the time came. These became the organizing principles: the impact on her family, the arc of her children's lives, what her next transition would actually look like. Once those questions were genuinely at the top, the financial work — cash flow, investments, insurance, estate, tax strategy — had something real to serve.

## A CLIENT STORY

## Sloane

*Life Reclaimed*

Sloane is a creative. She came into her marriage with strong instincts, clear values, and a natural ability to find possibility where others saw only constraint. Over the years, quietly, some of that got set aside.

Divorce brought financial complexity on top of emotional exhaustion. But alongside that weight was something else: hope. The question wasn't what was standard or safe — it was what could be true if her instincts were trusted.

As the financial picture came into focus, something else shifted too. Clarity about money became clarity about choices. Control in one place has a way of spreading.

## A CLIENT STORY

## Robert &amp; Claire

*Wealth built by passing things up*

Robert and Claire built steadily, without extravagance. Every luxury passed on was a quiet choice — to live freely, to keep options open, to eventually have something to pass on.

When that time arrived, so did something they hadn't anticipated. Their children felt the gap — not resentment, more like standing outside a room where important things were being decided.

What was needed was a way in. As the family's financial structure became visible and learnable, their children stopped feeling like outsiders and started feeling like the next chapter of something intentional.

*"Clarity about money became clarity about choices. Confidence in a plan became confidence in a direction."*



# LEVATUS

*Levatus — Latin — lifted, lightened, raised*

A boutique wealth advisory firm built on a simple conviction: clarity is the foundation of living freely. For nearly a decade, Levatus has defined a modern vision of integrated wealth service — one that starts not with portfolios but with people. We begin with the forces that actually shape a life, and work outward from there. We have been fortunate to build lasting relationships, grow through referrals, and cultivate a community of clients who share a belief that intention matters — in how they live, and in how they build.



SUE MCFARLAND'S HAND FELTED VASES USING LOCALLY SHEARED WOOL FROM ASHFORD HEIGHTS FARM, MA.



*Reconnecting with nature*

**SUE MCFARLAND TEXTILE ARTIST**

**A**fter a long day of staring at numbers on Excel and pixelated faces on Zoom, the first thing I like to do on a sunny day is take off my shoes, walk in the grass barefoot, then lay down and gaze up at the clouds.

My body craves to feel close with the earth— the source of what surrounds us, sustains us, makes us feel most alive. Many of us find ourselves longing to “touch grass,” quite literally, because of the need we feel to reconnect with nature.

Humans were meant to be immersed in and interact with nature— to experience the sun on our face, soil in our fingernails, snowflakes in our hair. But many of us spend our waking hours sitting in an air-conditioned building, squirming in a plastic chair, blinking under fluorescent lights. This isn't to say that having access to a safe, indoor workspace isn't a great privilege. And this isn't to say that everyone should abandon their day job to milk cows and churn butter. Rather, it means that although we are often disconnected from the rhythms and cycles nature, we all should become more attuned to, and grateful for, how nature provides for us.

That floral dress? From a cotton plant. That egg salad sandwich? From a living chicken. That historical fiction novel? From a living tree. That winter scarf? From a sheep. Yet because we are so disconnected from the manufacturing process, it's easy to view these products without thinking too much about their origin.

But not for Sue McFarland. Sue, a textile artisan at Wool and Weft, sees firsthand how a natural resource like sheep's wool turns into a marketable product like a winter scarf. She explains: “I am a part of completing a natural cycle. Fields and meadows covering the land provide sheep with natural food. The sheep grow a coat that is harvested. I take that ‘harvest’ and make a functional, sustainable, and aesthetically pleasing object. At some point, that object will outlive its usefulness and degrade back into the earth to provide nutrients for nature to begin its next cycle.” She understands the active, indeed essential, role in transforming the wool of a sheep into a functional fiber creation.

*“I am a part of completing  
a natural cycle.”*

So how does this process begin? Sue says that “the creation of any textile has always been a community process requiring the specialized skills and equipment of multiple human hands. Whether you are making wool, linen or cotton cloth, it is a very labor intensive production process.” It all begins with the shepherd who raises and cares for the sheep. This hands-on position differs starkly from what you might see on a LinkedIn job description— management of infectious disease, oversight of sheep breeding, and protection against weather extremes and dangerous . The shepherd's job is to make sure the sheep he has stay alive, and then that they bring other baby sheep to life as well. But like any good parent or caretaker, the shepherd's role is not just to keep the sheep in his flock from dying . It's to help them feel (as much as sheep can feel) safe and loved as well. As Sue says, “the best wool for making felt and wool products comes from well-cared for flocks.”

So we have the sheep— now we need the wool. Sue explains: “Once a year, usually in late winter/early spring, the long coat of the sheep is cut away. The shearer (or shearing team) comes to the farm and removes the fleece from each individual sheep using specialized electric or manual hand clippers. The fleeces come off the animal in one big piece. Because the sheep live mostly outside, their coat collects dirt and vegetable matter around the belly, legs and areas where they defecate. This unusable wool is cut away in a process called skirting. After skirting, additional VM (vegetable matter-pieces of grass, leaves etc.) is removed by hand.” Picking grass out of wool seems like a monumental task; I can only imagine it being somewhat like picking out bits of mulch of a cotton ball. But precision and attentiveness, to even tedious tasks like cleaning out wool, is necessary to ensure the beautiful final product.

After shaving off the wool, Sue explains the next step: scouring the wool. “Much like human hair produces oils, sheep produce a substance called lanolin that coats the fleece and makes it waterproof, but it also attracts dirt. For the purposes of fiber production, most of the lanolin and dirt need to be removed. “ Like we shampoo and condition our hair to remove build-up, so too sheep wool needs to be scoured to remove oils and dirt. We may go to a hair salon for this special treatment— but shepherds take their sheep's wool to a scouring mill to be soaked. After it gets soaked, it must be dried, and then comes the carding process.

*“The best wool for making felt and wool  
products comes from well-cared for flocks.”*



SUE MCFARLAND'S HAND FELTED VASES USING LOCALLY SHEARED WOOL FROM ASHFORD HEIGHTS FARM, MA.

If wool scouring were like shampooing and conditioning your hair, then carding is like combing and styling it once dried. Sue tells us: "Carding is the process of basically breaking up the clumps of cleaned wool with specialized wire tooth hand carders or machine carders that comb the fibers." And just like we might choose to style our hair into a braid or a bun, so too carded wool can be "styled" in two forms: roving and batt. Roving is a strand of untwisted wool which needs to be spun or felted to produce cloth; batt is a large rectangular sheet of unspun fiber that can be split apart. Sue says she prefers batt, as it makes the process of felt-making quicker.

After carding comes the felt-making process itself. Felt is made by rubbing the unspun fibers with water so they become tangled and won't come apart. When these unspun fibers become wet, microscopic scales open up. These microscope scales bear semblance to the woody organs that adorn conifer trees. The pine-cone-like scales serve the function of enmeshing with neighboring strands to tangle the fibers into a textile called felt. The felt maker lays out the dry wool in a predetermined shape or design and during the wetting and rubbing process uses the wool's tendency to tangle with adjacent strands to form a flat textile like a scarf or a three-dimensional object without seams similar to shaping clay.

Her studio is nested inside what was once a historic New England manufacturing cutlery mill. But about ten years ago, the new owner wanted to repurpose it as a space for artisans and manufacturers. Forks, spoons, and knives were once fashioned here; it is now a space where clay, wood, and quilts are created. Other places in the complex besides Sue's studio include a used book store, a community clay center, a woodworking studio, a permaculture education center, an award-winning quilt maker, a commercial photographer, and painters. As she walks through the complex to get to her studio, she describes her experience:

*"Walking through the complex, I am constantly exposed to the sounds and smells of creativity—turpentine, fresh wood, smelting glass, running sewing machines, lathes turning and the vacuum sounds of annealing ovens closing."*

After stopping to chat with some fellow artisans, Sue walks up a flight of stairs to reach her studio. And that's where her projects come to life. From throw pillows to winter scarves to woven Temari ornaments, Sue makes a range of unique 2D and 3D accessories that are all designed, fabricated, and finished by her own hand.

While all the pieces she makes are beautiful, they aren't meant solely for aesthetics: they serve a particular functional purpose, like keeping the neck warm during winter. Sue believes functionality to be essential to her work; likely because she has been living most of her adult life in a historic 1850's house, where, in Sue's words, "there's no room for things that don't serve multiple functions." By turning wool from sheep in the field into fiber vessels for the home, Sue stewards well the resources of nature by bringing both beauty and functionality to humanity.

After hearing about how Sue connects with nature through felt-making, some of us may be wanting to try our own hand at it. So what would she say to those wanting to learn? "Not unlike many vocations, some parts of the creative process are more satisfying than others...but you have to work through and appreciate each part of the making journey. In the end, you'll have the satisfaction (or dissatisfaction!) of making an object like no other existing in the world. Accept failure as a labor pain."

It's also important to accept the possibility that our attempts may not turn out to be perfect. Whether it's smudging the corners of a painting, or playing the wrong note on a song, or burning the bottom of sourdough bread, failure is always a possibility when we are bringing new art to life. But Sue reminds us to accept failure as a natural part of this process. To avoid failures is to spurn creation.

We may not all have the time, energy, capacity or desire, to turn sheep's wool into functional fiber vessels. But we can all find our own ways to re-connect with the cycles and rhythms of nature. Whether it's working in the fields with sheep, or simply touching grass after a long day at our day job, we can all find peace and fulfillment by appreciating the gift that is nature.

*"In the end, you'll have the satisfaction (or dissatisfaction!) of making an object like no other existing in the world. Accept failure as a labor pain."*



## *the healing power of art*

LINDA RHYNARD TAPESTRY WEAVER

**A**t some point in our lives, many of us have experienced the healing power of art.

Maybe it was listening to Gloria Gaynor's masterpiece *I Will Survive* after a difficult breakup; shedding a tear while looking at the magnificence of the *Pieta*; oil painting a majestic sunrise with a loved one. Both experiencing and creating art, whether it's a song, a sculpture, or a painting, offers us a cathartic way to get in touch with the deepest parts of ourselves— the anger, the grief, the joy we feel. We connect our invisible, sometimes indiscernible emotions with a physical, experiential substance— and that brings us peace.

Science backs this. Studies show that singing stimulates the vagus nerve to lower stress levels; drawing increases blood flow to the prefrontal cortex to increase serotonin.

Art of many forms has the power to heal our minds and bodies. In this interview, Linda Rhynard, a tapestry weaver in Rhode Island, attests to the healing and peace that comes from tapestry weaving.

Artistry, specifically textiles, has always been a part of Linda's life. As a child, she was taught by a friend to knit and by her grandmother to sew; as a young mother, she crafted handsewn tablecloths, curtains, and sweaters for her household.



The injury also inspired her to think about what she felt was truly important to her. She reflects: "It was in the still quiet moments in the night that I came to the realization that there was more to life, more of me that had been untapped; and it changed my way of thinking about the rest of my life." After recovering from that injury, she decided to discover more of life by fully devoting her time to an activity where she feels truly alive—tapestry weaving.

Tapestry weaving has been a source of healing for Linda, both physically and spiritually. The finger movement and coordination inherent to weaving helped her to regain dexterity and fine motor skills after the injury. But weaving didn't just help her hand recover—it has also brought peace to her inner being. By becoming a full-time weaver, she has more time to exist in those peaceful, reflective spaces.

As both an artist and a spiritually-connected person myself, I can relate to how art helps me to connect with the divine. I like to think that whenever I create, whether it be a song or a poem, that I am co-creating with God. I imagine God smiling, watching me fiddle with strings on my ukulele to find the perfect harmony, or tinker with my words on the page to find the perfect rhyme. It is in my creative element, existing outside of societal constraints or pressures, where I feel most free.

