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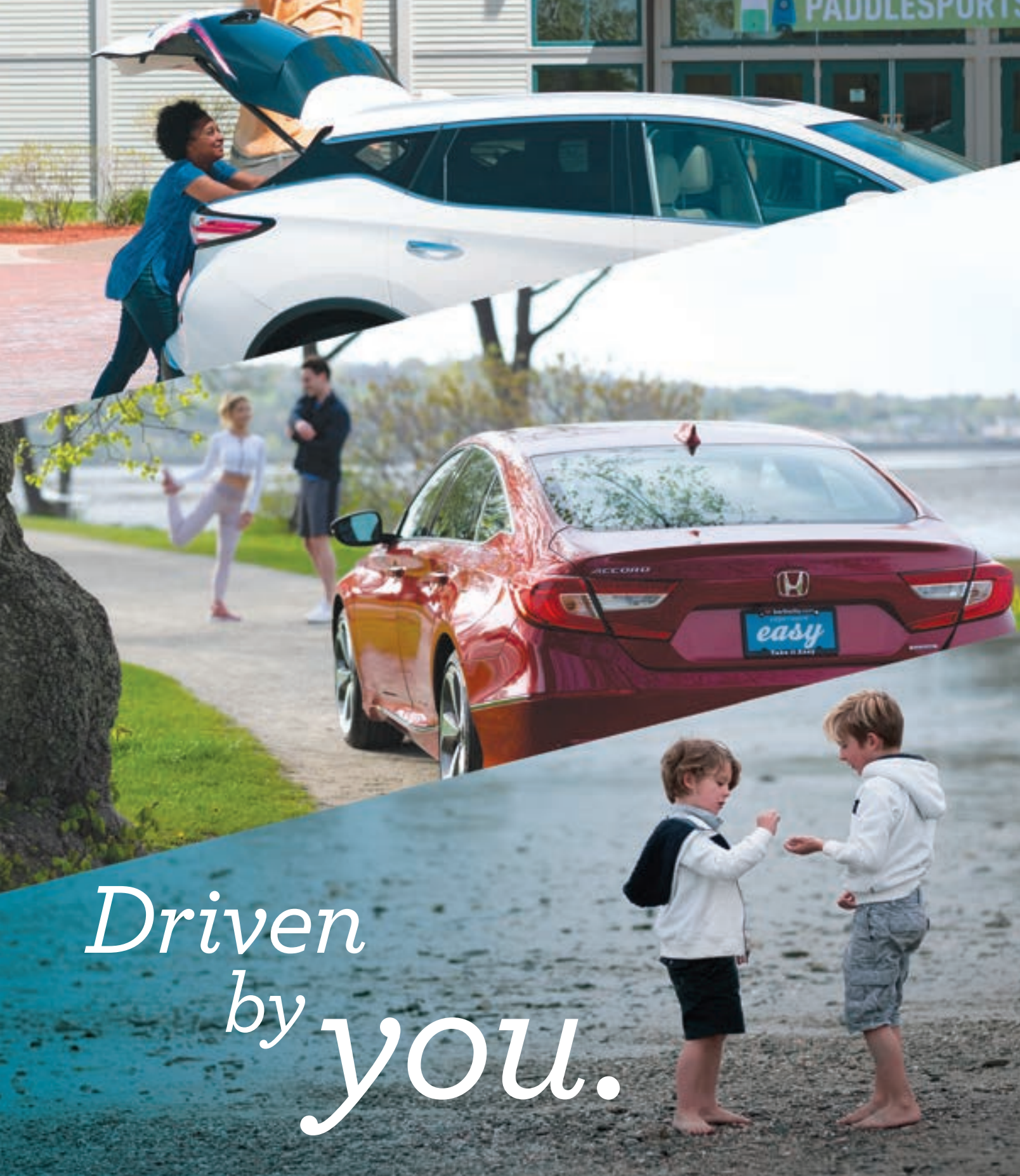
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IN THIS ISSUE

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FEATURED

- 14** Early Intervention
- 21** Charting a New Path
- 24** Side x Side
- 28** Power School
- 33** In The Trades
- 36** School Around Us
- 38** 5 Things: Hikes With a Swimming Hole
- 42** This Thing I Love

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 10** Ditch The Couch
- 44** That Girl!
- 46** Maine Style
- 50** At The Table
- 54** Amateur Hour
- 56** I'd Rather Be Reading
- 58** At The Helm
- 60** Momsense
- 62** Mix & Mingle
- 74** Verse & View



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Learning in new ways

This is our first education-focused issue, and while there are a million directions we could go and topics we could cover, this issue tells stories about how educators are “reimagining the classroom”—how teachers are reaching students differently, how the classroom looks and feels different than 30 years ago and, in many cases, how students themselves are helping to direct what their education looks like.

That’s the case with COMPASS Academy in Westbrook. COMPASS—or Creating Opportunities through Multiple Pathways for Academic and Social Success—had its pilot program this past year and all students involved have re-enrolled. There is a waiting list for year two. Darcie Simmons, one of the co-leaders of the program and a social studies teacher, describes it this way: “COMPASS is an experiential-based, hands-on program that is really good for kids who need real-world connection with the content. The kids we work with aren’t satisfied with being told to sit, take notes and learn enough to pass a test; they need to know why. Alternative education is like special ed; the kids don’t necessarily have learning disabilities, but they need one-to-one individualized strategies. We work closely with those who need that extra push.” Read more on page 21.

Forty-eight years ago, The School Around Us was perhaps one of the pioneers in Maine for “reimagining the classroom.” The school focuses on educating a person’s “intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials.” The school is run by the democratic process of consent—a format that is a step away from consensus. This allows the four adult committees that meet

monthly—facilities, education, development and administration—to act independently. As the members of the community have changed, so have some decisions. For example, at one point in the school’s history, parents thought homework was a good idea, while the current parent group has decided against it. This holistic approach to teaching has been well received. Read more on page 36.

My kids have been out of school for several years now, but I remember repeating the mantra “it takes a village” many, many times as I was raising them. That’s the philosophy of a program called Side x Side, founded by Beth Wilbur Van Mierlo. Side x Side, a non-profit organization, encourages school administrators and teachers to work alongside teaching artists with the goal of enhancing the standard curriculum from kindergarten to high school. The program is about five years old and in the past year alone, 19 artists participated with over 1,800 students. You can learn more on page 24.

There are so many great opportunities for kids and their families in Maine to learn in both traditional and in newer settings. It’s refreshing and inspiring to read about all of these dedicated women who are working to better educate our kids. Tell us what you think—write to us at letters@mainewomenmagazine.com or send us a note on Facebook. Be sure to follow us to stay tuned to everything going on in between issues. Our next issue, all about decadent foods, will be out toward the end of August. Until then...enjoy this fabulous Maine summer!

Correction: Monica Litsas, a Tri for a Cure participant, was incorrectly listed as a cancer survivor in the July issue of the magazine.



Lee Hews

ON THE COVER

Power School is a free Westbrook-based after-school and summer school program for immigrant and refugee children in third through eighth grade. Development Director Karen Collins says the program adapts to teach each student in different ways. Read more on page 28.

Photo by Lauryn Hottinger



MWMM

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Late-summer festivals and more

This month, enjoy a dance festival, compete in a paddle race and throw heavy objects at the Maine Highland Games

Written by Amy Paradysz



Left: Maine Highland Games. Right: Paddle Battle. Photos by Amy Paradysz

Paddle Battle

Sunday, Aug. 5, 1 to 5 p.m. (race at 3 p.m.)

The Nonantum Resort,
95 Ocean Ave., Kennebunkport

If you can paddle it, you can race it in The Nonantum Resort's annual Kennebunk river race. Kayak, canoe, SUP or surfboard, competitive or taking in the sights, whichever way you float it, this is a fun afternoon with live music, food and family activities on the resort's back lawn after the race. Advance registration is \$25 individual/\$35 tandem; day of registration is \$30. (nonantumresort.com/about-the-resort/paddle-battle)

Bates Dance Festival Finale

Saturday, Aug. 4 at 7:30 p.m.

Bates College Alumni Gymnasium, Lewiston

Bates Dance Festival is a nexus of dance—and tickets to the finale performance are just \$10 general admission. The show includes repertory pieces in jazz, modern, Afro-modern and hip hop performed by Bates Dance Festival Professional Training Program students and choreographed by a diverse group of dance artists. It's a small venue, so be sure to buy tickets online in advance. (batesdancefestival.org/performances)

'Mother Jones in Heaven'

Aug. 9–12

St. Lawrence Arts Center,
76 Congress St., Portland

You've probably heard of Mother Jones magazine, but perhaps not the infamous labor organizer Mary Harris "Mother" Jones for which the progressive magazine is named. This one-hour musical by Si Kahn and performed by Vivian Nesbitt (Breaking Bad) and John Dillon of the nationally syndicated radio show "Art of the Song" brings "Mother" Jones (1837–1930) to life in a compelling theatrical production on tour. Tickets are \$25 (plus fees) via Brown Paper Tickets. Shows are at 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and at 2 p.m. Sunday. (stlawrencearts.org)

Maine Highland Games

Saturday, Aug. 18

Topsham Fairgrounds, Topsham

The Scots love strong women. The annual Scottish Festival and Maine Highland Games at the Topsham Fairgrounds includes a full day of "heavy athletics" for both men and women (with different weight categories by gender). Events include the Braemer stone put, the heavy hammer and the sheaf toss. Basically,

throw heavy objects for distance, height and accuracy—and have fun doing it. (mainehighlandgames.org)

Superhero Lady Armwrestlers of Portland (SLAP!)

Saturday, Aug. 18, 8 p.m. to midnight

Port City Music Hall, Portland

Eight local lady armwrestlers make their entrances, each with a persona, entourage and theme song. During the single-elimination competition with an undercurrent of improv comedy, each entourage collects donations on behalf of their lady armwrestler. And the lady who fundraises the most for local charities wins the Crowd Favorite title. This is a night of entertainment you won't soon forget. (slapmaine.org)

Designing Women Craft Show

Saturday Aug. 25, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Longfellow's Greenhouse, Manchester

Designing Women organizes five craft shows a year, each benefitting a different local community-minded nonprofit while bringing together some of the best art in New England—made by women, of course. A couple dozen artists designers, potters, jewelry makers, photog-



Top: Historic photo of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones.
Above: Vivian Nesbitt. *Courtesy photos*

rapher and more—will be represented at this show in Manchester, benefitting the Sexual Assault Crisis & Support Center in Winthrop. (*designingwomen.org*)

Earthing Yoga

Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m. through Aug. 29
Eastern Prom, Portland

Earthing is a fast-growing movement based on the principle that connection with the earth is vital to our health. Explore earthing through OmBody Health's free Earthing Yoga classes Wednesday nights on the Eastern Prom. These all-levels classes focus on connection with the earth, our bodies and each other through sensory awareness, movement, mindfulness and gratitude. Try going mat free! (*ombodyhealth.com*)

Amy Paradysz is a writer, editor and photographer who lives in Scarborough.

