

AUGUST 2019

MWM

MAINE WOMEN MAGAZINE

the creative issue




Olive Kitteridge Returns

*“She honestly just showed up,”
says author*

Elizabeth Strout

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Foundation's hub of
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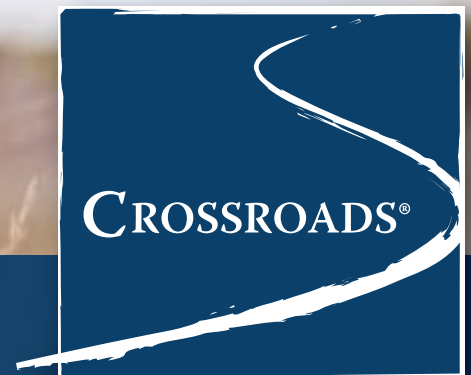
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For the last month I've been bathed in the creativity of others while we worked on this issue of Maine Women Magazine. Our Creative issue includes writers, dancers, artists, a curator, a comedian and philanthropists intent on trying to reboot a rural Maine town's economy through an infusion of artistic energy. Even our Home columnist, Sarah Holman, got into the theme, looking at ways to find, claim and maximize designated space for creative expression in one's home. It's important to allocate space for creativity, she says.

That got me thinking about how and where we find creativity. I'm writing this from my dining room table, which has far more in the way of papers and folders on it than it does plates or cutlery. If I'm not at MWM's office in South Portland, where I have colleagues and a nifty standing desk, this table is command central for the magazine, even though I have a perfectly good home office about five steps away. I also have a little desk upstairs in the hallway where I work on fiction. The couch is for knit-

ting. Yet the dining room seems to be where my magazine creativity happens. It's allocated.

But you never know where the creative impulse is going to find you. Writer Elizabeth Strout was checking her email in a cafe in Oslo, Norway, when Olive Kitteridge, the Maine woman at the heart of Strout's Pulitzer Prize winning 2008 novel of the same name, appeared to her. She was driving into the marina in fictional Crosby, Maine, and she had begun using a cane. And so Strout started typing what would turn out to be the sequel to *Olive Kitteridge*. I was lucky enough to sit down with Strout to talk about that upcoming sequel, *Olive, Again* and her striking run of productivity (possible causes: rediscovering the piano, happiness, genius, hard work).

This issue is packed with stories of finding and exploring creativity. You'll read about how working in Congress pushed Victoria Bonney to explore her comic side in standup and how the rural, financially drained town of Monson is being remade into a center for creative expression. The Center for Maine Contemporary Art's director and chief curator Suzette McAvoy tells us about the importance of taking risks in art. This month's A Room of Her Own offers a glimpse into the studio space artist Stephanie Pilk carved out for herself in an assisted living facility in Yarmouth. She's 95 and she's not done painting.

Finally, Momsense is taking a break this month (she'll be back) while we debut our advice column, Dear Evangeline. She tackles the topic of when to let go (and when to hold onto) of complicated friendships. Please consider her as you would a friend, someone to lean on; she gives great (and creative) advice. Find her at evangeline@mainewomenmagazine.com.

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ON THE COVER

Pulitzer Prize winning author Elizabeth Strout on the banks of the Androscoggin River in Brunswick, with the old Cabot Mill just visible in the background.

Photo by Heidi Kirn

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MARVIN

A POWERFUL POTENTIAL

When American businesswomen descended on Portland nearly a century ago

Have you seen the Power of Potential photography show at the Maine Historical Society yet? If you haven't, you've got until Aug. 25 to get over there for this fascinating glimpse at the working woman of nearly a century ago. The National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs held their seventh annual convention in Portland from July 12–18, 1925, just six years after the group was founded (and just as the women's suffrage movement was finally about to secure women the vote). Maine was a leader in New England for memberships in the professional clubs and the event was hosted by the Portland Business and Professional Women's Club.

Women, 2,000 of them, came from all over for the six-day event and the *Portland Evening Express* reported on it extensively. The newspaper covered them getting off the train, enjoying a clambake on Peaks Island and participating in meetings. Maine historian Candace Kanes has studied the 110 glass negatives from the collection and written about them for the Maine Memory Network. Among her observations? These ladies might have worn silly hats and costumes representing the states they'd come from, but they also got serious about issues like child labor. And liberation; they had a magazine, called *The Independent Woman*.