Linda likewise has experienced such moments of creative liberty when she enters flow state, as she says: "There are times when I am weaving that my mind can be elsewhere, but my fingers know what to do. Sometimes shapes and color combinations 'accidentally' appear; and in retrospect, are exactly what the piece needs."

For artists, there is a sense of freedom that comes with creating — you can freely choose your style, colors, materials, purpose. But for artists who sell their work, there is also immense pressure: which styles, colors, materials would make the most profit? Linda holds onto her freedom by listening to her inner spirit. When she becomes too focused on weaving for profit or creating for commission, she loses her sense of peace. So she listens instead to what calls from within.

*Her life has become more simple, more spiritual, so much so that "while her hands are moving, her mind is praying."*

But after a change in family circumstances, she no longer had the capacity to create as much as she wanted to. According to Linda, "creative things became a luxury and had to be put aside." Pragmatic needs took over, and so she worked hard in the corporate sphere to sustain her family. Creative endeavors still fueled her heart, but they were put on the backburner for a while.

Though she did not yet know it, that would change on an ordinary August morning in 2000, when a fall left Linda with a seriously injured hand, wrist, and elbow. In the stillness that followed, something unexpected surfaced. Forced to stop, she began to see. Despite the bleakness of the situation, she was sustained by her strong faith. Instead of being upset that she couldn't use her arm, she found glimmers of gratitude. She realized that the injury taught her to be grateful for the many things we often take for granted in life—like healthy, functioning limbs. So much so that she now marks August 19 on her calendar every year as the day she found her creative path.

Instead of proliferating tapestry pieces of her own, she is now proliferating love for tapestry-weaving through her students. According to Linda, “[she] lives to teach.” Her practice is now focused on teaching new weavers, continuing weavers, and advanced weavers, both at her home studio, the Rhode Island Weaving Center in Wakefield, and various other workshops, community centers, and fiber fairs. Regarding the centrality of teaching to her craft, she eloquently says: “If I were to define my practice, it isn’t so much a body of woven work, but the blessings that each of my students have brought to my life. So I guess that my ‘life’s tapestry’ would be my classes. [I] would be the warp, and my students would make up the weft.” The warp threads and the weft threads both interlock to create fabric, with the warp providing stability, and the weft providing texture. What a fitting expression for how Linda and her students both learn from and support each other. Through her example, Linda reminds us that knowledge of craftsmanship should not be gatekept for a talented selected few, but rather shared for the enjoyment of all who desire to learn.

Because at the end of the day, craft isn’t just about creating the most intricate, awe-inspiring final product. She reminds us that “tapestry weaving is more than the finished piece. It becomes part of you while you are designing it. It’s about the planning and the choosing of colors, the interpretations of the vision, creation of the cartoon to help guide your work – it’s all about the process.” As with many things in life, it’s about the journey, not the destination. And taking other people along for the ride can make the journey so much sweeter.

Hearing the healing and peace she and her students experience through craft may inspire some of us in our artistic journeys. So what advice does Linda have for aspiring creators? “Master the basic and advanced techniques, then make them your own. Do not worry about being artistic, because each one of us has intrinsic talent. You just have to find it and own it.” The peace of craft, the healing of craft, the solace of craft is within our grasp. Now, it’s only up to each one of us– to see the artist inside of ourselves, and to reach out to the brush, to the piano, to the loom, and to take hold of the healing power at our very fingertips.

*“Do not worry about being artistic, because each one of us has intrinsic talent. You just have to find it and own it.”*

*Linda Rhynard*





*a lifetime of joy*

**ELWOOD DONNELLY WOOD-CRAFTER, BASKET WEAVER, MUSICIAN**



ELWOOD BONNELLY'S BASKET WEAVING PROCESS

**T**ail curling, softly purring, a stray calico cat passes by the window of the Donnelly residence where Aubrey and Elwood live.

The sound of tapping tickles its ears, and the cat is intrigued. So it peers inside. On the laundry side of the basement, an old dryer rumbles, beating in time to the tap of Aubrey's clogs in the dancing corner. She twirls around, hair flying, to her newly released folk music album. Her husband smiles at her antics, then flips a dog-eared page in his poetry book.

When he's done, Elwood lays it atop a tottering stack of cookbooks, music books, and novels. His fingers trace the side of a smooth wooden table he just polished, then he wanders over to his basket-weaving workspace, where strands of dyed reeds lie on the table.

He begins: one bamboo ash reed over two, one bamboo ash reed under two, over two, under two, and so on. Soon, a criss-crossed array of emerald green, sapphire blue, and amber yellow lies in his hands. He shapes the reeds into a bowl and Elwood smiles, setting down the finished basket. After kissing his beaming wife's cheek, he turns to the window. He gives the cat a wave and the stray cat purrs at Elwood, tilting its head— so Elwood opens the window and pats the cat's matted head. When the music fades, the lantern light dims, the calico cat scampers away, its paws feeling lighter.

It is said that curiosity killed the cat, but this cat couldn't have felt more alive after peeking into the window. For Elwood Donnelly's basement is a cave in which he explores the gems of art in its rawest and most beautiful forms. Woodwork, weaving, dancing, singing— a range of artistic expressions co-existing in one small, humble space.

Elwood's artistic journey began with his roots, quite literally. As his first name suggests, Elwood discovered an interest in woodwork. He would later craft an arbor (latticed arch) under which his daughter got married, and a cedar chest for her keepsakes. Music was the next creative pursuit which shaped his life path. But it became far more than just a hobby— it became his new vocation.

*Woodwork, weaving, dancing, singing— a range of artistic expressions co-existing in one small, humble space.*

Elwood had been singing since childhood, and had formed a garage band in his teenage years, but he said “the thought of a music career never crossed [his] mind until [he] met [his current wife] Aubrey.” But along comes a lady with flowing brown locks and a smile of gold, and he is moved to say yes to a life with her— and thus a career in music for them both. So after they had some success with gigs, they decided to make the leap. At age 29, Aubrey quit her job as a literacy teacher, and four years later, at age 47, Elwood quit his job as a post office letter carrier. And the gigs kept coming, and coming, until they found themselves getting inquiries for music every day. Now, Elwood and Aubrey are musicians full-time through performing, recording, touring, and teaching workshops in folk music, all which can be found on their website.

About a year after beginning his music career, Elwood would find another creative outlet. Aubrey was headed to teach music at a folk school in North Carolina, and the couple decided to go together so they could attend a crafting class there. Of the classes listed for that week, basket-weaving caught Elwood's eye— so he decided to try his hand at it. Under the guidance of a master basket, Elwood wove his first basket. A year later in 1999, Elwood took another week-long class with another basket weaver in Kentucky. He now weaves functional baskets which he often sells at Made In Warren Artist Cooperative in Warren RI, makes for commission, or gives to people as gifts.

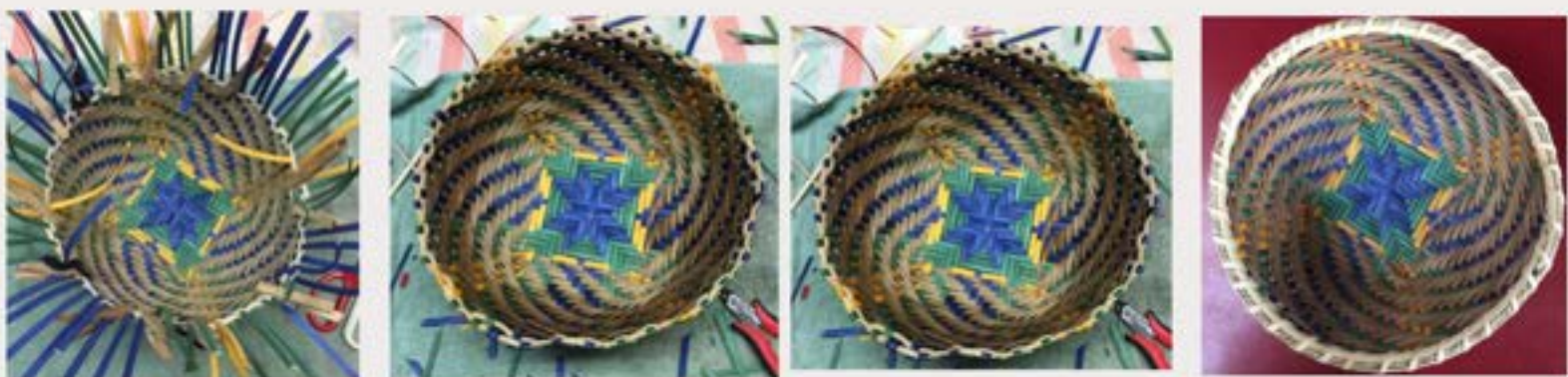
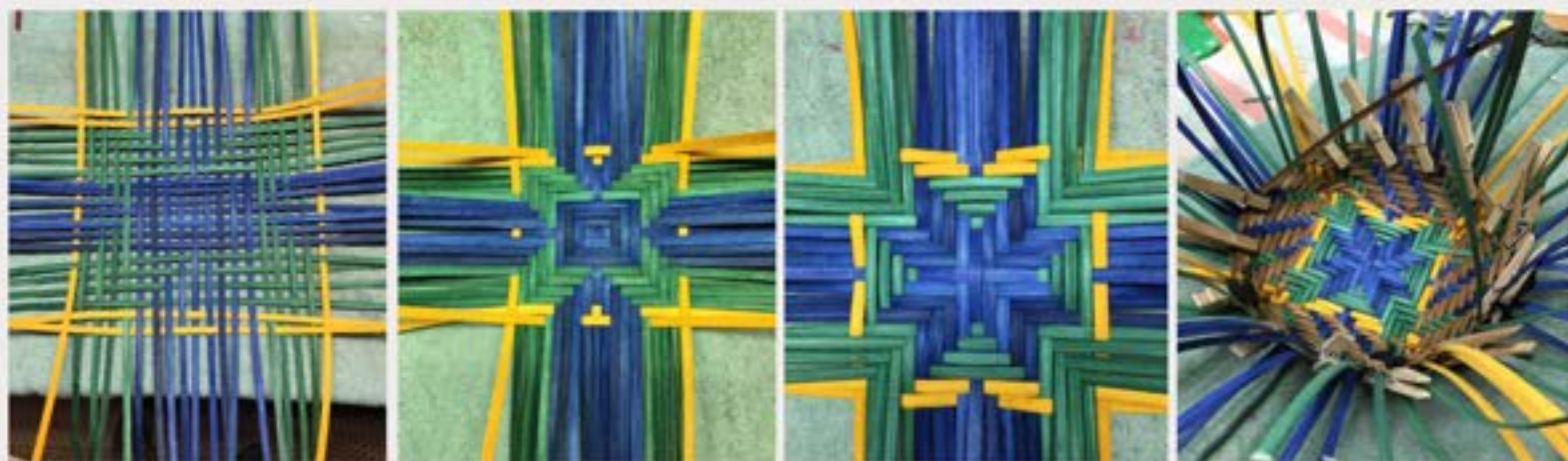
As a full-time musician, this hobby has offered him a different creative outlet. He explains: “Weaving gives me a leisure activity that fills some of those empty spaces between musical performances, while creating something that I love and that people find captivating enough to want in their homes.” And his journey of basket weaving began in 1998 will now come full circle in 2027. Next year, he will be returning to the same camp in North Carolina where he first learned to weave baskets— but this time, as a teacher.

*“Weaving gives me a leisure activity that fills some of those empty spaces between musical performances, while creating something that I love and that people find captivating enough to want in their homes.”*

Both Elwood's success in music and interest in basket-weaving bloomed at an age where many people are having a mid-life crisis. So to anyone out there in their mid-30s, late-40s, who might be curious about finding a new craft— should I learn how to make pastries? write haikus? pick up a guitar? take an improv acting class? Look to the example of Elwood. He remarks: "to those who may worry that it may be too late in life to start, I say don't let any obstacles get in your way; work through them and dwell on positive thoughts, reject any ideas that you may fail, step out, put in the work and hope for a favorable outcome."