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REIMAGINING THE CLASSROOM

How Maine educators are reaching students differently, how the classroom looks and feels different than 30 years ago and, in many cases, how students themselves are helping to shape their own education.





EARLY INTERVENTION

A case manager and a mother of a child with autism, April Fournier advocates for kids and relates to parents

WRITTEN BY PATRICIA MCCARTHY
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAURYN HOTTINGER





As both a case manager and a mother of a child with autism, April Fournier, pictured here with her son Asher, has a unique perspective, and uses it to work with parents and advocate for kids with special needs.

“Having been on both sides, I feel I have a really unique skill set when I’m in these meetings...I’ve had meetings while holding babies, I’ve had meetings in parking lots, in homes, wherever it works.”

When April Fournier works with parents struggling to accept the fact that their child needs special education services, she can personally relate. Her 9-year-old son Asher has autism, so she easily empathizes with the complex range of emotions parents deal with, especially soon after a diagnosis.

When Asher and his twin Mya were examined at their two-year checkup, their pediatrician gave both children an excellent bill of health, but noted striking differences in their behavior, recalls Fournier, 38.

“Mya was chatting up a storm and all personality, and Asher was really quiet and introverted,” she says. “The doctor wondered if we had noticed the same.”

Fournier says she and her husband Kevin Gray had, of course, noted differences, but were so busy and sleep deprived “just getting through having twins” while also parenting their 8- and 10-year-old sons and working full-time, that they hadn’t yet recognized that the twins’ differences extended beyond personality.

So, she says, it was a bit overwhelming when Asher was assessed, determined to have autism, and connected with Maine Department of Education’s Child Development Services for early intervention services.

“It all started to click pretty quickly that he was on the autism spectrum. An early childhood special educator came in a couple of times a week to help us learn how to bring out his social skills and speech skills,” said Fournier, who lives in Portland.

She and her husband decided that Kevin would leave his job and stay home to help their son, one-on-one.

“He spent five days a week sitting on the floor, doing this work with our son. And in six months, there was a huge transformation. We saw this little boy in our universe and not somewhere else. He was realizing he didn’t have to cry and scream to have his needs met, and all I kept thinking was gosh, that really worked.”

It was enough to get Fournier, a manager at Unum with a background in business, interested in going back to school to learn more about early childhood education. She says she was inspired to do for others what had been done for her son and family.

At age 3, Asher was no longer eligible for home visits, so he was enrolled in a special-needs preschool. Fournier took a job as a behavior technician at Providence Human Services in Scarborough and Springvale. That job involved going to families’ homes in the afternoons and evenings to provide behavior support for children ages 3-18, offering guidance for parents and creating plans for addressing particular needs.

“I’d talk with parents to figure out their biggest priorities. Do they want their kids to develop social skills? Be able to go to the grocery store? Get dressed on their own and sit through a meal?”

She was promoted to a supervisory role in Springvale, but the long commute interfered with her ability to be on-hand when Asher ran into issues at school, so she took a job as an ed tech at a preschool in Portland. That’s when she got a call from CDS, offering her a job as a case manager.

Fournier now works with families, chairing meetings where Individual Education Plans are created for children with special needs. Depending on the unique needs of each child, IEP meetings can involve special educators, school psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists, and, of course, the child’s parents. With her own experience as a mother sitting in those same meetings, she relates to the parents in a real way.

“Having been on both sides, I feel I have a really unique skill set when I’m in these meetings,” she says. “And I try to accommodate parent schedules. So I’ve had meetings while holding babies, I’ve had meetings in parking lots, in homes, wherever it works.”

Sarah Brydon’s 3-year-old twin daughters are two beneficiaries of those meetings.

“April was great at facilitating my daughters’ IEP meeting,” says Brydon, explaining that her daughters were born very prematurely and needed occupational, speech and physical therapy. “She kept the conversation moving, while making sure to include everyone’s perspective. She also made a point of acknowledging that it can be tough to hear what your kids can’t do and that our daughters are doing lots of things well. She’s so wonderful.”

Giovanna Hurley, a Child Development Services school psychologist, has worked with Fournier for several years and calls her a strong advocate for children.

“I love to have meetings with April. She goes out of her way and has a very nice way of communicating, partly because she understands things from a parent’s point of view, too,” says Hurley. “She’s very knowledgeable about the kinds of programs and therapies that are available for kids but doesn’t use a lot of jargon with parents. She’s caring and sensitive and positive.”

Lori Whittemore, director of Child Development Services REACH, says Fournier brings a lot of expertise and enthusiasm to her role.

“April is really great with families,” Whittemore says. “She’s compassionate and extremely culturally aware. She allows parents to process at their own rate because she’s done that, too. There are all kinds of emotions involved – grief, acceptance, denial. She honors parents in

their process, works really hard to honor people's cultures, but also helps them to understand that they really need the services. And she helps them to move forward."

Fournier strives to move forward herself as well, despite some challenges.

She went through the Emerge Maine program, which trains Democratic women who wish to run for office, and took a run at House Seat 42 this year. She had to drop out of the race after being diagnosed with a neurological condition last fall.

That didn't deter her from finishing her master's in education with a concentration on early intervention at the University of Maine this spring. And she's enrolling in a doctoral program in school psychology next summer at the University of Southern Maine.

In between mothering four children—they're now 17, 15 and the twins are 9—she's found time to complete the Tri for a Cure three times and serves on the board of Maine Roller Derby—she was an all-star player for five years and recently co-founded and manages the first all-indigenous women's roller derby team—comprised of 20 women from tribes all over the world—that competed at the World Cup this winter in Manchester, United Kingdom. She's involved with Pride Portland and was honored in June by serving as Grand Marshal of the annual Pride parade in Portland.

She says life is busy but great, and that Asher just finished fourth grade in public school and no longer needs one-on-one assistance.

"He's gone from non-verbal and checked out to a mostly typical quirky little guy who loves Godzilla and Legos—and now has friends!"

Her "front-row seat" and personal experience in understanding the importance of early intervention services drives her to passionately advocate for CDS.

"We're overextended, and the money doesn't seem to get to early intervention as it should," says Fournier, who has 260 active cases in a territory that covers all of Portland. "We know early intervention works, but no one seems to see a need to fund it," she says, noting that a bill to provide more funding got stalled in the state Legislature this spring. "We need to invest in these kids."

Patricia McCarthy is a long-time writer and editor. She has three daughters, lives in Cape Elizabeth, and also has a photography business (patriciamccarthy.com).

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CHARTING A NEW PATH

COMPASS Academy in Westbrook is
'changing the way we do school'

WRITTEN BY AMY PARADYSZ
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAURYN HOTTINGER



Leah Douglass, Sarah Anthony and Darcie Simmons are co-leaders of the COMPASS Academy, a new option available this past year for Westbrook students who were at risk of dropping out of high school.



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"The relationship part of teaching is so underestimated, especially when it comes to kids who feel disenfranchised," says English teacher Leah Douglass, who taught alternative education at Westbrook High School before co-leading the pilot year of COMPASS Academy. "Making them feel like they're part of a community is crazy vital."

COMPASS—or Creating Opportunities through Multiple Pathways for Academic and Social Success—was a new option available this past year for Westbrook students who were at risk of dropping out of high school. And, by all accounts, it's working: Going into year two, there's a 100 percent re-enrollment rate and a waiting list to get in.

"We're changing the way we do school," says social studies teacher Darcie Simmons. "COMPASS is an experiential-based, hands-on program that is really good for kids who

history of basketball, the physics of sports, charting data and interpreting statistics. Red Claws basketball coach Scott Morrison showed students how he uses player stats to guide coaching decisions on the court.

An EE on "adulting" covered how to file taxes, how to manage a bank account and—with a trip to Bill Dodge—how to finance a car. An EE on activism covered history, art and music as well as a campaign development project. An EE on U.S. wars went beyond the "why" and "when," with students exploring the science of weaponry and the geography of battles as they created exhibits to share with their peers.

"Now I'm challenged to think of another cool way to teach them another facet of U.S. history next year," Simmons says. "I think they'll be a little confused at first to be rapping about the American revolution, but think they'll get excited about it."

"COMPASS is community-based, so the students have a lot of say. We all came up with the rules together, so they've got more buy-in and are more engaged...They are co-creating what's going on here."

need real-world connection with the content. The kids we work with aren't satisfied with being told to sit, take notes and learn enough to pass a test; they need to know why. Alternative education is like special ed; the kids don't necessarily have learning disabilities, but they need one-to-one individualized strategies. We work closely with those who need that extra push."

"The credit recovery approach just wasn't working," explains Douglass. "A kid failing a class and having to retake that class, just filling out packets, felt hopeless. And education shouldn't feel punitive."

The 30 COMPASS students—in grades 10 through 12—work to achieve the same standards as the mainstream students do, but they take a different path. The Educational Experiences are two- to four-week multi-disciplinary units that delve into a specific topic, concept or project covering big themes such as force and energy, how economies work or solving two-step equations for variables.

Simmons and math teacher Sarah Anthony co-taught a basketball unit that covered the

"COMPASS is an amalgamation of a bunch of different alternative education programs that we meshed together to work for Westbrook," Douglass says, explaining that the founding teachers visited Noble High School in North Berwick and the Springfield Renaissance School in western Massachusetts for inspiration.

Of the 26 students who were enrolled in COMPASS over the past school year, many qualify for free or reduced lunch based on family income. The majority live with just one parent. Several have learning differences. Many face anxiety, illness or life circumstances outside their control, including, in a few cases, homelessness. Students accepted into the program—which requires a referral from a teacher or guidance counselor—tend to have been socially isolated or defiant. Or, they just weren't succeeding in other educational settings. One rarely showed up at for school at all before enrolling in COMPASS.

"COMPASS is community-based, so the students have a lot of say," Douglass says. "We

all came up with the rules together, so they've got more buy-in and are more engaged. They feel—and they are—part of the pilot. They are co-creating what's going on here.”

One of the rules the students co-created was a strong attendance policy with a maximum of 10 absences tolerated per semester.

“I'm really hopeful about this program,” Douglass says. “I loved my students before, and a lot of them are the same students we have now. But I just didn't feel like the program was meeting their needs. And attendance was always an issue. The attendance rate with this new program is off the charts. And, of course, you can't really learn if you're not here.”

Students have to apply for the program and re-apply each year.

“It's a really important piece that they have decided to do this, not that the school told them that's where they're going,” Anthony says. “A lot of times people think alternative education is the easy way out, but this curriculum is just as rigorous. The difference is that they're in a smaller environment, and they know we're going to be calling on them and checking on their work.”

The key to the program's first-year success, the three teachers say, is connection and community.

“The kids have to learn to work together,” Simmons says. “And they fight with each other like brothers and sisters because they love each other. They know they're cared for.”

All three subject area teachers—if they can even be called that in such an interdisciplinary approach—have a background in special or alternative education. All three live in the community where they teach. All three say that one of their favorite parts of teaching in COMPASS Academy is the opportunity to be creative in developing original lesson plans that teach to the same standards as in mainstream classrooms but in innovative ways adapted to their students' needs. That—let's be honest—has to be a lot more work than following a textbook.