Kanes found that the women who joined the local club in Portland and clubs elsewhere often owned small businesses. They worked in real



Convention goes from all over the country at a clambake on Peaks Island, July 1925. Photo courtesy of the Maine Historical Society

estate, advertising and journalism. They were doctors, nurses, teachers, stenographers and milliners. These weren't just young ladies working to fill the time until they got married. Kanes writes that about 80 percent of club members stayed single. The average age of club members was 40.

"What they had in common was a sense of their jobs as careers and an interest in moving up the occupational ladder to more responsibility and more remuneration," Kanes concludes. The exhibit is up at the Earle G. Shettleworth Jr. Lecture Hall until Aug. 25. (\$2–8, free to Maine Historical Society members; 489 Congress St., Portland; mainehistory.org)

SUMMER NIGHTS & DOG DAYS

»»» Merry Wives

Aug. 1, 9–10, 17–18

Cumston Hall, 796 Main St., Monmouth

The Theater at Monmouth, celebrating its 50th year, is performing *The Merry Wives of Windsor* this month, giving you multiple chances to see Shakespeare's domestic comedy, featuring jealous husbands, confused lovers and the triumph of feminine wisdom. Bonus: directed by a woman, Catherine Weidner. (\$20–34; 207-933-9999; theateratmonmouth.org)

»»» Witty Writers

Aug. 2, 7 p.m.

Mechanics Hall Library, 519 Congress St., Portland

Come hear three Maine women—Patsy Baldus, Kathy Eliscu and Lew-Elynn Hughes talk about writing (and publishing) with wit. A First Friday collaboration with Print Bookstore, Maine Authors Publishing and the Maine

Charitable Mechanic Association.

»»» Float Your Lantern

Aug. 4, 4–9 p.m.

Summer nights, summer lights. The Water Lantern Festival returns to Deering Oaks Park. Buy a lantern, decorate it with your hopes and dreams and send it out on the water while enjoying music and refreshments from a fleet of food trucks. (\$30–40; waterlanternfestival.com)

»»» Can You Can?

Aug. 15, 5:30–8 p.m.

244 Log Cabin Road, Arundel

It's tomato season. Are you ready to preserve yours? The University of Maine's Cooperative Extension will teach you how to can and freeze them. Visit a working farm, Frinklepod Farm, to learn from a Master Preserver and go home with your own jar of tomatoes. (\$30; register in advance at frinklepodfarm.com; 207-289-5805)

»»» Biker Babes

Aug. 21

Departing 38 Diamond St. at 5:45 p.m.

Here's a fun option for any woman feeling both



An earlier training ride for women. Photo courtesy of Eliza Cress, Bicycle Coalition of Maine

curious and nervous about road riding; the Bicycle Coalition of Maine is offering a ride designed to get you comfortable. Led by the coalition's Eliza Cress, this Wednesday night event will take you on an 18-mile round trip (duration: about two hours) from downtown Portland to Two Lights State Park and back. (Free)

»»» Smart Dog Tricks

Aug. 24–25, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Woman's best friend is featured at L.L.Bean this weekend during the two-day long Dog Days of August festival, which supports shelter pets and programs. If you've got a dog that loves water, consider bringing him or her along; the Dock-Dogs will be performing and they are some seriously good athletes (and dogs). (Free; lbean.com/summer)



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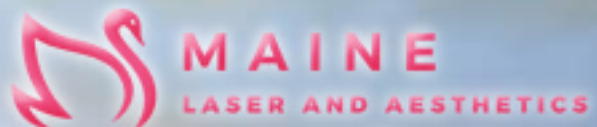
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AT 95, ARTIST JEAN PILK HASN'T QUIT

She works in an improvised, paint-flecked studio in her assisted living community in Yarmouth.

BY ANGIE BRYAN // PHOTOS BY HEIDI KIRN



When nationally known portrait artist Jean Pilk—who turned 95 in July—moved into an assisted living community in Yarmouth last year, she thought her painting days were behind her. After she had been there for a few months, though, the management offered her a little sitting room to use as her studio, and soon she was back to painting the days away.

In the studio, only a few steps down the hall from Pilk's apartment, a large easel holds an in-progress painting of Pilk's granddaughter, other portraits lean up against the walls and furniture, and two taborets (art supply organizers) hold a large inventory of brushes and paints. Few surfaces have escaped being flecked with paint.

Residents and staff frequently drop by. "The women who work here are my biggest fans," said Pilk. "They come in when I'm not here to see how it's going."