Elwood doesn't think that craft should be limited to a select talented few who hope to make a career out of it. He believes we all need "something for which we will sacrifice wealth and time to do, not knowing if it's our life's work or a life-long hobby." There's an intrinsic value to crafting, even without any financial profit. But how exactly do we find which crafts are worth possibly sacrificing time and money for? Don't be afraid to explore which ones suit you best, Elwood advises: "Make things, play instruments, arrange flowers, until one of them stands out to you and becomes your passion. Then you will have a lifetime of joy and will help bring more love into the world."

Each one of us has the opportunity before us to explore crafts, whether it be basket-weaving, songwriting, or something else, and to bring joy to others. Joy to ourselves, to our families, to our neighbors, to the world—and perhaps even to a passing calico cat.



# Writers in our backyard

*by Anna Downes*



Rhode Island hums with a creative energy that is quiet and insistent at once. Walk slowly enough and you will notice it: a mural that stops you mid-stride, a sculpture occupying a corner as if it has always belonged there, a RISD student moving through the world with something unfinished and luminous turning over in their mind. New England has always had this quality — a refusal to perform, a preference for letting the work speak.

The writers I had the privilege of sitting with for this issue carry that same spirit. They are not chasing spotlights. They are practicing the art of paying attention, of trusting the pull of an idea before they can fully name it, of being ready when inspiration arrives and having the courage to follow where it leads.

The biggest theme consistent throughout every interview is the idea of openness and readiness for when inspiration strikes. Great art cannot be forced with pressure. Great stories and art are a discovery within oneself — and the ability to trust your intuition when an idea is pulling you in a certain direction. It is about letting yourself see what unfolds, engaging in your artistic practice and process so that when inspiration strikes, you are ready to listen and let it take you by the hand on the journey ahead. Each writer spoke about this in their own words, and yet the thread was unmistakable.

Creativity takes practice. One only needs to be brave enough and confident enough to share the stories they create. Stories can be immensely intimate and personal, and it can be scary to share them with others, but if you do, you may find that other people are more willing to embrace this intimacy rather than judge it.

Once a story is told, it stops belonging only to the person who lived it. It opens. It becomes available to anyone willing to receive it.

I hope these voices find you ready to receive the gift of their art.

DAUGHTERS OF NANTUCKET

*There has to be a purpose. The messages have to be deeper than the average—even if presented in a real-life way—there has to be a "so what?"*



*Julie Gerstenblatt*

**What is your earliest memory of being drawn to stories—not necessarily writing them, but recognizing their power?**

My mother read to my brother and me every night — chapter books, one of us on each side of her. I still remember the night a scene from *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* made my brother laugh so hard he fell off the bed. She was a teacher who understood that imagination comes first — but she also pushed us. Every summer we went to the library, checked out books, and wrote about them. And then there was my aunt, who invented a character called Uncle Maxtub and would call me on the phone to relay his latest adventures. It was pure entertainment, pure imagination. Story was everywhere in my childhood — and it never really left.

**One of the themes of *Daughters of Nantucket* is what happens when women must reconcile the lives they've built with the lives they once imagined. Why does that particular tension interest you as a storyteller?**

Nantucket was a particularly interesting place for women — they could build businesses and enjoy freedoms that women inland simply couldn't. Once I learned about that agency, I wanted to explore what they would actually do with it. I knew early on there would be three women, three points of view — that was my earliest version, a book that was never published. Then an editor gave me feedback that changed everything: this story, she said, starts at the meeting.

You're working with three women, three distinct voices and perspectives. How did you begin to understand each woman as separate from the others? Did one character form before the others, leading the way to the "discovery" of your main protagonists?

Eliza arrived first, before I'd toured a single home or done any research. Maria was the hardest to crack — everything about her is so scientific, and I'm really not into science. I first saw her in a portrait at the library: rigid, stern, unyielding. I remember looking at her and thinking, how are you and I going to figure this out?

Then I found letters — sisters writing about Maria playing whist, laughing, holding court when the harbor froze and no one could get boats across. Suddenly she was human. Loose enough to talk to me. History books clean everything up; the letters gave me back the real woman — lustful and mean and gentle all at once.

Meg came with sympathy built in from the start. Pregnant in July, the most accessible of the three. Her relationship with Benjamin felt easy and true. The harder work was writing her as someone denied what the others had freely — not intelligence, not education, not ambition. Meg has all of that. What she is denied is access. She wants the American dream and uses education as her means of getting there. Writing from inside that injustice gave her everything — and made her, in the end, the most urgent voice in the book.

**Nantucket functions as far more than backdrop in this novel—it's almost a character unto itself. What drew you to this island as the essential setting for this story?**

I've been going to Nantucket since 1978 — a week or two every summer with my family. I loved it deeply, but I never considered it for a novel. I was working on romance and mystery until my second agent couldn't sell my second book and said simply: write the historical one. No one has done that story. There's a hole in the market. Write about the great fire.

It was a significant risk on multiple fronts — writing historical fiction for the first time, telling the story from the point of view of a woman of color, bringing a real historical figure to life, and then deciding she was gay. Maria Mitchell had extraordinary success, broke every barrier, and left almost nothing on record about her love life. That gap was mine to fill. She took her Vassar students west in tents to study the stars. Someone, I thought, was probably gay in Nantucket in the 1840s.

The island itself demanded the story.

**Have you found that your understanding of what makes a story worth telling has changed over time? What matters to you now that perhaps didn't matter when you first started writing?**

Yes — and being published clarified it in ways I didn't expect. It's not that every story needs to justify its existence, but publication asks something of you: there has to be a reason. A purpose. The messages have to run deeper than the surface, even when the story feels entirely grounded in real life. There has to be a "so what?"

Entertainment can be enough sometimes — but in historical fiction, in serious contemporary work, something larger has to be driving it. My second book carries a global ambition — the Opium Trade, clipper ships, lives that could end any day at sea. That kind of weight changes you as a writer. You can't easily go back.

My publisher now asks for the book club questions before the manuscript is finished. At first that felt like a constraint. Now I understand it as a compass — it keeps you writing toward something that matters.

**You balance teaching, family life, and writing. How do you protect the time and mental space needed for creative work? What does a sustainable writing practice look like for you?**

The foundation was built around my children's school day — get them on the bus, write from nine to two. I still keep those hours. Morning is when the work happens.

Yoga gives me the physical counterweight — clarity, groundedness, a body that isn't just sitting at a desk. I keep a notebook tracking my daily word count, not as pressure but as proof. The one thing that pulls me under is promotion. After my first book sold, I didn't write for a year and a half — book talks, appearances, the machinery of publication. I wasn't productive and I knew it. Now I protect the morning hours the way I protect everything else that matters. The work comes first. The talking about the work comes after.

**What role does reading play in your writing life? Are there books or writers who continue to shape how you think about craft or what a story can do?**

Reading is critical — I never believe people who say they want to write but don't read. Writers have to read. I taught this to my students: you have to read as a writer. You can borrow something, be inspired by an idea, and the more you read the more you understand how certain genres handle certain tropes. Reading always helps me stylistically. Early on it was big sagas — *The Thorn Birds*, *Danielle Steel*. Romance has always been part of me.

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**What do you hope readers carry with them after finishing *Daughters of Nantucket*? Not necessarily a "message," but perhaps a feeling or question that lingers?**

I want readers to see Nantucket differently. For anyone who has walked Main Street, stood at the harbor, felt the particular quality of light there — the island will mean something new. I want the book to be immersive, a great escape. But also a quiet reorientation — the kind that lingers after the last page, when you find yourself thinking about who built this place, who was kept out, and what it cost.

**MURDER ME TWICE**

*Don't waste time.*

Chris Watson

CHRIS WATSON  
PHOTO CREDIT: MARK AMUNDSON

**When did you first realize that writing was not just something you did, but something you were? Was there a moment, a particular a-ha point in time that brought this realization?**

I think it's really that I've known all my life that I am a storyteller. I did theater and television as a kid. I wrote my first novel in college and it's terrible and will never see the light of day, but it proved to myself that I can do it. Even in my corporate life I was writing stories and it was my favorite part of my job.

**What does your writing practice look like on an ordinary day? Not the romantic version, the real one. The tea, the gremlins of procrastination, the terror of the blank paper, the sitting down anyway.**

Historically the process for me was finding time in and around my full-time job. Until recently that meant going to the library or a coffee shop in the evening after work or on the weekend when my family was busy doing something else. I always write electronically using an iPad with a keyboard. I might jot down notes but I prefer to do it electronically because I am faster that way and it's accessible wherever I go—if I have an idea I can capture it on my phone and can edit on my desk at home or I can write wherever I am. I use an app called Scrivener which is great because it allows me to capture my research, my ideas, as well as multiple drafts. As far as the inspiration goes, let me think how to answer that, ah... sometimes I'll sit down and I need to force myself to write something, anything, just to get going. Right before the pandemic hit, I joined a writing group with three other people and as of that time we have met every Sunday for six years. Each one of us gives a prompt and I have now written a quarter million lines and many of these have found their way into the fiction I write.

**Do you write with your hands or your heart first? How do you know when a sentence is true versus when it's merely correct?**

I've talked to a lot of different writers. Some of them consider themselves plotters—others write by the seat of their pants and call themselves pantsers. ("Writing by the seat of your pants" is often shortened to "pantsing"). In my first mystery novel that I now have agents trying to sell, one of the characters is a writer and refers to herself as "pants half off"—which is kind of like me. I let the plot arise...

**What writers or books live on your bedside table right now? Not the ones you think you should be reading but the ones you actually reach for at 11 p.m.**

At the moment I am working my way through all of the Slow Horses books by Mick Herron—it's an espionage series about failed spies. But I also have on my bedside a book about an actual murder that happened in Maine, called Finding Amy, and I'm also reading a history of Captain James Cook and his final voyage of exploration.

**In a world that demands constant productivity, how do you protect the slow, mysterious work of writing? What does "unhurried" mean in your creative life?**

Part of it is when I'm writing for myself I'm not necessarily writing to a deadline, but when I get rolling and I'm in a groove sometimes I discover that I have written 4,000 or 5,000 words. But for my Sunday morning group I actually create a first draft before I meet them and I impose a pressure on myself as a change of pace.

**Why do you write? What's the real, human reason you put words on a page?**


If I didn't write I don't know what I would do. I can't paint, I can't draw—writing is something I do to express myself but I also love the idea of writing for others. Since I was a child I loved telling stories.


**What do you hope your words do in the world? Not what you hope they say, but what you hope they cause—a pause, a recognition, a moment of beauty?**


I hope what I write provides a sense of connection and that it speaks to people. When I read something and I look up and realize how much time has passed because I was enraptured, that brings me so much joy. I hope that what I write provides escape and perhaps some surprise and some recognition.


**What does "carpe diem" mean to you? How do you live the experience of seizing the day as a writer?**


If I have an idea I need to write it down. I will wake in the middle of the night with an idea and I know that if I don't write it down I will lose it. So it's not about seizing the day but mostly about seizing the idea and inspiration.

Who taught you to see the world the way you do? Was it a writer? A grandmother? A landscape? A loss? 

Mmm... my parents always encouraged me to read. Our home when I was growing up was full of books. Hallways full of books. I was exposed to so much of that. But I think two people who had a particular impact on me: one was my grandfather who was a college professor and a naturalist and I spent the summers bird watching with him, watching the seasons... and another person was a high school teacher, Paul Cartier. He was my theater teacher—he wasn't just a teacher, he actually taught drama classes. I spent two years in the Shakespeare theater troupe he created and I spent so much time exploring the themes of Shakespeare and the triple meanings. He gave me so much love for words and what they can represent and it's really thanks to him. 