“We're always wanting to quantify teaching with standardized tests and merit-based salaries, but that's ignoring what a lot of students really need, and that's a human connection with their teachers,” Douglass says. “Once they make that connection with you, they don't want to disappoint you. It's almost parental. But, also, building that trust builds credibility. If they trust you, they trust you're teaching them something valuable.”

Amy Paradysz is a writer, editor and photographer who lives in Scarborough.

WHAT STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT COMPASS:

“It showed me that I am not a failure. It showed me that I am smart. COMPASS made school work possible for me.

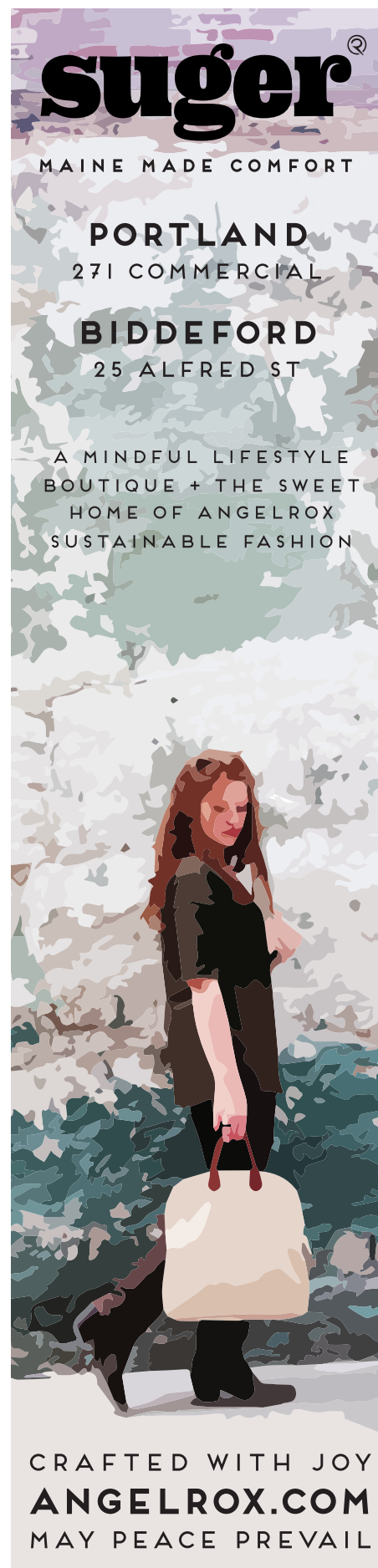
—Harmony Welsch, junior

“This year I grew more personally because I realized that I'm bigger than what I made myself feel. Academically, I've passed in more work in COMPASS than I have ever passed in all throughout high school.”

—Heba Zackaria, senior

“I succeeded more than I ever have while being in high school. Now that I am in COMPASS, I would rather be in school than do anything else. The teachers are extremely welcoming and have a place for each one of us. They pay attention to how we all individually learn.”

—Karis Fitzsimmons, senior



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Beth Wilbur Van Mierlo founded the non-profit organization Side x Side in 2013 to encourage school administrators and teachers to work alongside teaching artists with the goal of enhancing the standard curriculum from kindergarten to high school.

SIDE

X

SIDE

WRITTEN BY EMMA BOUTHILLETTE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAURYN HOTTINGER



“It takes a tribe to educate our kids today,” says Beth Wilbur Van Mierlo. “The more brilliant minds working together, the better, and our students benefit.”

This Portland mother of three would know. In addition to raising her own children—Matheo, Mikeal and Anneke—with her husband Jos, Wilbur Van Mierlo is actively engaged in Portland Public Schools through her non-profit organization Side x Side. “It takes a community working side-by-side to educate and support the next generation of students,” she says.

Specifically, this organization encourages school administration and teachers to work alongside teaching artists with the goal of enhancing the standard curriculum from kindergarten to high school through arts integration. The approach promotes critical thinking, creativity and innovation without changing the core curriculum. Since its founding in 2013, Side x Side has been well received by teachers, parents and especially students. During the most recent school year, 19 teaching artists worked in more than 80 classrooms reaching about 1,800 students.

“I have always been interested in the educa-

tion system and in particular how the curriculum is delivered. Throughout my schooling, I consistently struggled to prove what I had learned on tests, which often left me feeling embarrassed and ashamed,” says 48-year-old Wilbur Van Mierlo. “My own educational experiences fueled my passion to shift the way children learn today.”

The concept for Side x Side began less than a decade ago while Wilbur Van Mierlo volunteered as a teaching artist at Howard C. Reiche Community School in Portland. One of the first projects she developed encouraged students to think about how they viewed themselves and how their community perceived them. Wilbur Van Mierlo asked the students to sum this up into one descriptive word, which was then stitched in red thread within each student’s self-portrait. The final pieces of Threads, the Ties that Bind Us were displayed in a downtown gallery with a continuous red thread joining each portrait to represent the interconnectedness of community.

Wilbur Van Mierlo still remembers one of the first students she worked with who slouched as she walked down the hallways of school, avoided eye contact and stayed iso-

For more
information about
Side x Side, go to
sidexsideme.com



Student artwork decorates the walls and art supplies abound at Side x Side's offices on Congress Street in Portland. "(Side x Side) is not about producing artists or historians," says founder Beth Wilbur Van Mierlo, "but producing well-rounded people who can think for themselves and follow their own dreams."

lated from her classmates. "She struggled so much coming up with a positive word to describe herself," Wilbur Van Mierlo recalls. "She could come up with a million words that were negative."

Wilbur Van Mierlo jotted down all those negative terms and then suggested a new word: unique. Her unique style, unique manner, unique learning style. The student lit up. "She changed. She started reaching out, talking to more students, she would say 'Hi' when I saw her in the hallway. Things she wouldn't normally do," says Wilbur Van Mierlo. "It moved me so much."

Through these early projects, Wilbur Van Mierlo also noticed that "the arts projects were engaging for all students, including those who were at the high end of academic spectrum as well as those who were struggling. This is when I began to see the opportunity to utilize my skills while fulfilling my desire to make a greater difference in my community."

Shortly after founding Side x Side, Wilbur Van Mierlo was approached by Kelly Hrenko, art department chairs at the University of Southern Maine, seeking internship opportunities for the university's undergraduate students.

"After we met, we realized to expand programming you need expanded funds," says Hrenko, who had previous experience working with the Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination grant program. She helped Wilbur Van Mierlo secure the federal grant in the amount of \$1.9 million

to fund the implementation and assessment of arts integration in four public elementary schools. "It just spiraled from there."

"It is pretty amazing," says Hrenko of how the past four years have unfolded. She attributes the program's success to the unique partnerships created. "Beth surrounds herself with people who are constructive and honest. She is really strategic in who she brings in and has put together a team of top-notch teaching artists and administration."

The scope of Side x Side projects is equally amazing. In kindergarten, teachers promote literacy through dance and music. Second graders combine science with literacy, math, sculpture and illustration to learn about the ocean. History is brought to life for fifth-grade students through film-making, public speaking and acting. High school students explore engineering, computer technology and design in the "ARTronics" program, which highlights the intersection of art and technology.

"At any point in time, the content and medium of programs can change. That is the beauty of arts integration and our multifaceted teaching artists who can shift to meet the needs of the subject and classroom teacher," says Wilbur Van Mierlo. "(Side x Side) is about creating different ways for students to learn and engage with academic content. Almost every kid loves participating in the Side x Side projects because the units are multi-faceted and integrate the arts with other subject matters."

Portland Public Schools Superintendent Xavier Botana is impressed with the partner-

ship Side x Side has created in the district's schools. "Side x Side is a great resource for our teachers and helped our schools to integrate multiple media into important projects," he says. "They have a cutting-edge vision for how to integrate arts into learning about other subjects...we know so well that students don't just learn from books. They need opportunities to explore and express themselves."

"A student doesn't have to love art to engage and learn while having fun," says Wilbur Van Mierlo. Like hiding healthy ingredients in brownies, "amidst all of the direct learning, students (participating in Side x Side programming) are also learning invaluable life skills, including, but not limited to, collaboration, teamwork, public speaking, risk taking, critical thinking, presentation of knowledge and skills."

"I started Side x Side as a way to change the landscape of education," she says.

Her goal now is to secure sustainable funding to continue growing the programs and hopefully expand to more schools. "We would love to teach in other school districts. It is just a matter of securing funding to make that happen," she says.

Side x Side "is not about producing artists or historians," says Wilbur Van Mierlo, "but producing well-rounded people who can think for themselves and follow their own dreams."

Emma Bouthillette authored "A Brief History of Biddeford," about her hometown. She is a yoga instructor and a corgi mom. (emma-bouthillette.com)



Power School is a free Westbrook-based after-school and summer school program for immigrant and refugee children in third through eighth grade. Development Director Karen Collins says the program adapts to teach each student in different ways.

Power School

Giving students the added support
to be life-long learners

**WRITTEN BY BAILEY O'BRIEN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAURYN HOTTINGER**



In just four years, the Power School summer program has grown to 100 students and 10 staffed teachers. Students practice robotics, simulate running companies and build houses with math, all while gaining important comprehension skills.

Summer vacation started for most Maine schools in June, but a school in Westbrook remained buzzing with activity. In one classroom, a group of young English language learner students sat rapt while their teacher explained the history of the word “sit-in.” In the gym, sneakers squeaked as students lined up to take foul shots during a free period. Down the hall, a chattering cohort of students huddled over a cluster of desks. “They’re using marshmallows and spaghetti to build a structure that can bear weight,” says Karen Collins. She is the development director for the Power School, a free Westbrook-based afterschool and summer school program for immigrant and refugee children in third through eighth grade.

Collins founded Power School in 2014 with the Rev. Mutima Peter, the head pastor of the Bethel Christian Center in Westbrook. She had been helping the church with its fundraising and marketing when she and Peter saw the opportunity for expansion. “The

church had just moved to this new building in Westbrook, and they knew they wanted to do something else with the larger space,” says Collins. Inspired by the church’s diverse congregation, she and Peter opened the adjoining Intercultural Community Center, an organization that provides educational, social and health opportunities to immigrants. “We wanted to make a secular program so we could help people of all backgrounds,” says Collins.

The Power School was their inaugural program.

The first summer, “We had about 30 children and very little funding,” says Collins, who worked as a catch-all: teacher, business manager, fundraiser and program planner. “We mostly did it with volunteers, and it went really well!” In just four years, the summer school has grown to 100 students and 10 staffed teachers, and to accommodate this evolution, their usual site is under construction with the addition of four new dedicated Power School classrooms.

The students may have been displaced at

For more information about Power School, go to iccmaine.org/powerschool.php

the nearby Canal School for the summer, but Collins and her colleagues remain steadfast in their mission. “We serve a lot of children who haven’t really mastered English yet,” she says. “Some children who have just moved here are starting at the very beginning. So we have our classes, but it’s always with a focus on helping them gain English competency and fluency.” Even number-driven math classes rely on a high level of English comprehension. “If you don’t have the vocabulary, you can’t understand what’s being asked of you. Someone could say ‘4 minus 3’ or ‘4 take away 3’ or ‘4 subtract 3’—there are a lot of ways to say the same basic thing.”