1 “I think this is my clean one,” joked Pilk, who then reminisces about the time she moved out of an earlier home and in the process discovered paint splashes on every possible surface—including the dog.

2 Pilk’s favorite portrait in her apartment is of her daughter Candace in her prom dress. It was a dressing gown they embellished with embroidery tape. Her daughter, who was taking mandolin lessons at the time, posed in the dress with her instrument. The mandolin, however, did not get to go to the prom.

3 The cigarette in this painting of Pilk’s daughter Candace at their former home in D.C. wasn’t just a prop—both mother and daughter smoked then. “It wasn’t a real Jean Pilk portrait if there weren’t ashes in the paint,” her daughter says, laughing.

4 Pilk has a special fondness for the paintings of Van Dyck, Van Gogh, Singer Sargent and Andrew Wyeth. Not a fan of most modern art, she doesn’t have any female painters she particularly likes. When it comes to lack of notoriety for female painters, “I’m part of the problem,” she admits.

5 Pilk paints exclusively in oil, favoring Winsor & Newton permanent pigment paints. “I just find oils more satisfying.” Her most frequently used colors are in the crimson/cadmium/sienna family, but she occasionally does more monochromatic paintings, usually only for her family.



Although the studio has a chair (“in case I faint,” says Pilk), she always stands when painting. Her daughter, Candace Karu, jokes that she has long wanted to put a pedometer on her constantly moving mother.

Back in Pilk’s apartment, the walls are covered with portraits of her family. Paintings “aren’t allowed in if they’re not mine,” she says, laughing. A former military wife and mother to five, Pilk painted since she was a young girl, but got her more public start in the late 1960s when commissioned to do the official portrait of an admiral. By the time she left Washington, D.C., in 1999, she had painted the official portraits of Gen. Colin Powell, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, Maine Congressman and Gov. John Baldacci and others. There’s an entire wing in the Pentagon devoted to her portraits of past Joint Chiefs of Staff. *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* have written about her

work, but Pilk is humble, saying “there were hundreds of women who could have taken my place.” At the time, says Pilk, most female portrait artists simply weren’t considered as an option. “They weren’t valued.”

Pilk, who moved to Maine in 2004 to be closer to family (another daughter, Stephanie, lives in Yarmouth and a son, Jack, lives in Cape Elizabeth), admits that painting doesn’t come as easily to her as it used to. “I thought I had quit,” she says. “Some days I’d just as soon get beaten up than paint.”

Nevertheless, she persists.

Angie Bryan moved to Portland in 2018 when she retired from the diplomatic service. Her writing has also appeared in *The Foreign Service Journal* and she contributes regularly to *MaineToday.com*.

RED BEANS & RICE

WHERE YOU BEAN ALL MY LIFE?

Especially with a surprising secret ingredient, this classic Creole dish ticks all the boxes: inexpensive, adaptable for vegetarians and ideal for leftovers.

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY CANDACE KARU

come today singing the praises of beans, those tiny, protein-packed miracles. Legumes of all varieties have my undying love. I'm enchanted by tiny white cannellini beans in a hearty soup or pureed into garlicky dip. I can't get enough of rich New England baked beans, redolent with the flavors of molasses and maple syrup. I make a steaming pot of black-eyed peas for luck on New Year's Day and black beans with yellow rice when I'm missing my days in Miami. And nothing warms me from the inside out quite like a velvety bowl of split pea soup on a snowy winter day.

The latest addition to my bean scene was born, like so many unique culinary discoveries, in the magical city of New Orleans. My first trip to NOLA led to an epiphany about Red Beans and Rice, which found its way into my heart and my regular kitchen rotation.

This delicious dish ticks all my culinary boxes. It's easy to prepare, inexpensive and easily adaptable for vegetarians. It can be made days in advance and for smaller households, one preparation can yield several meals. It's perfect for potlucks and parties, and like most great leftovers, this dish tastes even better the next day.

I don't know how authentic my recipe is. I've adapted it from a number of different sources, but there is one recent addition to the ingredient list that is transformative. All credit for this one goes to Katie Macdonald who writes for Food52. Katie calls her mother's Red Beans and Rice mysterious ingredient "a secret that everybody knows."