If you could gather five writers (living or dead) around a table for a meal, who would they be? What would you serve? What would you ask? 

So let's see.... 


One would be a poet, Rudy Francisco—I was introduced to his writing by a member of my writing group. He is witty and accessible and fun. 


My favorite author of that time is C.S. Forester and my father introduced me to him when I was 12 and that was writing that really changed my life.


Another would be David Eddings and he was the first fantasy writer that I really dove into. I still go back to read his stuff. I think Agatha Christie as she's one of the best that's ever been....

The fifth author would be Henry Beston who wrote a book called *The Outermost House* which told his story of living in Cape Cod around the turn of the century for a full year and it's an extraordinary look at the environment of the Cape and how it changes. My grandfather loved the book and the house that Beston lived in was still at the Cape when I spent my summers there and we would walk North Eastham at the National Seashore. And my grandfather named their cottage *The Outermost House*. Probably none of them had a really good pizza—so probably a good coal-fired pizza...

I think I would just like to sit back and listen to what they would have to say to each other.

What makes a good life for a writer? Not a successful life—a good life. 

The feeling that you are writing something that you like and that you feel proud of. And perhaps the challenges. I feel a lot of people out there think they can't write as they are worried about what other people will say and that they'll be told they aren't good. But I think everyone can be a writer as an outlet of their creativity, their emotions, and their past. Even if it's just for themselves. 

If you could go back and meet yourself at the moment you first put pen to paper with the intention of being a writer—what would you tell that younger self? And would your younger self listen? 

I think I would probably say don't waste time.

And whether I would listen... ha! I hope I would, but when you are young what do old people know?

What's the most radical thing about being a writer in 2026?

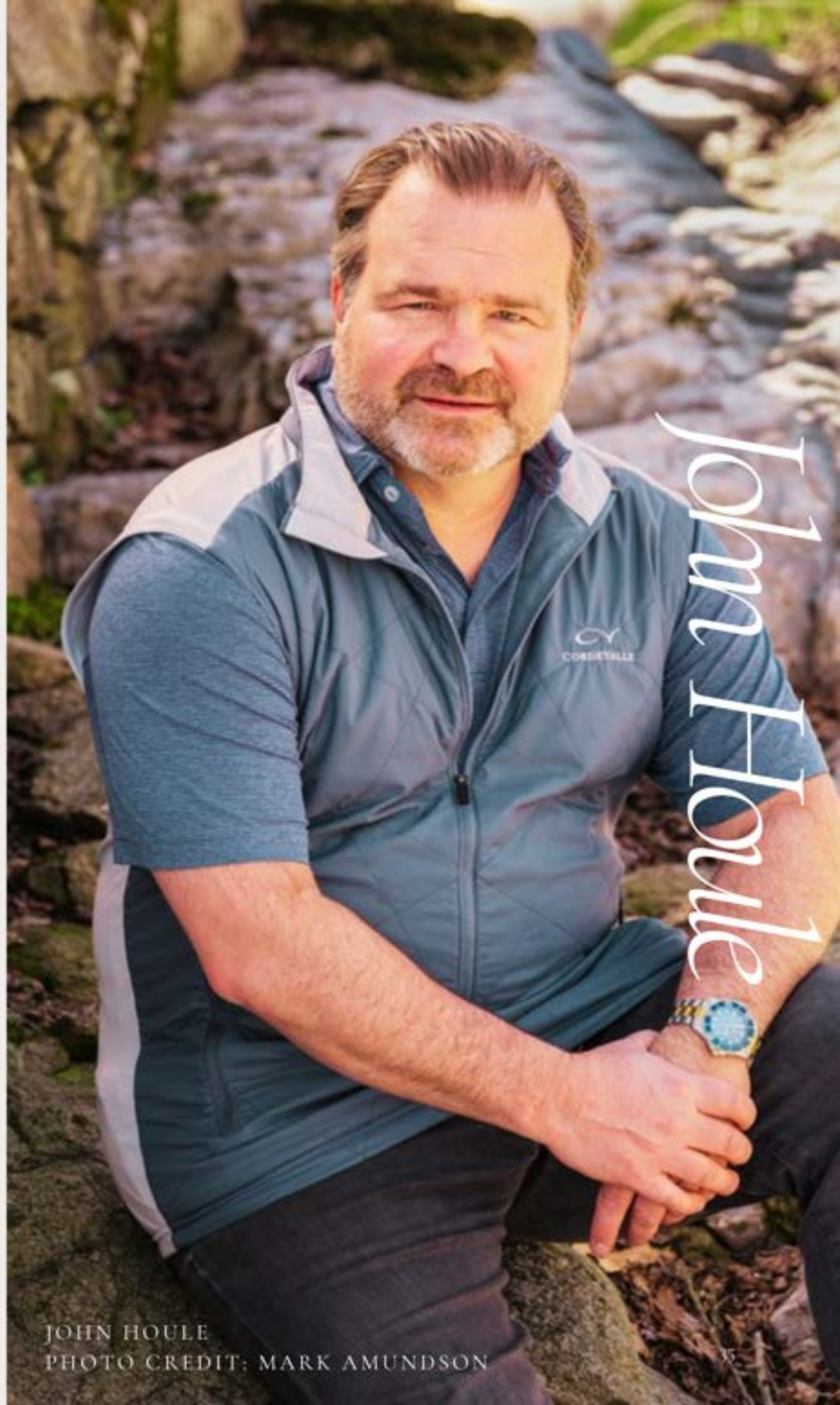
That in our current environment words are being devalued, expression and diversity are being shunned by many people, but as a writer expression, unique opinions and different perspectives are so vital and we can't be scared to write that down. Whether it's in your own journal, a letter to the editor, or a fiction piece, writers need to have responsibility for the words and the truth they can reveal.

How do you want to spend your days ten years from now? Will you still be writing? Will it look different?

I would love to just be able to focus on writing. A very good friend who is an award-winning published writer asked me once "why do you want to do it?" And I told her just once I want to walk into a bookstore and see what I've written on the bookshelf waiting to be discovered by someone. Ten years from now I want to be doing that a lot.

**KING-MAKERS OF PROVIDENCE  
• THE SIBERIAN CANDIDATE**

*To be a true Patriot is to question  
authority. In my own way, I think I'm  
doing that in my writing.*



*John Houle*

JOHN HOULE  
PHOTO CREDIT: MARK AMUNDSON

### On Origins and Awareness

John, when did you first sense that politics had grown "cold and unattached"? Was it an observation as a citizen—or the spark that demanded to become a novel?

As a political consultant in the early 2000's, I became disillusioned with politics. I had worked as a press spokesman and campaign manager on council, state senate, state representative, mayoral, secretary of state, and lieutenant governor races. The spark for me came when I was the campaign manager for a Democratic mayoral primary in Providence in 2002.

### On Character and Moral Trajectory

Henry Mercucio stands between ambition and conscience. When you began writing him, did you already know whether he would bend or break—or did you allow him to decide for himself as the story unfolded?

I always knew Henry would face a moral dilemma, but the story is how he handles it and applies his skill set to turn the tables on those he feels responsible for the current state of politics.

### On Pace and Gravity

Your book moves like a campaign: swift, tactical, relentless. Yet the prose remains measured, almost restrained. How do you write speed without sacrificing gravity? What's the craft of making something urgent without letting it become breathless?

I think writers are best when they write what they know. My style is definitely fast-paced, but I think there are some thought-provoking concepts behind the prose. In my recent writing, I like to insert an introspective chapter after major action scenes to give readers a chance to breathe and think.

### On Structure as Theatre

You structure the story in five acts, as though it were staged for performance. Do you see politics as theatre—and yourself as playwright more than novelist? What does that Shakespearean scaffolding give you that a conventional three-act structure would not?

In fact, my publisher pushed back on officially labeling the story in five acts, which is why you don't see Act I, Act II, etc. And as a new author at the time, I went with what the professionals wanted. However, this classical, proven storytelling technique allows me to further develop and show my characters' progression and redemption story.

Politics is definitely theater.... "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." (William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*)

Another great quote: "Politics is theater for ugly people."

### On Symbolic Beginnings

The novel opens at a funeral, amid a gathering of Providence's political class. That feels deliberate, almost mythic. What dies at the beginning of this story—innocence, loyalty, an entire era of politics—and how consciously did you build that funeral as metaphor?

The funeral was based on an actual event about a Boston City Councilor, Brian Honan, who was a great friend and passed away too young.

The funeral scene represents the death of old-time politics, very similar to what's illustrated in Edwin O'Connor's *The Last Hurrah*. While O'Connor was identifying the transition away from machine politics, I focus on the next evolution, which I define as the corporatization of politics.

### On Providence as Living Entity

Providence itself feels like a character in this book—layered, historic, quintessential in its particular brand of politics. What does it take to make place feel alive on the page?

With its historic past and legendary lore, Providence is certainly a character. While I wanted the setting to be indicative of a mid-sized city, Providence offers unique characteristics that make it ideal for a political novel. It allows me to explore traditional power structures and the influence of external forces, such as organized crime.

### On Protecting Solitude

In an age of constant distraction, how do you protect the solitude required to write? Do you approach the page as a craftsman reporting to his bench each morning, or as a strategist waiting for the right moment, the right opening, to strike?

I find solitude in writing. Before work, during lunch, after work, and on weekends, my creative writing is my reward and what keeps me grounded in a frantic world.

And finally, has the work made you more hopeful about the political arena, or simply more aware of its cost?

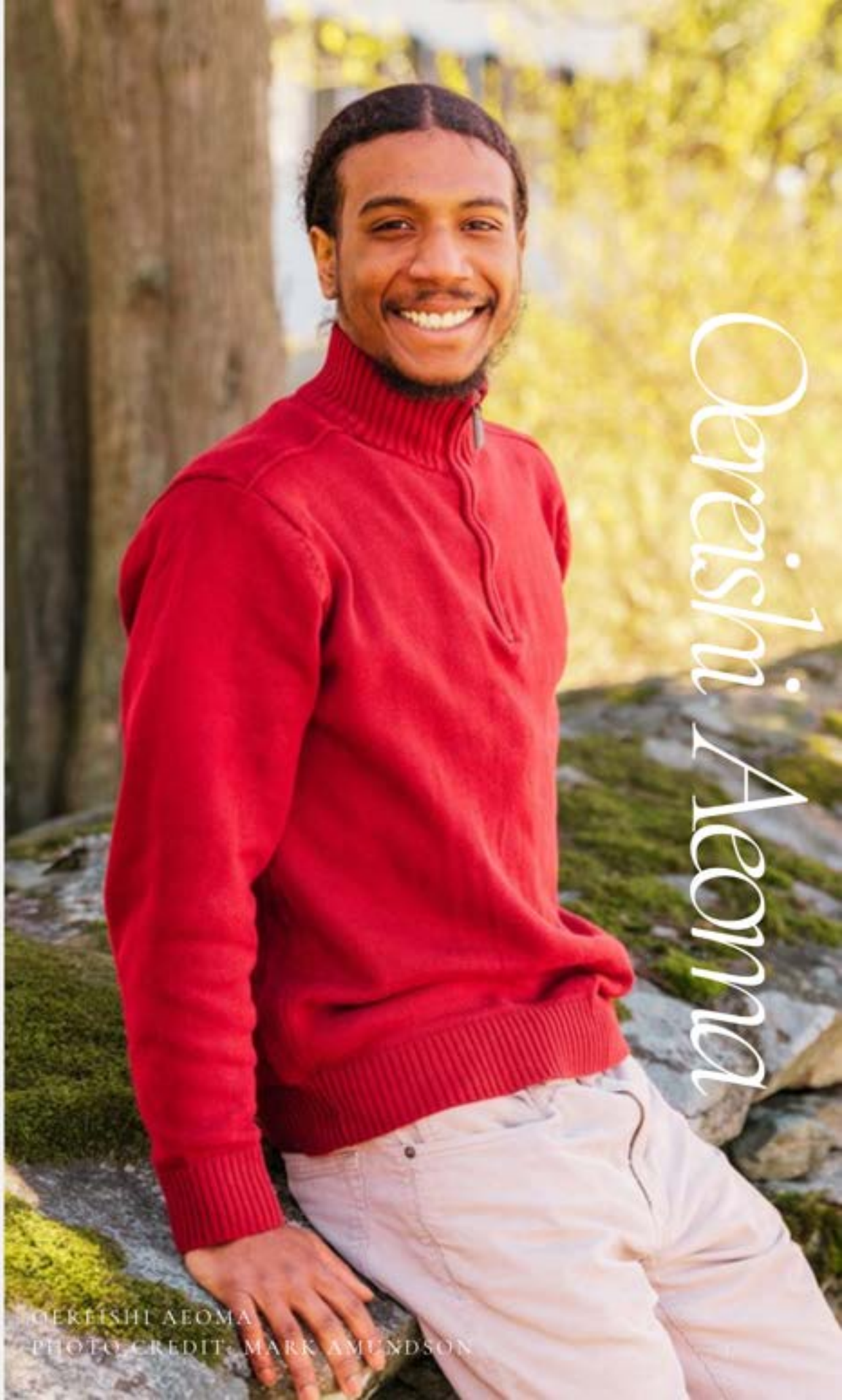
I am an eternal optimist. I believe in the American system. To be a true Patriot is to question authority. In my own way, I think I'm doing that in my writing.