This learning environment presents the Power School teachers with a unique challenge. “We might have a sixth-, seventh- or eighth-grader who just came to the country, so they’re reading at a much lower level,” says Collins. “We have to try to give them work that’s still interesting to them at their age.” To help accomplish this goal, the teachers use the scaffolding method. “Scaffolding is basically teaching one lesson to a group of children who have varying degrees of English comprehension. You teach the same lesson but in a few different ways,” Collins explains.

The curriculum, with its focus on English fluency, emphasizes the applied side of each subject. “This year, we’re working with Idexx. They’re going to come in twice a week in the summer and teach different STEM topics,” says Collins. “They bring lab coats and goggles and gloves. The

kids just love it.” The students will also have the opportunity to practice robotics, simulate running companies, build houses with math and analyze the nutrition of their food, all while gaining important comprehension skills.

Although the program functions as a school, frequent field trips to farms, parks and cultural hubs offer the students a chance to explore Maine in the summer. The students’ resounding favorite from years’ past is a ferry ride through Casco Bay to Long Island. “Many of the kids have never been on a boat before, so it’s really exciting for them,” says Collins. “You can read about being on a boat, but you don’t know what it feels like until you’re on one.”

In the years since the Power School’s first summer, Collins has settled comfortably into her development role. “I’m always trying to figure out what new and exciting programs other out-of-school-time organizations are doing. I’m often able to solicit funding from foundations based on what I’ve studied,” she says. Although this takes up the majority of her time, her title “is still not inclusive of all the things that I do. You name it. I drive the bus sometimes,” she says.

“You can read about being on a boat, but you don’t know what it feels like until you’re on one.”

Bailey O’Brien is a Portland-based freelance writer and editor. In her spare time, she can be found in tiny bookstores, on top of mountains or beside the ocean.

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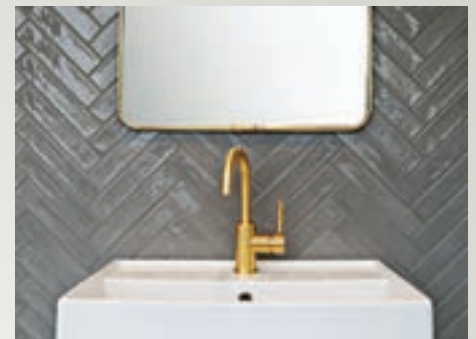
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In the trades

With a shortage of skilled trade workers—and college costs rising—Totally Trades! encourages girls in Maine to explore the trades

Written by Anna E. Jordan

“Our employers are screaming for skilled workers,” says Nancy Weed, director of the Region 10 Technical High School in Brunswick. “But our sending schools aren’t encouraging technical education.”

Weed runs one of 27 facilities within the Maine Department of Education that serve high schools around the state. Depending on the facility, these programs can include building trades, electricity, metal fabrication, automotive technology, medical occupations, truck driving, criminal justice, firefighting, computer fields and much more. Students receive a trade or technical credential from work completed in their junior and senior years of high school.

An emphasis on attending college has created a shortage of skilled trade workers who receive training from career and technical education programs and apprenticeships. For many 15- and 16-year-olds in Maine preparing to start their junior year of high school, it will be a year of standardized tests and college visits. According to the Mitchell Institute’s 2015 “Trends in College-Going” study, 57 percent of high school graduates in 2006 attended college that fall. In 2014 that percentage jumped

to 62. But there is another path that students and the adults who guide them often overlook—a path that incurs little to no debt and could mean direct entry into a well-paying job with advancement opportunities.

“There’s a lack of understanding about CTE (career and technical education) that feeds misconceptions,” says Weed. “People think that if you go to ‘voc’ [a vocational school] that you don’t go to college, that you just need to know how to pound nails, that people in ‘voc’ aren’t smart, that anyone can just be an automotive engineer without the understanding of the rigorous requirements including math and science. Those things just aren’t true.”

Weed and other CTE directors take their myth-busting presentations to schools around Maine, talking to sophomores about the benefits of non-traditional careers and hosting Q&A panels of current CTE students, both male and female.

And it’s a necessary effort. To find new future workers, employers are encouraging non-traditional applicants—women. New Ventures Maine, an organization that offers tuition-free programs for career, business and financial education, starts ear-



Totally Trades! participants get a taste of the trades with hands-on workshops—like learning to drive an excavator, building a toolbox from wood or hand-cutting their names into a sheet of steel—during the one-day conferences, which are geared towards girls in seventh and eighth grades. Last school year, eight Totally Trades! conferences served 772 students in grades 8 through 10. *Photos courtesy Totally Trades!*

lier by offering single-day Totally Trades! conferences for seventh- and eighth-grade girls. Participants take two one-hour, hands-on workshops that might include learning to drive an excavator, building a toolbox from wood or hand-cutting one's name into a sheet of steel with plasma-cutting implements. Last school year, eight Totally Trades! conferences served 772 students in grades 8 through 10.

"We say, if the girls can be on their own (because we still do believe that sometimes there's that gender bias)...they'll try these things without thinking about what the boys are saying," says Jean Dempster, New Ventures regional manager for central Maine.

Administered by the University of Maine at Augusta, New Ventures Maine offers Totally Trades! with the support of local businesses including Hardypond Construction, Cianbro, the Cynthia McMullin Fund for Women of the Maine Community Foundation, FedEx, Spectrum Communications and the community colleges. Dempster explains, "Employers participate in these conferences because they need workers. For them, it's really a recruiting event, even if the girls are two or three years from being able to take a full-time job."

Deirdre Wadsworth, president of Hardypond Construction, says the skilled trade shortage is having a big impact on the industry. "I keep a core group of employees and we add laborers through temp agencies

or students and interns to help out during the summer busy period," she says. "But I can't grow my company due to a lack of skilled employable people. We are also finding that every subcontractor we use is in the same position and often is so busy and under-staffed that they can't fulfill their obligations, which makes scheduling difficult and hard on my employees."

Wadsworth took the college pathway and studied economics at the University of Denver followed by an MBA in sustainability. When she decided being a project manager was the job for her, she came back to her father's company, Hardypond. In 2015 she became president of the company, yet she started out driving heavy equipment and working in the office when she was young before moving on to understanding design drawings, overseeing safety and estimating project costs as a LEEDS-certified professional.

The Totally Trades! conferences feature female speakers like Wadsworth and other women who have found success in the trades.

"This is an opportunity for these girls to see that there are women in the trades...women who have gone through trade school [who can] talk to the girls about the challenges of being the only girl in the class," says Dempster. "Even though it's worth it, there are still some barriers in an all-male environment."

Many argue technical credentials are a better return on investment than four-year college as the trades can be a solid path to employment and high-paying jobs. "It depends on the college degree," says Weed from Region 10 Technical School. "You can get a college degree in sociology and be working at McDonald's or you can study a skilled trade and go work for Cianbro at \$50- or \$60,000 a year."

As Weed mentioned earlier, students can do both CTE and go to college. "We find that the collegiate admissions programs come to us because our students, who have gone through CTE, have skills and experience that other applicants don't have. If you have your CNA, that helps you get into an RN program."

"All of us have to keep that learning going because things change so fast," Dempster agrees. "You might get an entry-level job as an auto technician working at a tire-changing place or garage, but to move up in salary you need to get a master technician credential. More education either at a traditional college or for a recognized credential does lead to more salary over time."

Dempster points out that wages in Maine sometimes don't support the college loans that people take on, which can keep students from reaching their goals. Students who graduate from CTEs can do so with no debt and they can use their trade to work their way through higher education with employers who will help fund the professional development required to advance, whether that's an apprenticeship, a two-year community college program or a four-year program.

Attracting girls and young women won't fix the skilled trade shortage quickly. "We can train or do apprentice programs, but to become a skilled worker, you need experience either through formal education or time on the job learning," says Wadsworth. "Because unemployment is so low, unless someone, possibly a female, wants to leave their current profession and get into the trades, I don't see any short-term solutions."

Still, Wadsworth encourages Totally Trades! participants to "be brave," and to "try new opportunities, to stand up and ask questions and to learn about the careers that don't interest them as well as the ones that do."

Anna E. Jordan (annaejordan.com) is a writer and editor. Follow her at [@annawriterdraw](https://twitter.com/annawriterdraw) for news about #kidlit, rowing and politics.

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SCHOOL AROUND US

A learning community built on trust

WRITTEN BY ANNA E. JORDAN

Back in 1970, Stacey and Marylyn Wentworth were part of a group of founding families who wanted to create a progressive educational community built on philosopher John Dewey's principles of practical and experiential learning. Together they created the School Around Us in Arundel, with a focus on educating a person's "intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials." School Around Us valued "both achievements and road blocks, with a focus on both what went well and what didn't go as planned."

Forty-eight years later, educator Amy Wentworth—Stacey and Marylyn's daughter—is still a member of the School Around Us learning community, along with two other teachers, an assistant, 27 students, their parents and a board of directors. The group knows that creating a community of holistic learners is hard work, even when that learning looks like play.

The school is run by the democratic process of consent—a format that is a step away from consensus. This allows the four adult committees that meet monthly—facilities, education, development and administration—to act independently. As the members of the community have changed, so have some decisions. For example, at one point in the school's history, parents thought homework was a good idea, while the current parent group has decided against it.

"Parents coming in, a lot of us come from a traditional public school setting, so we're learning and sort of unschooling ourselves in this process," says Laura Laprise, the administrative assistant at School Around Us, whose two children attended the school. "It's helpful that the teachers are there holding up holistic education and continually sharing that with us."

Parents and students can find it difficult to

put the school community before personal needs and concerns. The youngest children may not be developmentally ready to understand other people's perspectives. Still, each child, from kindergarten through eighth grade, has an equal voice in the community.

Students use the same democratic consent model to decide their thematic and project-based studies, which they spend a few hours each day working on. Changing the course study to meet the needs of students is known as "emergent curriculum." Sometimes those decisions look like a no-holds-barred student brainstorm. Other times, students are given leading questions or a category such as earth sciences around which to problem solve. When asked, "What's important to you, what do you think are problems in the world?" student concerns regarding homelessness prompted a unit that included a chilly overnight without shelter.

"Teachers pretty much are given the autonomy to follow the kids' interest and create classes that match the kids that are in the school," says Wentworth. "The parents trust that we're going to fulfill our 'eight basic skills' and bring in our philosophy of holistic education in whatever we do."

The eight basic skills are posted in every room of the school: body knowledge, citizenship, communication, creative arts, environmental harmony, logical thinking, practical life skills and self-knowledge. Skills integration happens in the thematic studies the children help define, it happens in their play in and out of doors and it happens in the more traditional reading and math classes, which also have room to be shaped by student imagination and interest.

Further structure comes from each student's annual academic, social and personal goals. At

the end of each term, "shares" allow each student to present their learning and progress to the whole school community.