Katie's mom adds one cup of pickle juice to her red beans. "It's not the same if you don't use it. It makes the entire dish," she says. I'm going to agree with her. The classic Creole recipe is next-level luscious when pick-



le juice is added. It balances the smoke and salt from the ham hock and diced ham. I use the brine from Mt. Olive Bread & Butter Chips, my go-to, straight-out-of-the-jar snack, which is always sitting front and center in my fridge. Now I save the juice, every drop destined for the bean pot.

My Grammy used to tell me "there's a lid for every pot" when I bemoaned my single status. And although I've yet to meet my Prince Charming—or even Prince Not So Bad—I do delight in finding perfect food pairings. Witness the magic that happens when you serve a warm slice of cornbread with Red Beans and Rice. It's a heavenly match.

I may get grief from purists for my cornbread "recipe," considering the foundation is old school Jiffy Cornbread mix, but some of the best Southern cooks and chefs I know swear by this time-saving wonder. It's been around since 1930 and is still going strong. I doctor it up a little by adding Greek yogurt for tang, jalapeño rings for a bit of heat and color, and Cheddar cheese because I can.



RED BEANS AND RICE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound dry red kidney beans
- Water to cover
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 3 stalks celery, diced
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 5 (at least) cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup pickle juice, dill or sweet is fine
- 5 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 smoked ham hock
- 1 pound smoked ham, cut into small cubes
- 5 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon of your favorite hot sauce (*I like Cholula*)
- 1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning or Greek seasoning (*I use Cavender's which I get online*)
- 1 teaspoon Yep! seasoning (*another online purchase*)
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley or cilantro
- 1 pound smoked sausage
- Hot cooked rice (*any will do, but I like brown*)

INSTRUCTIONS

Add beans to a large pot or bowl and cover by 2 inches with water. Place uncovered bowl on a counter overnight. The next morning, discard soaking water. Thoroughly rinse beans, drain well and place in a slow cooker.

Add remaining ingredients—except parsley, smoked sausage and rice—to slow cooker and give everything a stir. Cover and cook on LOW for 4 hours, checking occasionally and stirring beans, making sure none stick to the bottom.

After 4 hours, add the smoked sausage and continue on LOW another 2–3 hours until beans are soft and creamy.

Serve beans over rice with a generous slab of cornbread.

PRO TIPS

- The spices and seasonings in Southern cuisine, especially down-home Southern food, are key. Cavender's All Purpose Greek Seasoning has been made in the Ozarks town of Harrison, Arkansas, since 1963. You can order it online.
- I also highly recommend Yep! Seasoning made by the Blue Moon Specialty Foods in Spartanburg, South Carolina. I first tried Yep! when a shaker of it came in a gift basket from friends visiting from the South. I've been addicted ever since. Yep! is a peppery seasoning that I use as a dry rub for chicken and fish, seasoning for veggies and so much more. Yep! is available online.
- Red Beans and Rice benefits from the addition of leftover chicken or beef. I've chopped up leftover hamburgers cooked on the grill and added them to the pot for dinner the next night. Rotisserie chicken is also a tasty addition. If you want to lighten your carb load, you can have red beans and spinach, red beans and zucchini, or red beans and cauliflower.



CHEDDAR JALAPEÑO CORNBREAD

INGREDIENTS

- 1 box Jiffy cornbread mix
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1/4 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 egg
- 1 cup Cheddar cheese, grated
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Pickled jalapeño rings (*I like Trader Joe's Sweet & Hot Jalapeño Rings*)

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease 10-inch cast iron skillet.

Mix all ingredients except jalapeños in a bowl until combined. Batter will be lumpy.

Spread batter in skillet and dot with Jalapeño rings.

Cook in the oven until golden brown and sides of cornbread are pulling away from the skillet, about 15–20 minutes.



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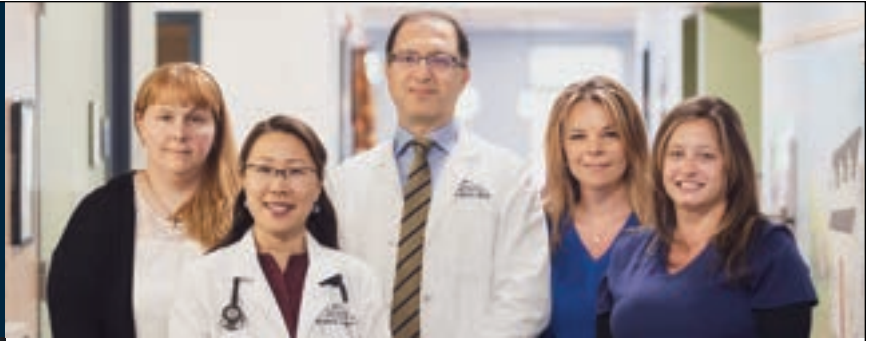


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Curating Community

For Suzette McAvoy, running the Center for Maine Contemporary Art is about risks, relationships and the rewards of building a community.