**BIRD BAND  
· BEING**

*I choose to focus on the generous and positive experiences and people.*

Oveishi Aeoma

OVEISHI AEOMA  
PHOTO CREDIT: MARK AMUNDSON



### On Multiple Vocations

Poet, storyteller, healer, writer, and more are all aspects of me that compose one. Whenever I do not embody my purest and truest essence, the stream of consciousness that flows from an everlasting source is denied its recognition. Otherwise, there is no tension, as there is no stress; by being one with, and only influenced by, Source, I become and express everything orchestrated by the cosmos, which I'm grateful and honored to be and do.

### On Community and Conversation

Community is the very essence of culture, and I recognize community as a supportive collective accumulated and generated over space and time. Yes, the New England poetry community can be both generous and insular, and although I have felt rejected and projected on by a handful of the poetry spaces I've entered, I choose to focus on the generous and positive experiences and people. For instance, when I perform my poems and stories, I sense and see the shift within the hearts and minds of the audience members. In addition, I have encountered wonderful people willing to connect, compensate, and help me without prejudice.

### On What Sustains

To say that I am completely aware of what compels and sustains me to continue producing would be irresponsible. That said, I know my heart and soul call me to express myself unapologetically. However, that does not absolve me of error; in fact, it promotes growth—something I embrace wholeheartedly. Moreover, being of service, and witnessing the light that radiates through the heart and eyes of a once-clouded soul, brings me a joy comparable to love. As for a practice, ritual, or return that grounds me, I would say it is anything that embodies love and liberation.

### On The Poem You're Writing Now

At the moment, in regards to art and healing, I focus on completing some books, composing some songs, constructing classes for teaching styles of healing and meditation, and so on. Time will always tell when it comes to my many purposes. Inspiration comes and goes as it pleases; it is the responsibility of the vessel to measure and to do what is called for by the cosmos and thus thyself.

#### POEM:

Be bee  
Be bird  
Be deer

Be lion  
Be monkey  
Be grass

Be seed  
Be leaf  
Be flower

Be tree  
Be light  
Be water

Be earth  
Be fire  
Be hill

Be mountain  
Be sun  
Be moon

Be star  
Be galaxy  
Be space

Be hope  
Be joy  
Be love

Be abundant  
Be ample  
Be an example

Be there  
Be here

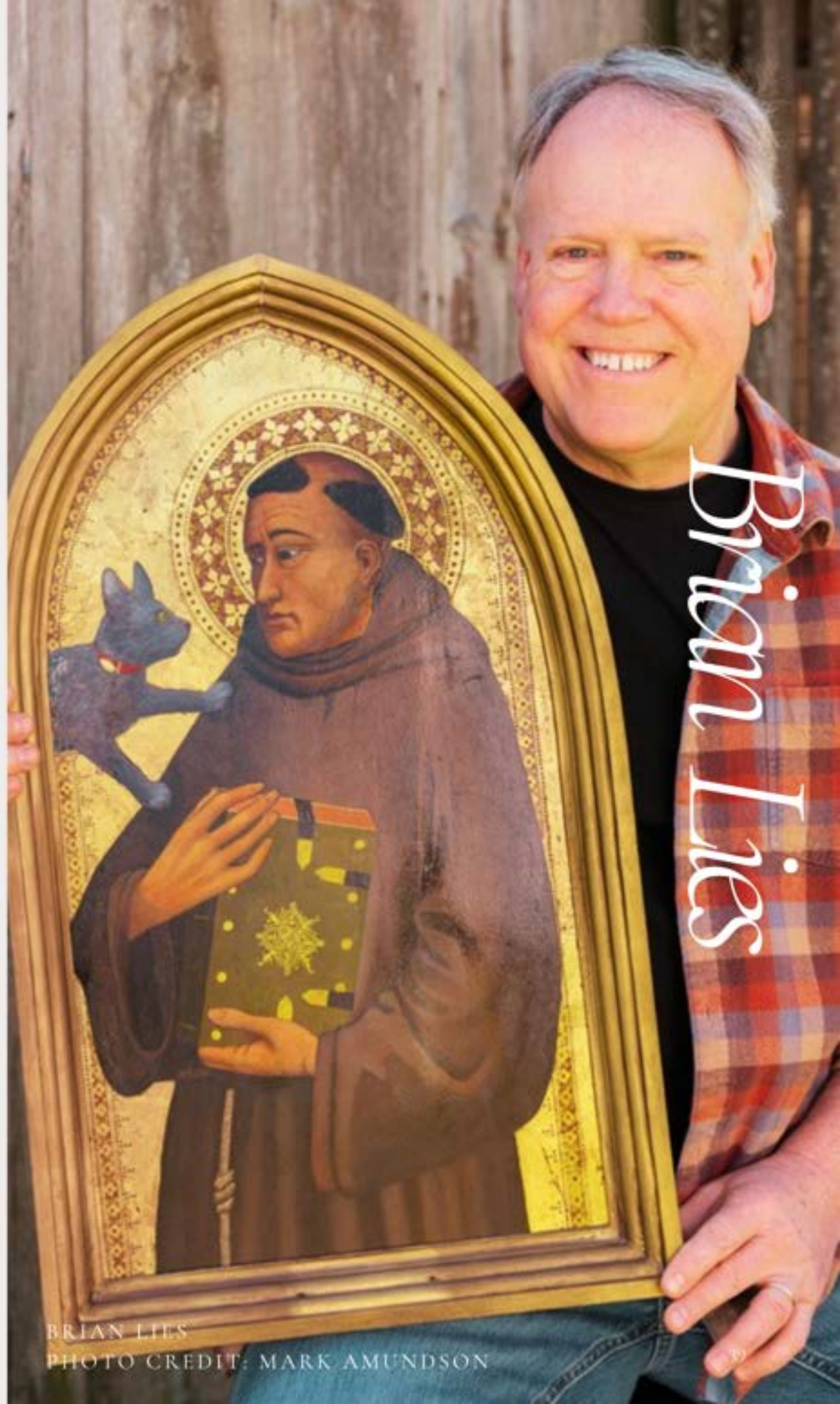
Be aware  
Be hold  
Behold . . .

Be,  
first and foremost

Oereishi Aeoma - Being

CAT NAP • BATS AT THE LIBRARY  
THE ROUGH PATCH

*You can create the brain you need for whatever you want to do—if you put in the time to build a neural network that's dedicated to that skill*



Brian Lies

BRIAN LIES  
PHOTO CREDIT: MARK AMUNDSON

When did you first realize that making books was not just something you did, but something you were? ■

I'm not sure I've ever felt it's who I am—I feel incredibly lucky to be allowed to publish books for kids! For me, the whole creative path has been a twisty one, as I was one of those kids that wanted to be creative. . . but I never thought I was good enough. I remember working on a book about fossils when I was in third grade (but all I was doing was copying facts from other fossil books) and absolutely loving the idea of publishing a book. My older sister always wanted to be a writer, and that was a motivator for me, trying to keep up with her. But what really inspired me was a school visit from a children's book author and illustrator when I was in 5th grade. He had illustrated some of my favorite books when I was younger. And I remember how he spoke about making art—he made it sound like everyone could do it. To see this man who looked like anybody's father or grandfather talking about simply making stories made it feel accessible. And remember thinking, "I really want to be an illustrator!" But I still believed in "talent"—like an inborn thing—so I quashed that dream, knowing that I wasn't one of the "gifted ones." ■

I always loved working with my hands, and thinking "Oh wow, I made this! This is cool." As I mention in the essay at the end of *Cat Nap*, I always wanted to make something that didn't look like it had been made by a kid. So I was still thinking of creativity as being a magical thing, not a learned thing. When I was at Brown studying psychology, doing creative things was my pressure release, and it was then that I started thinking of attempting art as a career. If doing an illustration for the college newspaper was the best part of my week, why not try to make it my job? It still took some failures, and then almost three years in art school after I graduated before my skills had developed to a point where getting started in illustration was possible.

When I visit schools, I always tell kids that being creative can be learned—the same way we can develop sports skills, we can develop creative skills. You can create the brain you need for whatever you want to do—if you put in the time to build a neural network that's dedicated to that skill.

What does your creative practice look like on an ordinary day? Not the Hollywood version where inspiration strikes like lightning (what the French call the *déclat* moment), but the real one—the second guessing, the procrastination, the moment you finally take your pencils out.

Because I am a writer, an illustrator and a public speaker, my weeks are always different—there is never a repeated schedule, another "same old Tuesday." It depends on what phase I'm in on a book—am I writing or illustrating? In my writing phases, I usually get about 2-3 hours of writing in before I begin to lose focus. Then there's always something administrative to be done, and I can switch to those—answering emails, talking with schools, putting things together to be mailed. . . or even working on a different project.

When I am illustrating, my focus lasts longer—I can draw or paint for up to twelve hours a day when I'm on deadline. Recently I decided it's not worth going back to work in the evening, as it steals energy from the next day. Balance is important! It's also important to try and get outside, especially in the summer. I'll go out into the garden and work there, balancing out the intellectual side of things. It's restorative to just move—whether it's exercise, mowing the lawn...or cooking. Even when I'm working on deadline, I like to make dinner—my wife sometimes sees it as more work for me, but it's really about putting hands and mind to work on an entirely different task. I think the different things feed each other.

When I'm painting, maybe the thousands and thousands of blades of grass in a lawn, I'm always thinking about something. What's nice about those times is letting your thoughts roam wherever they want to go. Those "rambling times" are where new ideas arise. You think of one thing, and that takes you to another connection, then another. Creativity is a mash-up of unusual connections! I suppose someone might argue that you're wasting time by letting your brain wander and ramble, but most people have had ideas come to them while doing something else—like taking a shower, or the minutes before we fall asleep. What happens is our brain is freed from having to be productive, and without that pressure, we're more likely to come up with ideas that we can later use in creative work.