"It's definitely hard for parents to build trust that play or processing is as important as learning to read," says Wentworth. "So much research is coming out around the importance of play. Around the importance of giving kids time to deal with conflict on their own and get messy and that that develops the creative mind and helps problem solving. It's nice that there's research out there that's backing up what we've been doing for so long."

The school's asymmetrical wooden building has areas for the younger group (K-2), the middle group (grades 3-5), and the older group (grades 6-8), but students are just as likely to flow from place to place and learn during extended "breaks" outdoors. Fluid scheduling allows students to get deeply involved in learning and play without imposing rigid transitions.

The 9-1 student-teacher ratio is key to the three teachers' deep knowledge of each and every student. Teachers share their observations about student growth with parents regularly in narrative form without test or grades. "Even though Amy focuses on the younger group," Laprise says, "she is just as in-tune with the children in the middle and the older groups and their needs and their own personal goals. And I really appreciate that."

Each eighth-grader at School Around Us develops a year-long culminating project that includes a portfolio from each year of their schooling, answers to 10 reflective questions and a service piece that reflects who they are as a person and relates to their interests. Many students use their final project to leave a gift to the school—whether that's solar panels purchased with a grant they applied for, a quiet room for students designed with the help of an architect, an herb garden or a now-mature, sweet-smelling rose bush and shade-giving apple tree.

While some School Around Us graduates go on to the New School (a progressive high school for which Marylyn Wentworth was also a founding member) others choose private school or homeschooling or opt for a public school for a new experience or to pursue athletics. "One thing that we work really hard on is to have the kids know themselves and know what their needs are," says Wentworth. "Because of that work, kids make choices that are pretty good matches."

Anna E. Jordan (annaejordan.com) is a writer and editor. Follow her at [@annawritedraw](https://twitter.com/annawritedraw) for news about #kidlit, rowing and politics.

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5 things

5 HIKES THAT INCLUDE A SWIMMING HOLE

Written & photographed by Shannon Bryan

These Maine (and one New Hampshire) hikes are the perfect combination of woodsy exploration and a cool late-summer dip.

1 Mousam Way North & Indian's Last Leap, Sanford

Hike through Riverside Cemetery and along the Mousam River to get to Indian's Last Leap, a cool swimming hole. Or wade into the family-friendly waters at Springvale Park. There are multiple places to park at various parts of the 3.9-mile trail network, allowing you to hike a longer or shorter distance, depending on what you're up for. Part of the trail is pavement and crushed gravel, and in the woods the trail becomes more rugged. Park right at Springvale Park for access to the river at the popular family beach, or hike less than 0.5 miles to Indian's Last Leap swimming hole.

2 Tumbledown Mountain, Weld

The 1.9-mile Brook Trail will take you straight up to the pond near the summit, where you can lounge near the water or get in for a swim. (With all the sweating you'll do on your way up, it'll feel great to cool down in the pond.) Or take the Loop Trail for added challenge (in the form of stream crossings, rock scrambling and Fat Man's Misery—a narrow fissure in the mountain you'll have the pleasure of climbing through).





Blueberry Mountain & Rattlesnack Pool, Evans Notch

3

The emerald-colored water of Rattlesnack Pool is mesmerizing. It's also really cold, but plenty of bold hikers plunge in. If you hike the entire 3.9-mile loop (starting on the White Cairn Trail to Blueberry Ridge Trail and then to Stone House Trail), the pool will be a welcome reward. But you can also skip the loop and hike straight to the pool via the Stone House Trail. Both trailheads are accessed from Stone House Road.

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4 | Swan Island, Richmond

Located at the head of Merrymeeting Bay, just off the coast of Richmond, Swan Island is a 4-mile-long, half-mile-wide island that isn't far out to sea, but feels remote once you're on it. It's open to the public from May to October and offers easy-going trails (ranging from 0.5–2 miles), kayak rentals and a fine spot for swimming on the east side of the island near the camping area. You could paddle yourself to Swan Island—it's a stone's throw from the mainland—or take the 5-minute ferry offered by IFW. (To reserve a spot on the ferry, call 207-547-5322 or email swan.island@maine.gov.)

Lonesome Lake Trail, Franconia Notch State Park, New Hampshire

5

Follow the Lonesome Lake Trail and be rewarded with supreme views, a sweat-inducing hike, and a refreshing swim in Lonesome Lake. The trail is a 3.1-mile loop, but you can extend the hike by taking other trails to or from the trailhead, located in the Lafayette Campground in Franconia Notch State Park. It's a moderate hike—so you will earn that dip! And feel free to pop into the AMC Lonesome Lake Hut.



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Julie Wilson & her honeybees

Written by Julie Wilson
Photographed by Lauryn Hottinger

Until six years ago, I made every effort to avoid coming in contact with stinging insects. But now, I just love, love, love being surrounded by honeybees. Despite what you might think, working with bees is an extremely calming experience. At a hive's peak size, there can be up to 60,000 bees—remaining calm and thoughtful as a beekeeper is a must! I marvel at a beehive's organization, how each worker bee completes the job assigned to her current role in the hive and how the queen bee truly looks regal. Truly.

I love the hum the bees make when I remove the hive cover, the busyness of their activity—coming and going with such purpose. I love the sweet, earthy beeswax smell of the hive and the opportunity to share jars of golden honey with friends and family.

In the summer, when the bees are busy fanning the inside of the hive to evaporate excess moisture before they seal up the honey with a film of wax, my backyard smells wonderfully delicious. During the winter months, I trudge through the snow and hold a stethoscope to the side of the hive straining to hear the buzzing sound of them vibrating their wings to generate heat. I know I could use a thermal attachment on my iPhone but I don't think it would feel the same.

Beekeeping was something that my father was interested in but just didn't have the chance to explore. So when I came across the book "First Lessons in Beekeeping" in a box of his books, I knew I had to give it a try. I often think of him and of my grandmother and gratefully thank them for instilling in me an appreciation for nature—something I've not yet outgrown.

Julie Wilson is a high school special education teacher who lives in North Yarmouth with her husband Bill, her cat Mandu and several colonies of honey bees.

NOTE ABOUT THIS THING I LOVE

We want to know what makes you feel fantastic, powerful, on top of the world. And we'll highlight you in these pages. Email MWM editor Shannon at sbryan@mainewomenmagazine.com.

Julie Wilson keeps several colonies of honeybees in her yard, and she loves the busyness of their activity, the organization of the hive and how her backyard smells in summer when the bees are sealing up honey with a film of wax.





SHARED STRENGTH

Trainer Kayla Cavallaro helps young women get strong—in more ways than one

Written by Natalie Ladd

Photographed by Taylor Roberge

Eighteen-year-old Emily Richards recalls celebrating her 15th birthday dinner with a family who loves her. Having barely finished eating, she closed the bathroom door and purged her meal. Throwing up, she says, gave her a feeling of profound relief and what she now recognizes as “control” over some small corner of her life. But this time, with the tap water running, her suspecting mother overheard. Small, frail and in need of help, Richards’ self-destructive behavior could no longer be ignored.

Adopted from the Philippines at age 2, Richards now stands just under 5 feet tall and weighs a healthy weight. “I’m Asian and looked different from my family. I was being bullied at school and felt like I didn’t fit anywhere,” she says. “My family is great and my mom wanted me to go to therapy, so I did. And to my pediatrician and a psychologist. I was on two different medications and felt like a robot.” Then a friend saw a small Facebook blurb about Find Your Strength! An Eating Disorder Strength Training Program Free of Guilt and Shame (FYS!), a program out of Dirigo Fitness in Falmouth.

FYS! founder Kayla Cavallaro, 24, and Richards are kindred spirits. “I was bulimic at 16 and hospitalized with throat scarring from all the acid at 20,” Cavallaro says. “I was killing myself and until then, my family didn’t know. I wanted to be left alone, but finally, I got tired of lying to my therapist and to other people that I was OK. It was either live this dark lonely life forever or get help.”

Cavallaro, a certified personal trainer with a B.A in exercise science and a minor in nutrition, is frustrated with how little people know about eating disorders and the difficulty associated with treating them. “It isn’t like drugs and alcohol,” she says. “Those things are vices, and food becomes one, but people have to eat.”



FOR MORE INFORMATION

about Find Your Strength!,
call Kayla Cavallaro
207-805-1079.

For more information about eating disorders, visit the National Association of Eating Disorders online at neda.org

“According to the National Exercise Trainer Association, eating disorder death rates are continuously the highest of any mental disorder. Other research backs this up, too,” Cavallaro says. “I looked hard to find a therapist who really got it. One woman who didn’t know I was bulimic said she treated anxiety, depression and family relationship stuff, but not eating disorders. ‘They never get better,’ was what she told me.” The words stuck.

Cavallaro worked through her addiction with doctors and a therapist she still sees and is clear that the program is intended to complement not substitute other support systems. “FYS! is a place where girls can gather with others who understand the pull eating disorders present. It’s safe here, we have each other’s backs. Getting strong is a healthier way to have control. Not to mention the other benefits of exercise.”

Emily agrees. “When I first came here I could barely lift my backpack, much less increasing weights. I’m still small, but I like having muscles. I’m strong.”

Natalie Ladd is a freelance writer and single mom of two millennial Maine women. A rabid Springsteen fan, she has never met a pungent cheese or vista view she didn’t like.

THAT Girl! puts a monthly spotlight on young women who have something meaningful to share and on the organizations and influencers who guide and support them. Do you know a girl or an unsung support group or mentor whose story should be told? Reach out to Natalie Ladd: nhladd@aol.com.

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MAINE STYLE



Adventure in style

Written by Amy Power
Photographed by Amanda Whitegiver

Late summer is full of adventure. That said, I frequently find my comfortable walking shoes do not necessarily jive with my overall aesthetic. You can only wear sneakers or Sperry's so many times before feeling like it's time to switch it up—but you also cannot walk for miles exploring new places in strappy sandals, shoes with no cushion, or, worse yet, heels.

Amanda and I have been on the hunt for the ideal sandal that takes our look (and our bodies) that extra mile as we explore new towns, stroll through farmers markets and trek across the world this season: a sandal that is comfortable, non-chafing, blister-free and most importantly has a supportive sole.

We settled on the Clair Slingback by Caslon. It's cushy sole, butter-soft sueded leather, comfortable wide straps, plethora of color options and adjustable band checked all our boxes. Not only are they flattering, I have walked around for miles in them without regretting a single step. Our secret walking weapon selected, we built this month's column (literally) from the ground up around these easy breezy sandals.