BY STACEY KORS // PHOTOS BY HEIDI KIRN

Suzette McAvoy in front of *Digital Man*, the Jonathan Borofsky sculpture that the Ogunquit-based artist built for the 2016 opening of the Center for Maine Contemporary art



As the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockland prepared for its grand opening in 2016, Ogunquit-based sculptor Jonathan Borofsky was there day and night building *Digital Man*, a 24-foot tower of colorful, cookie-cutter people. Borofsky's solo show was the main event and he'd be leaving *Digital Man* behind as a permanent fixture in the courtyard. That is, once he finished it. "He kept expanding it," says Suzette McAvoy, CMCA's director and chief curator. "We didn't know what we were going to get, but fortunately that's the kind of thing we can do.

"Risk is a big part of contemporary art," she adds. "And as an institution, we have to be willing to take risks, too."

The fruits of that risk-taking are evident all around McAvoy. Under her leadership, CMCA has transformed from a small institution on the brink of financial ruin into a destination that draws 40,000 visitors annually and has helped transform Rockland, once a gritty, working class city to be passed through quickly, into what many are calling the new art capital of Maine.

A construction crew is working outside CMCA to make the once-industrial street more pedestrian friendly, using pavers that match CMCA's. "We were pioneers down here," explains McAvoy, surveying the project from her office. "Now the city is bringing the streetscape to us."

Designed by architect Toshiko Mori, CMCA's sleekly modern building features an all-glass, street-level façade that allows passersby not only a glimpse of the art on exhibit, but also of the staff in their offices. "I love that I can see visitors come in," says McAvoy. "And they can see us, and see that there's people behind the scenes making this work happen. That brings a warmth to it."

Like the building she runs, McAvoy is polished and accessible. A chic dresser with a sophisticated urban style (designer Isaac Mizrahi's memoir was a recent read), McAvoy, 60, projects a no-nonsense attitude, but one-on-one, is extremely affable. Her office shelves are as carefully curated as CMCA's walls: horizontally stacked art books are displayed with works from artists who have shown there—including Alex Katz and John Walker—along with pieces by her daughter, Elizabeth, who studied at the Rhode Island School of Design. To McAvoy, these works are not a "collection" so much as keepsakes representing years of

curation and, more important, the personal relationships that drive her passion for contemporary art.

McAvoy is from Oneonta, a college town in central New York. One of the benefits of living in a college town was Saturday Seminars, a program where high school students could take classes at the state university. "I took a studio printing class and a history of English art and architecture," she says. "We actually traveled to England for a week as part of that course. Both classes really got me interested in

"Risk is a big part of contemporary art," says Suzette McAvoy, the director and chief curator of the Center for Maine Contemporary Art. "And as an institution, we have to be willing to take risks, too."

art and art history."

When McAvoy entered Hobart and William Smith College, however, she took a more practical route. "I was pre-law. I didn't think that you could do anything related to art as a profession." Then she took an introduction to art history class to fulfill curriculum requirements, fell in love and switched her major.

Contemporary art didn't interest McAvoy until senior year, when she curated her first show, of sculptor Genevieve Karr Hamlin's work, as her senior project. She got to know Karr, selected the work, arranged for shipping, insurance and the installation. "I loved it all. I realized that this is what I wanted to do: work with objects as well as with people."

Her first job, at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, was strictly objects, doing condition reports, photographing and cataloging—"Peggy Fleming's ice skates, Muhammad Ali's robe, a Stradivarius cello." Working for a

massive museum taught McAvoy a lot—including that it wasn't for her. "Before I left for graduate school, the Smithsonian's registrar, Virginia Beets, said to me, 'There's just as much need for family practitioners as there is for heart surgeons. Not everyone needs to be a specialist.' That stuck with me."

McAvoy attended the Cooperstown Graduate Program for museum studies, then worked at Cornell University's Johnson Museum as a curatorial assistant. While there she married Brendan McAvoy, and when he decided to pursue graduate studies in marine affairs at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, she landed a job as the director of the URI gallery. "It worked out nicely," she says, adding with a smile, "and one of us had a salary."