Cat Nap required you to create fifty-seven forgeries—real stained glass, fired ceramics, oil paint, gold leaf—rather than use Photoshop or AI. Do you work with your hands or your heart first? When you're rendering a kitten mid-leap through a masterwork or painting that moment when Evan discovers his dog has died, do you feel your way into it, or think your way into it?

For me, it's my mind first. I'm not a big doodler, later turning an idle scribble into a finished thing. It's about sitting down and getting to work, with intention. Kids will ask "what do you like best, writing or illustrating?" What's most important to me is the story. I start collecting words and pictures related to the central idea. It's an engaging time of what if? What if the story goes like this—or this? What do the characters look like? I generate a lot of material, both words and pictures. It's a magical time, as if you're the first reader of the story, finding your way into it. I compare this part of the creative effort with making cotton candy—the white paper cone is the basic story idea, and if you only run it around once inside the cotton candy machine, you get a sad, loose, spider-webby sort of thing, but if you keep working it around, more and more stuff sticks to it, and eventually it starts to look like real cotton candy. You have to spend time to find the shape of the thing. And then it's about revision—figuring out what part of the story will be carried by text, and what part will be carried by the images. It's an exercise in both intellect and intuition to get the balance right.

**In a world that demands constant productivity, how do you protect that kind of slow, mysterious work? You chose to forge the Mer's collection by hand when technology offered you shortcuts. What does "unhurried" mean in your creative life?**

There is one part of the myth of creativity and talent—where "I'm going to sit here, and wait for inspiration to come." Inspiration comes when you are actively participating in the act of creating. If you don't show up to work every day, you can't expect results! I'm very lucky, because most of the time I do have a project on the desk or drawing table that I need to answer to, so it's not hard for me to sit down and get started. Being disciplined means that you're less likely to need to rush to get it done.

**What books live on your bedside table right now?**

Right now I am reading a book called *Ingrained*, which my daughter gave me for Christmas. It's a memoir by Scottish woodworker Callum Robinson, about how a huge corporate woodworking job he'd been counting on for his business evaporates, and how he works to re-tool his expectations and business plan. It's a great read, but for any self-employed person, it's also very anxiety-inducing!

**Why do you make books for children about hard subjects?**

*The Rough Patch* was really a "one and only" for me—it's the only book I have done that is overtly about a difficult subject (loss and hope). I didn't imagine an audience for it. I kept going back to it over a number of years, and kept putting it back on the shelf. But eventually I decided to listen to intuition—and the resulting book got a great reception—it was awarded a Caldecott Honor.

A lot of adults want to shield children from any difficult topics. But life does send us hard things, and we need to have the tools to cope with them. Kids understand loss. Kids don't have agency over their lives the way adults have, and stories about hard things can model resilience and ways of coping.

**What do you hope your books do in the world?**

If you've never experienced loss before, you don't know how you're supposed to behave or feel. One thing I've heard about *The Rough Patch* is it has given people a sort of emotional trellis they can lean on—a potential guide to find their own way through hard things. I have a friend who is a hospice worker, and she told me she takes *The Rough Patch* with her on home visits. There was one occasion where she was visiting an elderly woman, and the woman's twenty-something grandsons were at the kitchen table, completely numb and unable to talk about what was happening. She left the book on the table, and they read it while she was with their grandmother. When she came back out they were finally able to talk and ask questions. It was an ice breaker for them.

# Beneath the symptoms

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MILK THISTLE

## ON THE ORIGIN

### Mark Brody, CCH, Founder of Dynamis Preventive Medicine

Mark Brody earned his M.D. from Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1986. He is also director of the World Council for Health's New England and Heartland chapters. In 2021, because of COVID-related directives, he relinquished his Rhode Island medical license to better advocate for patient rights, informed consent, and health autonomy. He now practices Integrative Healthcare under Rhode Island's Health Freedom Law. The practice works with individuals experiencing a wide range of health problems commonly seen in any doctor's office.

- HOMEOPATHIC TREATMENT
- HERBAL & BOTANICAL MEDICINE
- BOWEN WORK
- FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE
- ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE



MARK BRODY, CCH  
PHOTO: GIACINTA DRUMMY

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# What the Body Already Knows



*I believe the body holds an innate capacity to heal when given the right tools and environment. Hippocrates said, "Let food be your medicine, and medicine be your food." For me, this is not merely a philosophy — it is an invitation to approach wellness with mindfulness, curiosity, and grace. When we work with the body instead of against it — when we choose consistency over force — healing becomes less about doing more and more about listening well.*

Years of listening have taught me that the body is rarely asking to be fixed. More often, it's asking to be heard. Symptoms aren't inconveniences — they're quiet messages inviting attention, care, and understanding. Over time, I've learned that healing rarely comes from forceful interventions. It emerges instead through gentle, consistent support. Small daily shifts in how we eat, how we rest, how we breathe, and how we care for ourselves. These subtle choices create far more lasting change than anything rushed or aggressive ever could.

My relationship with this kind of healing began long before I had words for it. Growing up as a first-generation American to a Greek father and an Iranian mother, I was surrounded by traditions rooted in ancient wisdom. Our home was filled with home-cooked meals, herbal teas offered for everyday ailments, and an unspoken understanding that nature was something to turn toward, not away from. Food wasn't just nourishment — it was care. Rest was respected, and the body was trusted.

As I grew older, that trust deepened through travel. Time spent in the Amazon rainforest, learning from indigenous healers, reshaped how I understood medicine. I witnessed a profound reverence for the natural world and its ability to support healing — an understanding that for every imbalance, there is something in nature that can help restore harmony. One moment stays with me. Covered in mosquito bites and out of solutions, a local guide offered sap from a nearby tree. Within minutes, the itching and redness faded. It was a small experience, yet a powerful reminder of how responsive the body can be when given the right support.

This is how I understand naturopathic medicine. It looks at the whole person — how systems are interconnected, how stress expresses itself in the body, and how daily choices quietly accumulate. It asks not only what is happening, but why. Rather than chasing symptoms, it focuses on restoring foundations: nourishment, sleep, movement, digestion, nervous system regulation, and connection. Healing becomes a partnership rather than a prescription.

Small corrections can take many forms. A short walk after meals to support digestion, breathwork to calm the nervous system, gentle posture adjustments during the workday, choosing nutrient-dense foods over extreme diets, or creating a simple ritual to unwind before bed. Each shift is quiet and intentional — a nudge rather than a push. Over weeks and months, these thoughtful actions compound, allowing the body to regain balance naturally. Supplements, botanicals, and lifestyle supports are chosen with precision, always to meet the body where it is, never to overwhelm it.

As the founder of Anasa Personalized Medicine, I'm grateful to practice naturopathic medicine in my home state of Rhode Island. My training includes a Doctorate in Naturopathic Medicine and a Master's degree in Nutrition, along with study in gentle hands-on therapies such as reiki and craniosacral therapy. What continues to shape my work most, however, are the stories people bring into the room — their lived experiences, their patterns, and their own intuition about their bodies.

*Dr. Chrysanthi Kazantzis is a naturopathic physician and founder of Anasa Personalized Medicine in Rhode Island.*

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# The Whole-Body Mouth

## ORIGIN

In conventional dentistry, we're trained to treat symptoms — fill a cavity, perform a root canal — but not always to ask why the issue developed in the first place. Over time, I saw patterns in my patients: chronic inflammation, recurring infections, unexplained sensitivities. It became clear that the mouth is not separate from the body. That realization led me to study biological dentistry — an approach that honors the body's natural ability to heal and recognizes the oral cavity as part of a much larger system.

## ON THE DEFINITION

Biological dentistry is a philosophy of care that looks at the mouth as an integral part of the whole body. For a new patient, I explain it simply: everything we do in your mouth should support — not challenge — your overall health. This means we use biocompatible materials, minimize toxins, and focus on prevention and healing rather than just intervention.

## ON THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE

When patients walk into our practice, they often notice something different right away — it's calmer, more intentional, and more personal. We look at dental history, overall health, lifestyle, and concerns before recommending any treatment. Patients can expect transparency, education, and a sense that they are truly being cared for — not just treated.

## ON THE WHOLE BODY CONNECTION

The mouth doesn't work in isolation. It never has. Bacteria from the gums enter the bloodstream. Inflammation that starts in the mouth travels. Research has connected periodontal disease to cardiovascular disease, autoimmune conditions, metabolic dysfunction, and cognitive decline. These aren't coincidences—they're signals. At Bio Dental, we take those signals seriously.

When I look at a patient's mouth, I'm not just evaluating their teeth. I'm looking for patterns that often tell a story about what's happening elsewhere in the body. A cavity isn't just a cavity. Gum disease isn't just gum disease. They are windows into your systemic health.

Every decision we make chairside has the potential to either support your body or burden it. We choose to support it.



"Health is not compartmentalized. What happens in the mouth doesn't stay in the mouth. When we begin to see the body as an interconnected system, we can make choices that support true, lasting wellness — not just temporary fixes.

# The Quiet Hours. What sleep is *really* trying to tell us

"Could the way we sleep tonight predict our risk of developing a disease 20 years from now?"

Waking up feeling truly refreshed is probably one of the most rewarding experiences, even though it doesn't happen that often, or at all. I, like many others, have experienced the impact of sleep deprivation on cognitive performance and overall well-being. We all know that sleep is important, however, we take it for granted and often blame our lifestyle, demanding jobs, or caregiving responsibilities for poor-quality sleep.

Sleep serves many essential purposes such as removing metabolic waste that builds up in our brains during the day, regulating mood, and memory formation. This process happens primarily during the deepest stage of non-REM sleep, which is characterized by Slow Wave Activity (SWA). I find it fascinating that even in Greek mythology, Hypnos, the god of sleep, and Lethe, the goddess of forgetfulness, lived together, acknowledging the deep and enduring link between sleep and memory.

Earlier this year, a multimodal foundational model for disease prediction based on sleep data was released, which was trained on data from more than 65,000 participants. Although translation into clinical practice is still evolving, the notion that one night of sleep could contain information about our long-term health is game-changing. The possibility of predicting disease risk from sleep patterns could create a new frontier for early therapeutic intervention and validate what we already know: sleep is critical for our health.

As someone with two X chromosomes, I am statistically more likely to develop a range of conditions, including Alzheimer's disease, autoimmune disorders, and depression, just to name a few. A common feature across many of these conditions is that specific patterns in sleep dysfunction often appear long before other symptoms emerge, providing the opportunity to seek treatment much earlier.

This is precisely why I became interested in the neuroscience of sleep and how monitoring electrical brain activity at home during sleep might reshape how we understand disease, particularly for certain populations that have a higher risk of these conditions. Sleep has structure; each night, we cycle through light sleep, deep sleep, and REM in repeating patterns. Using FDA-cleared wearable EEG (electroencephalography) devices, we can measure and study these distinct electrical rhythms and transform them into quantifiable biological signals that can tell us something meaningful. These data can help us understand how a disease progresses, identify who is likely to respond to treatment, and detect early signs that a therapy is working. This information shifts the patient-physician dynamic from reactive to proactive, creating space for thoughtful, data-driven conversations which are based on evidence rather than the subjective experience.

I feel excited about the future we are building where we can use something we do every night, sleep, to learn something profound about our health.\*

*Dr. Georgina Kontou is a neuroscientist and Business Development Manager at Beacon, working at the intersection of life science and clinical practice. Her research interests include sleep, brain health, and the science of recovery.*

# Functional Medicine: The Medicine That Asks Why



There is a particular kind of patient I meet often.

They arrive with a quiet exhaustion - not just from their symptoms, but from the long journey of trying to understand them. They have seen specialists, run labs, tried medications. They have been told, more than once, that everything looks “normal” and the unspoken message that it’s in their head.

And yet, they are not well.

They struggle with anxiety that doesn’t fully lift, depression that lingers beneath the surface, sleep that never restores, a body that feels inflamed, unpredictable, or simply not their own. What they carry is not just illness - it is confusion. A sense that something is being missed.