Islands and lighthouses dot the Maine coast, all begging to be explored, but one in particular will always hold a special place in my heart and history. In the summer of 2011 I was 25, clutching a freshly earned master's degree, engaged to a sailor and looking for one last "hurrah" before resigning myself to full-blown adult-

ing. Nate and I both grew up in the shadow of Seguin Island, the difference between us being that he spent his youth volunteering out there, whereas I didn't step foot on this 64-acre outpost until Memorial Day Weekend 2011 when Ethan Deberry, captain of The Seguin Island Ferry, delivered us to its cove as the newly minted volunteer lighthouse keepers for the next three months. In addition to proving that Nate and I could, indeed, live in remote close quarters without killing each other (helpful knowledge going into a marriage), Seguin also offers expansive and dramatic views in all directions (you can even see Mount Washington on particularly clear days) and hiking trails across the varied landscape. In addition to offering me a day of nostalgia and memory, the island provides the perfect backdrop for taking these sandals, and the look we built around them, for the ultimate adventure test drive.

Preparing for a day on Seguin can be an adventure in itself. The island is situated two miles off shore, at the mouth of the Kennebec River. If you don't happen to own (or have access to) a boat, you first drive to Fort Popham (in Phippsburg) and then catch the Seguin Island Ferry to take you the rest of the way. Just drive until the road ends and look for the guy with the curly red hair (that's Ethan). You'll get there, we promise.

Layers are absolutely necessary for this frequently chilly boat ride. We chose the iconic L.L. Bean Sweater

GET THE LOOKS

Clair Slingback by Caslon (nordstrom.com, \$79.95)

L.L. Bean Sweater Fleece Pullover by L.L.Bean
(llbean.com, \$79)

Cora Shorts by Boden (bodenusa.com, \$70)

Whisper Cotton V-Neck Pocket Tee by Madewell
(madewell.com, \$24.50)

Watercolor Waves medium tote by Sea Bags
(seabags.com, \$160-\$200)

Beaded Circle Tassel Earrings by J.Crew Factory
(factory.jcrew.com, \$39.50)

Cotton Bandana in Villa Blue by Madewell
(madewell.com, \$12.50)



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fashion, head over to the East Coast
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Fleece Pullover. We love the custom feel of the fit—it's available in petite, regular and plus-sized options—coupled with the soft warmth this wardrobe staple wraps you in. L.L.Bean updated the classic look of a fleece with a knit exterior, while keeping the traditional brushed fleece inside. This slight alteration of the design makes it feel a little more refined and transitions the jacket into a practical and fashionable choice. I was hugely tempted by the new color-block options, but erred on the side of caution and versatility with the solid sailcloth color.

There isn't a dock on the island, so you need to be poised to navigate the transition from dinghy to rocky beach and be quite ready to get your feet, ankles and sometimes calves wet. Amanda and I opted to pack her camera and our cell phones in a dry bag, but if you travel with less gear, a simple waterproof/floating phone case would be an excellent choice in case of a dunking. Rolling up pants is always a viable option, but instead I chose to wear Cora Shorts by Boden. This linen short has a 6-inch inseam and a fuller leg, providing more coverage and freedom of movement as we trekked up the steep incline to the top of the island and wandered about. Our favorite detail on these shorts was the removable tie at the waist. In so many cases, when shorts or pants have a bow at the waist, it isn't actually removable. We loved the freedom of choice (to bow or not to bow!) along with the vibrantly bright color and natural ventilation the linen offers. Pro tip: Boden is based in the UK. If you're in a hurry, many items are also available at Nordstrom and they get to you far more quickly when you go that route.

The top of Seguin is approximately 186 feet above sea level, and the hill to get to the top is rather steep. I quickly ditched my layering piece as we paused to enjoy a strategically placed bench at a scenic overlook. We

figured we would lean in completely to our nautical theme and pair our brightly colored shorts with a navy and white striped tee. While there's no shortage of stripes out there, we love the affordability and versatility of this Whisper Cotton V-Neck Pocket Tee by Madewell. I struggle with v-neck shirts being a little too deep on my petite frame, but I found this one comfortable, flattering and not too revealing. Cotton naturally stretches out a bit, but this top held its shape well and the side-slits at the hem are a thoughtful detail.

Save its natural beauty and a few historical landmarks, there is little on the island. Anything you may want, you need to carry in with you. With two toddlers at home, I find myself eating like one and was sure to pack plenty of snacks and water. Sea Bags have risen in fame to the point where no summer look feels complete without one. Made from recycled sails, the medium tote in "Watercolor Waves" complements our nautical theme in the most practical way and carries all of our necessities with ease. What solidified this choice for us was that we don't have to worry about it getting wet (because...sails) and, since it can be thrown in the washer and dryer, we don't have to be concerned about the bottom getting dirty on the floor of Ethan's lobster boat. We were able to tuck everything we needed inside and sail off into the sunrise for our grand island adventure.

Amy Power and Amanda Whitegiver are co-founders of East Coast Inspired, a fashion and lifestyle blog. Amy is a mother of two (and the model featured in this column's photos) who spends her days dreaming of the ultimate craft room and intending to go for a run. Amanda is a lifestyle family photographer who adores dark chocolate and singing with her two daughters.



Life lessons from the kitchen

Written by Candace Karu

My father, who grew up poor, was the first in his family to go to college. After three years as a scholarship student at a military high school in the Southwest, he earned an appointment to the United States Military Academy. His time at West Point gave him the foundation for a life his parents could only dream of.

My dad was quietly proud of his formal education and all that it afforded him. His time at West Point as a student and later as a teacher gave him entrée to a world far beyond the small town where he grew up.

As much as he appreciated his formal education, my father also knew the value of lessons learned outside the classroom. My parents made sure that life lessons were ongoing in our house. My mother took us to museums, galleries and the theater. My father pressed me into service for all his home-improvement projects. I spent long hours during my 11th summer helping him build and install a fence around our yard. That was the summer I learned how to operate power tools and to curse like a sailor.

It was around that time that I began to take a real interest in cooking. Because my mother was a full-time artist, cooking wasn't high on her list of priorities. My most influential culinary

mentors were all on TV. Julia Child, Graham Kerr and all the Great Chefs taught me not only how to cook but how food brought people together, how food really did equal love.

More than anyone else, my grandmother guided my early education in the kitchen. She taught me basic skills that stay with me to this day. Her recipes, like this one for lemon bars, were uncomplicated and simply delicious.

While my father taught me life lessons that helped me navigate the outside world, my grandmother—his mother—guided my early education in the kitchen. She taught me basic skills that stay with me to this day. Her recipes, like this one for lemon bars, were uncomplicated and simply delicious.

Here are my grandmother's top kitchen tips for all good cooks and her very favorite dessert recipe:

- Clean as you go.
- Use fresh ingredients.
- Read a new recipe through twice before you start to cook.
- Sharpen your knives often.
- Simple is better.
- A little wine for the chef never hurt.

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Gramma Leta's Lemon Bars



Above: These old-fashioned lemon bars are light and airy, the perfect sweet for the end of any meal. Right: Risotto can be a heavenly side dish when you're serving fish or chicken. Or make it a main course by incorporating shrimp or lobster as this recipe does. *Photos by Candace Karu*

◀ Gramma Leta's Lemon Bars

These old-fashioned favorites are light and airy, the perfect sweet for the end of any meal. Fresh lemon juice and zest are the key to their lemony zing.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups of all purpose flour, plus 3 tablespoons
1/2 cup of confectioners sugar, plus 1 tablespoon
3/4 cup of butter
Zest of two large lemons
1/3 cup fresh lemon juice
3 large eggs
1 cup granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon baking powder

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°.
Grease a 9" x 13" baking pan.
Combine 1 1/2 cups of flour and 1/2 cup confectioners sugar.
Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse sand.
Distribute mixture in greased baking pan and gently pat down to form a crust.
Bake until golden brown, about 15 minutes.
Zest lemons, you should have about 1 tablespoon.

Juice lemons to yield 1/3 cup.

Beat eggs with mixer on high speed until thickened, about 3 minutes. On low speed, slowly add lemon juice, lemon zest, granulated sugar, salt, baking powder and 3 tablespoons of flour. Scrape the sides of the bowl and mix until thoroughly blended.

Pour filling over the crust and bake until filling is set, about 15 minutes.

Set on wire rack to cool. When cool, dust with remaining confectioners sugar.

Cut into squares or triangles.

▼ Lemon Shrimp Risotto

Risotto can be a heavenly side dish when you're serving fish or chicken. Or make it a main course by incorporating shrimp or lobster as this recipe does. Risotto requires attention as it cooks, but since it's mostly just watching and stirring, it means you can chat and share a glass of wine with your guests while you cook.



INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons butter
1 medium white onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 1/2 cups of Arborio rice
1/2 cup white wine, plus more for the chef
5 cups chicken (or vegetable) broth
1 large lemon, juice and zest
3/4 pounds, cooked, peeled shrimp, cut to bite-sized pieces (or cooked lobster)
1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
Broccoli micro greens or chopped parsley for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

Bring broth to a gentle simmer in a saucepan.

In a large saucepan, heat butter and oil over medium heat. Add onions and cook until soft and translucent. Add minced garlic and cook for one more minute.

Add rice and stir to coat, cook for about 3 minutes.

Slowly add wine, stirring continuously until it is absorbed.

Add about a half a cup of broth and stir until it is absorbed. Continue adding broth, half a cup at a time.

Add the white wine, and stir continually over medium heat until it is absorbed.

Add 1/2 cup of hot broth, stirring as it is absorbed.

Continue adding hot broth, stirring continuously for about 15 minutes, until rice is creamy but still firm.

Add shrimp, lemon juice and half the lemon zest and cook until heated through.

Add Parmesan cheese and mix thoroughly. Remove from heat and garnish with remaining lemon zest and micro greens or parsley.



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My oh mai tai!

Written & photographed by Jessie Lacey

The mai tai cocktail gained popularity in the 50s and 60s as with the raise of tiki-themed restaurants (“maitai” is the Tahitian word for “good”), but the true origin of the mai tai is a little hazy, since two bartenders claim to be the inventor. Victor J. Bergeron claims to have made it in 1944 at his restaurant Trader Vic’s, while Ernest Beaumont-Gantt, a.k.a “Don the Beachcomber,” claims to have created it in 1933 at his bar named after himself, albeit a version more complex. While there is some overlap between the two recipes (rum, curaçao, lime juice), they taste distinctly different.

And because one of my favorite things is to take a tried-and-true, century-old cocktail and give it a modern Maine update, I’ve done just that with this spin on the mai tai. For this recipe, I use the older and complex Don the Beachcomber version as my jumping-off point. I didn’t want to rely heavily on the curaçao, as both mai tai creators make such a big deal about the importance of where the curaçao comes from and what oranges are used—and both landed on conflicting conclusions. Screw it, I found some deliciousness with Toasted Coconut Cordial, a liqueur by Mossy Ledge Spirits, a new distillery out of Etna. This gives the mai tai some added sweetness without overwhelming it. I also decided to mix in some Spider Island Rum, a dark rum put out by Sebago Lake Distillery. There were a lot to choose from when it came to Maine-made white and dark rums. To keep the mai tai complicated, I kept the Angostura bitters, like Don would have liked.

Jessie resides at the heart of downtown Portland with her border collie puppy Josie, making cocktails and trouble.



In this Maine take on the mai tai, the addition of Toasted Coconut Cordial, a liqueur by Mossy Ledge Spirits, a new distillery out of Etna, gives the mai tai some added sweetness without overwhelming it.