When she was offered a job as chief curator at the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland, that worked for her Merchant Marine husband as well. "Brendan said, 'Oh, coast of Maine? I think I can get a job.'" He found work at the Maritime Academy in Castine and they moved to Belfast in the spring of 1989 and have lived there since. McAvoy worked at the Farnsworth until August 1995. But then, with a 9-month-old daughter, Elizabeth, no available child care, and her husband shipping commercially, sometimes for three months at a time, she decided to step back. "I did some consulting," she says, "and worked with a little gallery in Belfast, just to keep my hand in things until Elizabeth was in school."

When the Farnsworth acquired the J.J. Newberry's building to create the Morehouse Wing for Contemporary Art, McAvoy was hired back as adjunct curator. "I only wanted to work part time," she says, "but they wanted somebody who was going to focus on building the contemporary collection and program. So I got pulled back in." She returned to the role of chief curator in 2003, and became the museum's interim director in 2006.

Three years later, McAvoy was diagnosed with breast cancer. "I took it as a sign," she says. "I'd been at the Farnsworth for quite a long time, and I thought, You should take a break."

But McAvoy is not one to remain idle. Once her cancer treatment was completed she took another job, as director of Waterfall Arts in Belfast. She committed to a year: "Just to get them started. It was basically in my backyard." She worked as an independent curator and consultant. She wrote an art column. Then in 2010, CMCA came calling, with two board



McAvoy's office shelves are as carefully curated as CMCA's gallery walls, stacked with art books and keepsakes, including works from artists who have shown there, like Alex Katz, and pieces by her daughter, Elizabeth, who studied at the Rhode Island School of Design.



"Risk is a big part of contemporary art," says Suzette McAvoy, the director and chief curator of the Center for Maine Contemporary Art. "The idea for this institution was to create something that was going to attract young people."

members asking McAvoy to help rebuild trust in the struggling institution. "They were in Rockport then," she recalls, "and were facing financial trouble. They had tried to be year-round instead of seasonal, but the cost to run that building, which was built in the 19th century as a livery stable and had no foot traffic, drained what resources they had. There was a question of whether it was going to make it."

She'd used CMCA as a resource while she was at the Farnsworth, as a place to introduce her to new artists. "It's the only statewide organization serving the artists of Maine, and had been doing that since 1952. To see it not

survive this rough patch...it just seemed worth a try."

McAvoy started as director in the fall of 2010 with the Quimby Family Foundation providing an operating support grant to cover her salary for the first year. With McAvoy at the helm, a few of CMCA's former board members returned and provided support; the board and membership grew slowly but steadily. In 2012, CMCA's 60th-anniversary year, McAvoy presented a strategic plan to the board.

"I said that if we were going to survive we'd have to move," she says. They had four parking spaces, were in a residential neighborhood

and couldn't expand. Nor could they show a lot of large scale contemporary work, like that of John Bisbee and Kathy Bradford. New media was especially problematic. "There were hardly any electrical outlets. We had a little projection in one of our biennials, and had to show it in a closet."

With a capital campaign in full swing, McAvoy and the board explored several Midcoast communities for CMCA's new site. When a building in Rockland being used as art spaces became available, says McAvoy, "We thought it was ideal because it's so close to the Farnsworth, and there's city parking across the street. All we had to do is renovate and expand." Those plans ground to a halt when it was discovered that the building, once a fireproof garage, was full of asbestos. "We decided to tear it down. But that gave us the opportunity to get a purpose-built building. Of course, that added something like a million dollars to our capital campaign."

McAvoy immediately thought of Toshiko Mori, who had designed the Farnsworth's first expansion in 1995 and had since become internationally known. "But she was willing to do it, and at a much reduced fee. She loved the idea of giving back to Rockland."

When Mori and her team presented their plan for the U-shaped building, she explained that the center courtyard could be used as both a performance and gathering space, and the glass facade would allow the public to see in. "She said it's where museums are going, this idea of transparency, of including the community. It's like an embrace to the community."

Not everyone hugged back. "A vocal group wanted it to be red brick to match Main Street. We argued that we're about contemporary art and of the moment, and the building should reflect our mission."