Functional medicine begins in that space.

It does not start with a diagnosis. It starts with a question: Why is this happening?

Rather than isolating symptoms, functional medicine looks at the body as an interconnected system. The brain is not separate from the gut, or the immune system, or hormones, or metabolism. It is shaped by all of them. When one system is out of balance, others follow.

What appears as anxiety may be driven by inflammation. What looks like depression may be connected to blood sugar instability, microbiome disruption, or nutrient depletion. The body speaks in symptoms, but those symptoms are often the final expression of something deeper.

Functional medicine is the practice of listening for that deeper story.

And often, that story has been fragmented.

Patients come to us having seen multiple specialists—each focused on a single organ system, each offering a piece of the puzzle, but no one stepping back to see the whole picture. The dermatologist is looking at the skin. The gastroenterologist is focused on procedures. The endocrinologist is tracking lab values. They are all doing important work—but they are not always speaking to one another.

I remember a couple who came in with their three-year-old son. They had one simple question: Why are his iron and ferritin levels chronically low?

They had already been given iron supplements. More than once.

But they weren’t looking for another prescription. They were looking for an answer that made sense.

At the same time, their son had persistent rashes on his skin. No one had connected the two. No one had asked whether the gut, the immune system, and nutrient absorption might be part of the same story.

They were left with pieces—but no explanation.

This is where our work becomes different.

We connect the dots between systems. We ask how the gut is influencing the immune response, how inflammation is affecting nutrient absorption, how seemingly unrelated symptoms may, in fact, be deeply related. We have the freedom of time to listen carefully, to gather data thoughtfully, and to step into the role of detectives—piecing together the full story.

*Achina Stein DO, IFMCP is an internationally known functional medicine psychiatrist, the owner of Functional Mind LLC in Providence, RI, podcaster, and the author of What If It’s NOT Depression?: Your Guide To Finding Answers and Solutions.*

# Music and Synesthesia

*by Skylar Dragomire*

"We're not wired to hear music—we're wired to feel it.  
for survival, for primal instinct."

Charles Antone

Charles Antone, founder of HOLON Sound, has spent  
a lifetime chasing the feeling music makes in the body.

Now he's built a speaker that does the same.



[The HOLON is the first listener shaped sound experience platform.]

*more than meets the ear*

**CHARLES ANTONE, FOUNDER HOLON SOUND**

There is a particular kind of listener — one for whom sound is not background but atmosphere, not heard so much as felt. Charles Antone doesn't just listen to music; he experiences it physically. And HOLON Sound, the Providence-based startup he founded, is the product of a lifetime spent trying to give that experience a physical form.

The HOLON Cube is a meticulously designed speaker system built around a simple but ambitious premise: that sound should be three-dimensional, layered, and fully present. When a dynamic piece of music plays through a HOLON Cube, the bass doesn't flatten everything else — it settles beneath the melody like a foundation, felt more than heard.

Each cube features real-time adaptive technology that shapes sound to the room, the listener, and the music — across home, studio, and venue environments — and even a mode engineered to replicate the warmth of vinyl.

The result is a system that treats audio as something responsive, almost alive. I had the privilege of sitting with Charles recently, and what struck me most was how completely the product reflects the person.

*"Some songs are scared into my existence"*

*Charles Antone*

# Journal

CHARLES ANTONE  
PHOTO CREDIT: MARK AMUNDSON

### **A pre-cognitive relationship with sound**

Music, Charles told me, was never a conscious choice. It was pre-cognitive — something that arrived before language. His earliest memories are of live philharmonic performances, where around the age of five or six he began seeing what he heard: blooms and circles, shapes that moved with the music. He experiences synesthesia, that rare neurological condition in which the senses blur and cross. As someone who shares this experience, I found myself nodding at everything he described — the way certain sounds become textures, the way a piece of music can seem to occupy physical space.

He has always chased what he calls the feeling of frisson: the neurological response behind goosebumps, that involuntary shiver that arrives when a song reaches something deep. For Charles, it is not metaphor. Music has a real, palpable effect on him — and so, just as powerfully, do bad sounds. Raised by a single parent through a difficult childhood, he grew up acutely attuned to the sonic environment around him. Sound could unsettle him as easily as it could elevate him. That sensitivity never left. If anything, it became the engine of everything that followed.

### **Built by hand from the beginning**

Charles began designing and building audio hardware at eleven. A friend's father who worked at Bose gave him a collection of sound equipment, and rather than simply use it, he took it apart — reverse-engineering each piece until he understood how it worked, then reassembling it, then building his own. He taught himself through research, through furniture makers, through original manufacturers who showed him how to turn a handmade object into something sellable.

From the beginning, he believed that audio devices exist to serve the experience — not the other way around.

He describes feeling his materials in his mind before he ever touches them, knowing from the outset exactly how he wants a product to exist. The marriage of technology and craft, of convenience and physical beauty, has always been the standard he builds toward.

### **The songs seared into him**

Some songs, Charles said, are seared into his existence. When Radiohead released *Kid A*, he had just lost his mother to cancer. Everything in *Its Right Place* remains difficult for him to hear. Karma Police, by the same band, carries a different weight — he and his wife walked out to it at their wedding. He listens to Led Zeppelin, Beastie Boys, Billie Eilish. He is drawn to experimental rock and industrial music, citing Nine Inch Nails' *The Downward Spiral* as a formative record.

### Who HOLON is for

HOLON isn't for everyone.

It's for those who notice when sound changes a room. For those who feel when a song crosses from hearing into memory. Charles speaks about the importance of dynamic range and deep contrast, the way a properly designed sound environment transforms a film. We are, he noted, wired to respond to subtle shifts in sound — a primal instinct that a great system reawakens.

Not everyone is made for it. Some people, he acknowledged, have an alarmed response to the sheer presence of HOLON's sound. But for others, the effect is immediate and total. He described a blind wellness worker in the building next to the HOLON studio who, hearing the sound through the walls one afternoon, had to stop what he was doing and come find its source.

That, perhaps, is the best description of what Charles Antone has built: something that makes people stop and follow the sound.

### The object and the dream

The HOLON Cube is geometric and minimal in design — a cube, seemingly simple, that contains far more than its surface suggests. Charles is deliberate about this. Objects, he believes, simplify complex things. The mystery of a product matters. What appears modest should, on closer encounter, exceed every expectation.

Looking back at the distance he has traveled from the eleven-year-old reverse-engineering Bose equipment in his bedroom, Charles says he feels relieved. From the beginning, the HOLON Cube was never meant to be just a product. It was an attempt to give shape to something intangible, to make sound something you could feel, move through, and return to.

For those who experience it, the shift is immediate. Music stops being something you play, and becomes something you inhabit.

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HOLON Sound is based in Providence, Rhode Island.

PHOTO CREDIT: MARK AMUNDSON



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# Handyman Work, Done the Craftsman's Way

Since I was a child, I really enjoyed disassembling and reassembling everything again from toys to radios and telephones. This was my hobby and used to give me the feeling of being over the moon every time I was able to complete my task without leftovers.

Later in my teen years due to my parents' job, we moved houses quite a few times and in each new house we arrived I helped my mother to accomplish her home dream projects.

I really love working with my hands. Seeing the satisfaction in my clients' eyes is the best reward I can get — it's what drives everything I do. My most honest critics? My wife and two daughters. They are detail-oriented in the best possible way, and their feedback keeps my standards exactly where they need to be. Every project I take on has to pass their eye before it passes anyone else's.

Home is personal. So is the work I put into it.

Chris Handyman — call for a consultation.



# Material as Memory

by *Theodora Tsevas*

"The most radical thing you can do with an old building is not to preserve it behind glass, but to give it a reason to stay standing".

Eleni Tsigarida, ETSI Architects

"You learn to slow down and listen to what's already there."

Nathaniel Carden, Novel Terra



"TELONEIO" CUSTOMS  
HOUSE RESTORATION  
KARDAMYLLI, GREECE.



WHITINSVILLE, MA  
DAIRY BARN  
PHOTO: NOVEL TERRA

## ON THE ART OF RESTORING WHAT ALREADY EXISTS

"Some restorations give a building a new life. The best ones give it back its old one." Eleni Tsigarida

Every old building is a decision someone hasn't made yet. Tear it down, and you start from zero, or rather from less than zero, since the centuries of labor and material embedded in the walls are gone for good. Restore it, and you inherit everything: the history, the damage, the community that considers it theirs, and whatever the walls are hiding that you won't find until you open them.

Eleni Tsigarida, architect and founder of ETSI Architects, based in Kardamyli on the Mani peninsula in southern Greece, learned this during construction, when a Mediterranean hurricane made landfall on the Peloponnese while her crew was in the middle of restoring a 16th-century customs house. Seawater entered the entire body of the building. It took three weeks and fifty tons of clean water to flush it out, bucket by bucket.

"You do not know an old building until you inject it," Tsigarida said in a recent lecture at the New York Institute of Technology. "Most of the damage is invisible."

The building was a customs house in that same port town, where the Taygetus mountains drop almost directly into the sea. On a coastline the Venetians could not control, it was part of a deal: the local population would run the trade operation, provide safe passage, and stop boarding ships. Over the following centuries, it became a storage facility, a motel, and eventually a ruin that a family of five bought in 2014. They were looking for a home by the sea. They did not know it was a listed monument. They did not know it carried that history. What they found instead was a four-year approval process, followed by four more years of construction.

The archaeological authorities wanted a museum. The local fishermen wanted unrestricted access. The clients wanted somewhere for their family. Tsigarida's task was to find a version that honored all three.

When construction began, the walls were in worse shape than anyone had anticipated. The concrete sealed moisture inside the limestone, corroded the steel mesh within, and caused more damage in a few decades than the previous four centuries combined—roughly thirty percent of the wall volume was void: hollow spaces, invisible from the outside, slowly collapsing from within.

She had budgeted for ten to twelve thousand liters of lime-based injection mix. She used thirty thousand.

What emerged in 2021 is two buildings around a sheltered courtyard — 250 square meters, four bedrooms, an open kitchen and living area facing the sea. The original limestone, salt-worn and uneven, is now the defining presence in every room. The floors are marble from a nearby quarry. The joinery is olive wood. At the entrance, a craftsman hand-set a mosaic from ten thousand pebbles collected from the surrounding coast. The project has since been nominated for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture and the Mies van der Rohe Award 2026.



**"TELONEIO" CUSTOMS HOUSE RESTORATION IN GREECE. PHOTO: PANAYIOTIS VOUMVAKIS**



TELONEIO RESTORATION IN GREECE. PHOTO: JULIA KLIMI

"A building incorporates evidence," she said. "Traces of labour, of mistakes, of environmental forces, of political shifts, of changing ownership and changing priorities."

The building is a place where a family spends their summers inside walls that the Venetians built to control piracy on a coastline that no longer exists as it once did. The fishermen still dock outside. The church next door still holds festivals.

For Tsigarida, the project proved something she had long believed: that the most radical thing you can do with an old building is not to preserve it behind glass, but to give it a reason to stay standing. An architect working in Massachusetts is starting from the same premise.

Nathaniel Carden, architect and co-founder of Novel Terra, a research and design studio based in Providence, Rhode Island, hasn't put pen to paper yet.

## WHAT TRANSFORMATION ASKS

The site is in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, a former mill town where a family named Whitin once ran what amounted to a vertical economy: they owned the mill, the farms, and the workers' housing. In the economic downturn of the 1870s, mill workers were put to work clearing a particular stretch of land. In the process, they built what locals still call the Great Wall, a twenty-foot stone retaining wall with three barrel vaults and underground passages cut through the stone. A dairy farm was established in the 1880s, burned in 1957, and slowly collapsed over the following decades. By the time a local family bought the property a few years ago, what remained were three walls of a stone barn, the Great Wall, and the stone boundaries of old pastures thick with brush.