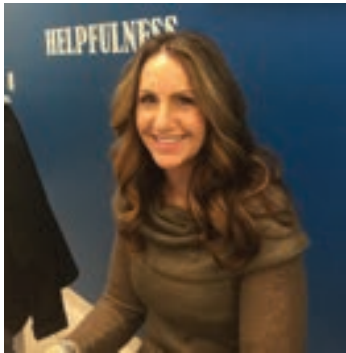


RECIPE

- 1 ounce dark rum (*I recommend Sebago Lake Distillery's Spider Island Rum*)
- 1 ounce white rum
- 1/2 ounce curaçao
- 1/2 ounce Mossy Ledge Toasted Coconut Cordial from Mossy Ledge Spirits
- 3/4 ounce lime juice
- 2 dashes Angostura bitters

Fill a rocks glass or a tiki vessel with ice. In a shaker, fill with ice, dark rum, white rum, curaçao, coconut cordial, lime juice and angostura bitters. Shake and strain into glass. Garnish with pineapple, cherries, a lime, basically any fruit you got, just put it on there because you should eat more fruit.

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I'D RATHER BE READING

There's a lot to fathom in 'The Last Cruise'

Written by Amy Canfield

The latest novel from Maine author Kate Christensen ("The Great Man," "Blue Plate Special," "How to Cook a Moose,") is a tale of adventure on the high seas, 21st-century style. Sure there's swash-buckling romance and suspense, but "The Last Cruise" also examines the complexities of hot-button political issues, such as the 1 percent vs. the rest of us and the plight of refugees. It's a "social comedy," dark and pointedly funny by turns.

The story takes place on the Queen Isabella, a once-luxurious, 1950s-vintage ocean liner making its final voyage, a two-week, two-way trip from Long Beach, California, to Hawaii, before being retired. Among those aboard for the nostalgia-themed cruise—no internet, smoking is allowed and the menu consists only of 50s-glam fare such as lobster thermidor—are: Christine, a Maine farm-girl-turned-NYC journalist-turned-Maine-farm-wife; Miriam, an older Israeli violinist; and Mick, a body, competitive Hungarian chef with career aspirations. Then there's management and the crew, between whom tensions grow increasingly heated as a perfect storm of unrest, tension, germs and nature take their toll.

"I wrote the book during the 2016 presidential election—I see the Isabella as a microcosm of America in the 21st century," Christensen says.

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HERE'S WHAT ELSE CHRISTENSEN HAS TO SAY ABOUT THIS TIMELY PAGE-TURNER:

Q How did you decide on the three main characters and what did you draw upon to create them?

A Christine, Miriam and Mick all came to me when I was mulling over the story of a cruise ship facing a crisis in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The novel was inspired by news stories I'd been reading for a few years, about engine room fires and norovirus outbreaks, people falling overboard and so forth. I formed an image of cruise ships as floating, isolated, self-contained places where catastrophes happen and get serious very quickly. Somehow a farmer, a musician and a chef struck me as the three points of view I needed to tell the story I wanted to tell, this triumverate of a New Englander, an American-born Israeli and a Hungarian. Farming, music and cooking are the elements of civilization onboard in danger of being lost.

Q Christine was "called back" to Maine by Maine, she says, to a lifestyle she earlier fled to New York City to escape. She's smart, she's self-aware, but she's still not satisfied with her life. What do you think this says about the choices women make?

A Christine is in her mid-30s and finds herself at a crossroads in her life. She went to New York in her 20s and became a journalist, realized it wasn't what she wanted to do and went home to Maine to marry a farmer, the expected thing for women in her family to do. But to her, it isn't an ideal choice, it's settling for something familiar and safe after realizing that her dream wasn't really what she wanted. I think it can be hard, sometimes, for ambitious women to accept a fallback to conformity and tradition. Christine is still young, and she doesn't have kids yet, and isn't sure she wants them, isn't sure farming is really the life for her in the long run. So it's not too late for her to leave, to find the thing she really does want. She's a 21st century educated woman, not a 19th century farm wife, so she has options and freedom, which can give rise to dissatisfaction and confusion. The cruise awakens her, reminds her of all the things she's given up. She has to choose between adventure and safety,

autonomy and stability, passion and marriage. The mid-30s can be a time of reckoning and questioning for women, and I think Christine embodies this.

Q Miriam thinks "life is but a series of hurdles," but she is resilient, feisty and optimistic enough to survive those thrown in her long path. What makes her different from Christine and Mick?

A Her age! She's old enough to have perspective. Mick and Christine are in their 30s, she's in her 70s. She has been through a lot in the intervening four decades between their ages—war, motherhood, divorce, political turmoil, personal dramas. She's done and seen enough to know that life is short, you can't have everything, so you'd better choose something and stick to what you love. And you don't have to sacrifice old loves for new ones. She's loyal and pragmatic, but she's also passionate and game for something new. While Mick and Christine dither and second-guess themselves and cogitate, Miriam dives headlong into romance with the man she's always loved.

Q Why was it important for you to examine the "Upstairs, Downstairs" tensions between the diverse crew and management?

A One of the major themes of the novel is widening global class divisions, from the so-called 1 percent on down. The novel posits a new "Fourth World," the homeless refugees fleeing to countries who don't want them and barely tolerate them—they're the wave of new workers threatening to displace the Third World workers currently employed on the *Isabella*, which kicks off the walkout during a series of crises.

Q What is one thing you want readers to take away from "The Last Cruise?"

A An understanding of the ending, or an attempt to understand it. It was the only one I envisioned for the novel through several



Author photo by Erin Little

drafts. It never changed. The book starts out as a conventional social comedy and shades into something else halfway through. This abrupt shift was an attempt to convey the urgency of what I felt and saw going on all around me as I wrote the novel. I couldn't escape it—I saw a wrecking ball coming into our comfortable American lives, and I felt a real need to write straight into that. It's not an escapist novel, and I am sorry for that, because we could all use some escape right now, but I hope it is nonetheless an interesting page-turner. I hope the ending reverberates for readers, and I hope they will attempt to understand why the book had to end this way.

Q What's a recent book you've read that you'd recommend to Maine Women Magazine readers?

A Can I cheat and recommend three? They're all by writers with ties to Maine, and they're all nonfiction disaster books of one kind or another. I loved Kathryn Miles's "Quakeland," which is about earthquakes, Peter Coviello's "Long Players," about overcoming divorce, and "Sea Change" by Peter Nichols, a memoir about sailing solo (or rather, trying to sail solo—not to give too much away) across the Atlantic Ocean. They're all riveting and beautifully written.

Amy Canfield, an editor of Maine Women Magazine, is a bibliophile who lives in South Portland, has never been on a cruise and now never will.



Trusting her gut

Kelly Taxter founded Trust Your Gut Inc. to help kids heal

**Written by Mercedes Grandin
Photographed by Molly Haley**

Kelly Taxter works to help kids and teens heal their minds and bodies. The Yarmouth native and licensed clinical social worker spent nearly a decade counseling families in their homes, but she started to feel that the work wasn't effective.

"It was hard to get the buy-in from children because of the stigma associated with needing and getting help," she says. The traditional model relied on children needing a diagnosis to receive her counseling, which Taxter says further stigmatized their ability to receive help. To Taxter, the system seemed broken.

Two and a half years ago, she chose to trust her gut and help kids—from kindergarteners to college students—in a different way.

Taxter grew up in Yarmouth and left Maine to attend Lynchburg College in Virginia and earn her B.A. and a master's in education in clinical mental health counseling. It was in Virginia where she counseled families for close to 10 years, but she found herself burning out. In 2012, she made the decision to return to Maine to be closer to her family and start a family of her own. She also pursued a certification as a personal trainer and wellness coach and began focusing on a holistic and alternative model to tackling the challenges she saw adolescents facing.

She opened Trust Your Gut Inc. in April 2016 with a goal to "help kids learn how to tap into and listen to their intuition and literally heal their gut," she says. "If you treat your body with kindness, it's amazing what it can do for you."

Taxter's approach integrates mental health counseling and mindfulness practices with nutrition, art therapy, outdoor movement and physical training. She does business out of her home in Cumberland, where the indoor/outdoor learning space includes an outdoor vegetable and wildflower garden, a nature trail and a Zen board used as part of art therapy. The water-absorbent board is painted on, and the image fades as it dries, representing impermanence and being in the moment.

At Trust Your Gut, traditional terms are rethought. The kids and young adults Taxter works with, who she calls "students," refer to her as a "mentor, coach or life guide" not as a "counselor," and the focus is on their "wellness journey" rather than on treatment.

"There's nothing wrong with them that needs to be fixed," Taxter says. "It's giving them the tools to cope with the challenges in front of them with peers, family, school." Her background of personal training

Students get active outside at Trust Your Gut Inc., which has indoor and outdoor learning space.

and coaching, helps kids see the link between their mental and physical health. "Often depression and lifestyle are connected. Pairing nutrition and physical activity helps heal, and I want to shift the focus so that we can maybe alleviate some of the symptoms."

She has worked with students from kindergarten through college, but the majority of her clients are middle-school aged. She sees more girls than boys, perhaps because girls can sometimes be harder on themselves, she says, or because of a stigma around boys working with their emotions. Either way, all are welcome at Trust Your Gut. "Generally speaking," says Taxter, "all teenagers feel overwhelmed with expectations, and struggle with friendships, body image, and family tension."

Trust Your Gut's wellness Journey is broken down into four core concepts: My Story, My Body, My Voice and My Tribe. "Everyone has a story that they repeat and hold onto, so it helps them identify what memories and experiences they are identifying with and consuming," Taxter says. The goal is for students to notice patterns they're holding on to that aren't serving them. My Body helps students treat their bodies with kindness and movement and nutrition, while My Voice focuses on helping them find and use their voice to express themselves. "My Tribe is taking what you've learned about yourself and realizing you have more power than you think. A lot of the students see themselves as stuck in certain social groups and patterns, but they have the ability to choose where they put their energy." Altogether, the four pillars help students grapple with the challenges they face during an often tumultuous time in their lives.

This past April, Taxter hired her first employee, Kate Whitescarver, a mental health counselor and personal trainer with a focus in nutrition. Together they plan to shift Trust Your Gut's focus to add more support groups for teens. They're launching a "Movement-based Mindset Group" at Royal River Park in Yarmouth that will meet after school on Wednesdays through the summer. The class includes outdoor yoga, movement and mindfulness practices, as well as group activities for students. Taxter explains this group support connects with the concept of The Tribe, by providing teenagers with a positive support network. "Every kid I see comes in with the same struggle: low self worth, self judgement and assumptions around others judging them. They're getting stuck in an anxiety and depression mindset and they feel alone. The goal is to bring them into this group mindset and build a tribe so that they don't feel alone, and grow a support network to bounce ideas off each other and get through the challenging pre-teen experience. Knowing you're not alone can be comforting and beneficial."