The new owners run several lumber yards, including one in Whitinsville. When they cleared the site, they saved what they could: large timbers from the collapsed barn, stone from the old walls. Both are stockpiled on site, waiting. They plan to build three houses among the ruins, two sharing the old cow courtyard and a third on the hill above. Parents, daughter, son. A family compound. "You learn to slow down and listen to what's already there," Carden said. Before any design decisions are made, his team is building a 3D model of the ruins, mapping the history, and working through whatever archival records exist. Construction, if permitting goes well, is still two years away.

The structural approach echoes Tsigarida's: a foundation within a foundation, a new structure that supports itself independently, leaving the nineteenth-century stone exposed but not load-bearing. You see the history. You live inside it. You don't ask the wall to be something it can no longer be. The salvaged timber and reclaimed stone are not incidental. They are the supply chain.

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**DAIRY BARN PROJECT WHITINSVILLE, MA PHOTO CREDIT: NOVEL TERRA**

## BEHIND THE RUIN

The community has a stake in this. People have been walking past those ruins for generations. When a developer proposed seventy-five houses on the site, the community organized, fought back, and won. A portion of the land was transferred to the town as conservation trails. Carden is aware that whatever he builds will be read against that history.

"There's an argument that a site with this kind of cultural resonance could support a public use," he said. "But a private residence can also be a form of stewardship. I think the community will see it that way."

On sustainability, Carden is planning geothermal heating, a radiant slab system, and a careful reckoning with solar. "Sustainability implies continuity. Longevity. Building something that future generations will look at and say: don't tear that down." It is a principle Tsigarida shares. "The greenest building is the one that already exists," she said. Demolition, she added, does not start from zero. It starts from negative.

In Kardamyli, the work is done. The family moved in. In Whitinsville, the design hasn't started yet. The walls are standing. The timber is waiting, but that is already enough to begin.



**NOVEL TERRA DAIRY BARN PROJECT  
WHITINSVILLE, MA**

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# Grow Slowly

DAN PENENGO

On that first 60-degree day toward spring, the phone begins to ring with passion and fury — folks ready to pay undisclosed amounts of money to build them a zero-to-sixty garden. "How old are you and how long have you been gardening?" While this first question may seem a bit forward, it provides essential information about a person's relationship with growing food. Inevitably, people most often have small gardens in boxes and want to expand — "but never in the front yard!"

Others swear that they kill everything, though their mother had the most beautiful garden. Generally, people seeking advice for their gardens and landscapes have spent a modest amount of time in their lives growing food, though they are now, assuredly, ready for more.

The typical spring call asks for a garden install after which they'll fend for themselves — not unlike a handyman who installs a boiler. We know we need hot water while remaining entirely in the dark about the intricacies of the heating system.

*"Patience is the key to long-term success — especially if one's green thumb has been dormant for a time, or if we've gardened in the box a little too long".*

Dan Penengo

*Daniel Penengo was born in Montevideo, Uruguay on December 27, 1974, and emigrated to the United States around 1980. He attributes his green thumb to tending his father's prize-winning rose bushes and his mother's culinary herb garden as a youngster on Long Island. Daniel deepened his love for ecology through research work in Everglades National Park during his studies at Florida International University. Since arriving in Rhode Island in 2013, he has continued to advocate for an ecologically minded approach to society and education through his work with local farms, schools, and neighborhoods. He resides at his 5,000 square foot neighborhood farm, Little Uruguay, in the Bay Spring neighborhood of Barrington, Rhode Island. — [diggingeducation.org](http://diggingeducation.org)*

## Patience

The spring garden bug is a real thing. People clamor at local nurseries, loading up on bagged soils and plants still plump from their winter greenhouse homes. The only thing left to figure out is how to snuggle too many tomato plants into a garden box best suited for a handful of culinary herbs.

Fast forward to September and the phone is silent. Interestingly, this may be the most important time for gardening. Preparing for a fall crop and winterizing food gardens is the real prize — if one would consider it. Yes, the summer sizzle of roasting vegetables is climactic. But for the future homesteader, the virtue of the natural garden reveals itself season to season.

What follows are a few essential messages from what nature has to teach us — learned over time tending to natural food gardens, and the conversations forged within them alongside clients and friends.

### Five steps toward a natural garden

One.

Grab a journal and honestly assess your relationship with food. How much of your life have you spent growing it, if at all? If you were to live only on foods you grew or foraged, what lifestyle changes would that require? Study the landscape that surrounds you. What is it suited for? What do you enjoy most about it? Write, and keep writing.

Two.

Learn to farm. Volunteer at a local farm. Attend workshops on regenerative food growing. Often people garden in silos, not recognizing that their own neighborhoods are filled with talented and experienced growers. Consider a realistic timeline for weaning into a life that is season-based, less consumer-driven, and more attuned to natural rhythms.

Three.

Allow one year to transform a sunny portion of lawn into farmland. It could be ten square feet, a hundred, or a thousand.

The simplest approach is the lasagna method — decompose the lawn by laying newspaper or cardboard on top, then layering compost above. Then find a regional organic seed retailer and order a cover crop blend: a mix of legumes and grains that mimic nature, grow quickly, and build fertility.

Four.

Repeat on this new patch of farmland. Once established, you will begin learning to rotate between growing food and growing soil, with nature as your guide. Introduce easy-to-grow foods and perennial plants that thrive with minimal labor. In time, expand. Over time, a thriving food-growing ecosystem that replicates nature's own rhythms takes shape.

Five.

Return to patience and perspective. Season upon season, year over year, the adaptation into a natural way of living — one that resides within all of us — finds itself at home. The inner landscape mirroring the outer one: calm and strong, resilient, cooperative, patient.

MILENA PAGÁN

# Cucina



**LITTLE SISTER, PROVIDENCE RI**

"I Think I'm Building Myself."

Milena Pagán is a restaurateur, urban farmer, and homesteader operating in Providence, Rhode Island. She runs Little Sister — a kitchen rooted in Puerto Rican tradition, scratch-made everything, and a working compost pile out back.

She studied with gardener and educator Daniel Penengo. This is what she learned — and what she taught herself.

# Povera

# The peasant table has room for one more

When you bring the garden into the kitchen

You harvest what a plant can give at its peak, then return it to the soil so it can become the foundation for something new. That cycle of use, rest, compost, rebirth is the lesson I carry into the kitchen and into life. Operating restaurants often demands urgency, but the deeper work is ecological: observing what something can give, honoring when its useful life is complete, and transforming what remains into the groundwork for what comes next.

The more you repeat that cycle, the closer you get to a kitchen ecosystem that sustains itself.

This is the work that makes a harvest possible. You don't get tomatoes without the year of soil building that came before them. It isn't about return on investment — it's about following the cycle. Much of what sustains visible success is invisible labor: preparation, maintenance, and care that never gets recognized as the product. You can't have one without the other. The unseen work isn't separate from the outcome. It is the condition that makes the outcome possible.

American culture has assigned different value to different kinds of labor, but it's less about the work itself and more about who is doing it and how that work is framed. Puerto Rican food exists within a different racial and colonial history, and those dynamics shape how its value is perceived. I no longer cook in pursuit of mainstream approval. That's a moving target and, frankly, a fool's errand. I cook to share my culture with integrity and to connect with people who recognize themselves in the food. What I can do is cook with clarity of purpose and let the work speak for itself.

Composting has taught me that very little is truly waste. Everything transforms into something else if you're attentive to the process. There's something grounding in taking what is deemed worthless and turning it into nourishment. It reshapes how I think about value — not as a fixed property, but as something created through attention, time, and care.

Restaurants aren't permanent. Farms aren't permanent. Communities aren't static — they shift, evolve, and sometimes disappear. What endures is the capacity you build within yourself. Growing food, composting, and cooking from scratch are ways of building that resilience. So if this project succeeds, what I've built isn't just a restaurant, a farm, or even a community. I've built capacity, resilience, and a way of moving through the world that allows me, and those I care for, to endure — and to eat well.

# The Primmordial Memory of Cheese



**MATEO KEHLER OF JASPER HILL FARM ON GRIEF,  
ALCHEMY, AND WHY THE CHEESE ALWAYS TELLS  
THE TRUTH.**

*by Anna Amoiradaki*



"Something new is waiting to be born"

#### THE SUSTENANCE OF GATHERING — ON THE METAPHYSICAL MATURING OF LIFE

The ancient awe of a Basque shepherd lifting a newly formed head of cheese to the sky — thanking God and animal for this life-sustaining gift — is an image Mateo Kehler knows in his hands. In the cellars of Jasper Hill Farm in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, he and his brother have spent a lifetime revealing what cheese has always been: the center of our civilization, and the center of our table.

Jasper Hill cheeses arrive to one's home more as a gift - a curated selection of cloth and bark-bound cheeses nestled in wood shavings, and tucked between the wheels, a hand-bound zine: *A Dialogue on the Alchemy of Cheesemaking*.

The conversation that followed was a lyrical encounter of the zine's artful exploration of the perennial alchemical phases of the ancient and most delicious sustenance that has taken the center of man's table since the ancient times: cheese.

*"I am just an actor, a participant in a process that is playing out in time, in the passing of seasons."*

**You call the cow our adopted mother. Who taught you to see her this way — and what did you have to unlearn first?**

We are mammals, ultimately. Milk was obviously a precious, life-giving substance — but our capacity to digest it is a recent adaptation, a mutation in the genome of dairy cultures. Cheesemaking gave us access to this incredible source of nutrients and fundamentally changed our relationship with cows and goats. They became such an extraordinary source of our nutrition.

The cheeses we started producing ten thousand years ago nourished us — and they became a summation, a complete capture of the microbial life, the presence of animals on the landscape, and the footprint of the farmer. What we have come to understand as the pastoral idea. In my opinion, pure human beauty.

*"Basque cheesemakers, when they are unfolding their cheese, they hold it up and present it to God — like they are presenting their baby."*

In Aristotelian thinking, the addition of rennet in the vessel was an act of active dissemination — the product of fertility itself is like a womb, and out of that womb comes the cheese. The way we have come to conceive of it is a form of memory and a form of timekeeping. A life-forming path that connects us to our own primordial past and to what makes us human.

**You write that a cheese is full of hidden secrets revealed by time. Are you a keeper of secrets, or one who reveals them?**

Time reveals secrets. Cheese is a time capsule. It contains all the light of the summer sun — the forages fermented in the rumen of our cows, transformed by the skill and craft of the cheesemaker. If there is any imbalance in the practice, the process, the equipment — those defects will be revealed as the cheese ripens.

On the other side: if the milk is vibrant and the execution is flawless, the secret life of that cheese erupts in a burst of joy in your mouth.

**You said the main ingredient in your cheese is grief. What did you mean?**

It's the sacrifice of the male young in the herd — you harvest the abomasum from the babies to make the rennet. We love our cows. We love the babies. And yet they are fundamentally a part of a circle of life and death that can be summed up in the cheese.

The microbial life we unleash during the cheesemaking process — these microbes that transform milk from a liquid into a solid — they all die. It's the process of death and dying that releases them. Life and death and the circle of life. And so the process of making cheese becomes a meditation.

*"We are holding the grief of the world as we are ripened by this process of making cheese"*

**What are you actually selling, when someone opens a box of Jasper Hill cheese?**

What we are offering is a point of connection to something primordial — something that has echoes in our collective memory, in the joyous celebration. Many times, most of the time, we are at the center of a family celebration, a special moment with friends.

We are participating in creating the opportunity for joy and connection. And for our team and for myself personally — it's what I am seeking in my own life. The opportunity to connect to something that is deeply real.

*"There is not much left that is real."*



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