The work she's doing is both tangible and rewarding, Taxter says. One teenager Taxter worked with was able to realize a negative pattern she had with boys and relationships that often became physically abusive. Another teenager, who struggled with severe anxiety and depression and left school to be homeschooled, was able to return to school and be successful. Taxter also frequently sees teenage girls struggling with body image, and her approach is to reframe their mentality around "being strong and healthy" and integrate a holistic approach to wellness and nutrition.

Taxter attributes Trust Your Gut's growth and success to Facebook, which is ironic considering she is not an avid social media user. "I usually like to fly under the radar, I don't like having the spotlight on me," she says. One of her greatest challenges has been "putting herself out there" on social media. "I have had to become comfortable with making videos and letting my personality show in order for the business to grow," she says. "I do the same things I ask of the kids: to work through something that is uncomfortable. Usually some really solid breathing/centering, a few 'energy bursts' (I do a lap around the house if I start to get frustrated) and acknowledging that I did my best," she says.

Taxter's work is gaining traction, as the majority of students she started working with when she began Trust Your Gut have continued working with her. "It means I have their buy-in and they see something positive. I ask kids at the end of each session 'What kind of energy are you taking with you from our time together?' Sometimes they have an abstract answer and sometimes it's concrete. First they have to acknowledge and then take action to make a change. They go from thinking 'I can't' to 'If I try in this way, I can.'"

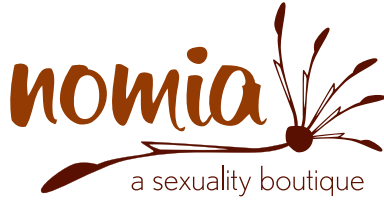
Mercedes Grandin is a freelance writer, editor, English teacher and tutor. She lives in Brunswick with her husband Erik and their chocolate Labrador Fozzie.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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Kelly Taxter, founder of Trust Your Gut Inc., works to help kids heal their minds and bodies at her home-based business in Cumberland.

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Setting my son loose in Shady Oaks

Written by Maggie Knowles

1986: Open on a formal dining room, set for Thanksgiving. Several well-dressed elderly couples conduct polite, quiet conversation. Also the table sits young family; neighbors who were invited to join the feast.

In the stage whisper of a fascinated yet horrified 10-year-old: "Mom, why do all of the old people here have loose, floppy necks like turkeys?"

Zoom in on Very Embarrassed Mother. Through clenched teeth: "I thought I had raised a nice, polite girl who knows better than to ask such rude things."

And...scene.

The shame and horror of that memory (me, the Stage Whisperer) stabbed my brain as my 10-year-old son and I prepared to enter the assisted care facility where my mother-in-law had just moved.

"Nana's new house is pretty different from her old one," I stuttered to my son. "There will be, um, roommates who can't really, um, take care of themselves. So, just, you know..."

My grandparents were gone by the time I was 10; my son has three. Up until this month, his Nana was driving and living alone and "normal." Now, well...

I flushed under my nervous memory of being my son's age and not quite sure how to behave around old people. I'm certainly not sure how to prepare my son for seeing his Nana in this new situation.

I wanted to say, "Just don't stare and avoid topics having to do with necks." But I couldn't.

As we were buzzed in, I could only hope that maybe it was naptime.

It isn't that I am afraid of aging, per se.



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But I do have a phobia that my presence in some way points out that, “in case you weren’t aware, you are 86 and need to drink your cheeseburger.” The fact that most of the residents need help to do everything, the loss of freedom to even pee alone, just seems tragic. I don’t want to see myself that way. I don’t want my son to see me that way.

I had a boyfriend who would wax lyrical on the indignity of aging, in the way that only a 25-year-old can. That phrase always stuck to me, “the indignity of aging.” Like this natural process, to which there is no vaccination, was a shameful punishment. Despite success, money and technology, aging is the ultimate equalizer.

Of course, that concept is as lackluster to a child as frosting-free cupcakes.

Part of parenting is not allowing our paralyzing social shortcomings to affect our kids.

Part of parenting is not allowing our paralyzing social shortcomings to affect our kids.

.....

So, I set my son loose in Shady Oaks.

I watched as he gently pushed Nana’s wheelchair through the halls. I echoed him as his normally shy voice clearly said “Hi” to passersby, who glowed to have a child in their midst. I burst with love when a trembling man took my son’s hand between his own paper-thin versions and said, “It is sure nice to meet a fine gentleman like yourself.”

During these hours, there was no age. There was joy and connection. There wasn’t loneliness, fear or cheeseburger smoothies. There were smiles, excitement and fondness. And there was a lesson: My child showed me that while youth may be fleeting, its lasting power is in making surprising and sweet moments last forever.

Maggie Knowles writes about all things kid. She and her family live in Yarmouth, where she gardens, keeps bees and refuses to get rid of her stilettos.



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Women in Harmony member Andrea Wenger sings during a rehearsal. Women in Harmony is a social justice chorus that rehearses in Portland and performs songs about justice, equality and community around southern Maine.

Women in Harmony chorus taps into the power of music

Written by Amy Paradysz | Photographed by Dylan Verner

“There’s something about doing music that touches your soul,” says the Rev. Jill Saxby of Cape Elizabeth.

She’s one of 60 members of Women in Harmony, a social justice chorus that taps into the power of music to inspire societal change.

“Singing with this group feeds into a lot of work I’ve done with political advocacy and social justice work with the faith community,” says Saxby, a second soprano. “After a long day of talk, talk, talk, I come to rehearsal and just sing about it—justice, equality, community—and fill back up. We all need a little cup of water once in a while.”

Led by director Catherine Beller-McKenna and accompanist Deana Gurney, Women in Harmony rehearses one night a week in Portland

for just over two hours and performs several times a year in southern Maine.

“There’s a uniqueness about what we do with our dual focus on musical excellence and singing for social justice,” says Beller-McKenna, who has led the group for 19 of its 25 years. “The philosophy is two-sided: to build a community within the chorus that is diverse and empowering by giving them a voice, and our work in the community.”

During an annual retreat in September, the singers dig deep into learning the next season’s music—ranging from classical to folk and ethnic to pop and blues—and getting to know each other better. Over the past season—which had the theme “Songs of Resistance”—the



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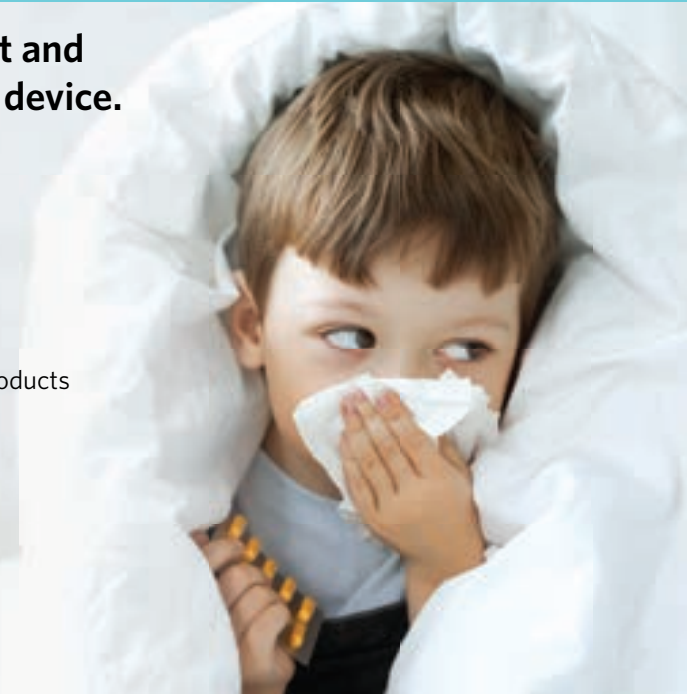
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The Women in Harmony chorus rehearses at the Allen Avenue UU Church in Portland. The chorus was started 25 years ago.



waiting list to join grew to 25 women. Performing pieces like “No More Silence,” “Against All Odds” and “Common Woman,” the chorus has a loyal following of liberal music lovers.

“What we’re seeing is that music can change the world,” Saxby says. “I get the feeling that many people in our audiences are people who feel refreshed and inspired by our music. They tend to be people who are out there working for a better world. Women in Harmony is a purposefully welcoming community. It’s gay, straight, older, younger, partnered, not partnered, professional musicians and people who don’t even read music. It’s part of the ethos of the group that all are welcome here.”

Anne Perron of Poland had a deep fear of singing in public and didn’t even realize she had talent when she came in for a voice check on a dare 11 years ago. Now she’s even in the Outreach Ensemble, a subgroup that performs at special events. Soprano Angela Foss joined a year after Perron, and eventually their friendship blossomed into something more. The whole chorus came to their wedding, singing “One Voice” by The Wailin’ Jennys.

“A lot of the women in the chorus have said that the sense of community is as important to them as the singing,” says Sue Butler, a first alto from Windham who has been a member for 21 years. “But, at the same time, we have grown so much musically over the years. We

started with two-part simple songs and now we do poly-rhythms, foreign languages and multiple key changes. Some of it is really complex music.”

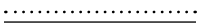
Earlier this summer, 36 members of Women in Harmony went to the Sister Singers Festival in Grand Rapids, Michigan. At the five-day gathering of feminist women’s choruses, Women in Harmony performed songs of resistance and joined in a mass chorus 300 women strong.

“Singing fills me with joy, particularly singing with other women who have a similar stance,” says Lisa Derman, a second soprano from Cape Elizabeth. “Some of my favorite moments are the time in our concerts when we invite the audience to sing along. There’s something about a community singing together that unites people. When we sang ‘We Shall Overcome’ at

our last concert, you could feel it in the audience.”

“Singing with a group of women is so, so empowering and energizing,” says Kate York, a board member and first soprano from Falmouth. “Everyone should take care of themselves and do what makes them happy, and music does that for me.”

“After a long day of talk, talk, talk, I come to rehearsal and just sing about it—justice, equality, community—and fill back up. We all need a little cup of water once in a while.”



Amy Paradysz is a freelance writer from Scarborough whose enthusiasm for singing exceeds her aptitude.

Wordsmiths and photographers, send us your goods! MWM is soliciting local poets and picture-takers for inclusion in Verse and View, our reader-submitted, word-and-image series. Send your entries to: verse_view@mainewomenmagazine.com.



Photo by Kevyn Fowler

V.

Written by Molana Oei, Lubec/Portland

That day
as if it were yesterday
 stands still in my mind
and calmly puts up with
retrospection.
I remember it was a tilting
 Wild fury
That came off the Atlantic. First
were the wendigo winds of the
north
carrying with them
Arctic whispers,
harpoons and blubber lamps.

The docks were dashed in the
backwash
Of a thousand sea creatures

And crabs,
their insides failed from too long
out of water
Curled tight like fists
in the netted traps on the pier
their eyes black beads of curious horror.

We lean ourselves
into the gale
 on tiptoe
Gravity's hold easing off until
only the fingers of our feet
Touch the fraying boards.

Then it subsides.
We stumble forward,
The laughter, like a too-small catch,
torn from our mouths and thrown back
into the froth.

A scarf is lost, but there is no point
in trying to track it.
We retreat
to thermoses of hot tea
and peanut butter Saltines.



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