For McAvoy, a modern building had another benefit. "The idea for this institution was to create something that was going to attract young people," she says. "People said, 'Rockland was always a working-class community, and we need to bring back that working waterfront.' But my argument was that we have to create a community that young people want to live and work in, and the only way to do that is to make it so they don't feel like they're missing out by living here." Now there are more than a dozen art galleries in Rockland, First Fridays "are huge" and McAvoy oversees both a staff and membership list that trends young.

"I credit Suzette with no less than changing the cultural landscape of Rockland," says Donna McNeil, executive director of the Ellis-Beauregard Foundation, which has partnered with CMCA for its new Fellowship in the Visual Arts.

McAvoy sees CMCA as representing a new chapter in the ongoing story of Maine's role in American art. "We're not a collecting institution, like a traditional museum," she says. "So we can respond to things more quickly and program shows about current issues. We work directly with the artists, so the work tends to come right out of the studio and is very, very new." That can be risky, but McAvoy says she's learned to trust her instincts, and her artists. "They've never let me down."

That trust was on display this summer with *Hubris Atë Nemesis*, an installation by Ellis-Beauregard Fellows and artistic collaborators Wade Kavanaugh and Stephen B. Nguyen. It transformed a room at CMCA into a curvaceous and sweeping plywood landscape symbolising Maine's rugged and dynamic coast. "All of our works are site-specific," says Kavanaugh, "but this was the first time we've ever used just plywood, so the pristine CMCA gallery space became our studio. It takes a lot of courage for a museum director to trust artists and to give them the space they need to work through challenges."

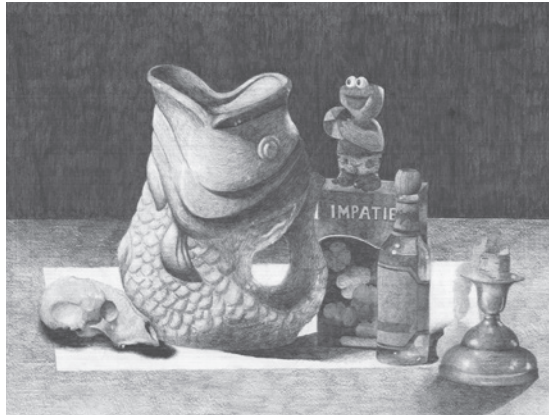
Last fall, the goals of her first strategic plan met, McAvoy completed her second, which includes creating an endowment and expanding outreach. "We need to make the general public across the state, and then beyond, know who we are."

It's easy to imagine McAvoy being courted by a larger institution with a more national presence. But she would still prefer being a family practitioner to being a heart surgeon.

"I'd always rather be in a small institution like this, where I get to work with a small, dedicated team, and everybody does a little bit of everything," she says. "We're not only creating this institution. We're creating this community."

Stacey Kors is the former editor of *Take Magazine* and has written extensively about the arts, including for the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *The Boston Globe* and *TimeOut New York*. She lives with her husband and dog in the oldest house on Peaks Island.

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STROUT, AGAIN

ELIZABETH STROUT ON HOW OLIVE KITTERIDGE RETURNED UNBIDDEN, OLDER AND WISER BUT STILL WITH THAT “POP” THAT MAKES HER SO UNIQUE.

BY MARY POLS // PHOTOS BY HEIDI KIRN



For years, Olive Kitteridge stayed quiet, tucked away in a folder her creator, writer Elizabeth Strout, had labeled “Olive Scraps.” After winning the Pulitzer Prize for her third book, 2008’s *Olive Kitteridge*, a novel built on interconnected stories, Strout was busy with other characters, ones outside of Olive’s immediate world in Crosby, Maine. There were other Mainers, like the Burgess siblings Jim, Bob and Susan, the main characters in 2013’s *The Burgess Boys*. There was Lucy Barton, a Midwesterner who had moved to New York and become a writer, and who narrated her own story in 2016’s *My Name is Lucy Barton*.

Then one day, when Strout was traveling solo in Norway, Olive appeared to her while she was checking her email in a cafe around the corner from her Oslo hotel. The often cranky retired school-teacher from the fictional town of Crosby, Maine, who had uncanny insights and was capable of both deep kindness and petty judgments, was suddenly there.

“She honestly just showed up,” Strout says. “I could see her in her car, nosing it into the marina.” Olive had aged; she appeared to now be in her early 80s. “She was poking along with her cane. I just saw her so clearly that I thought, ‘OK, I guess I will have to write this down.’”

Strout had a weekend to kill. Some might have shopped or visited a museum. Not Strout. “I am just too squirrely,” she says. “I don’t like to jaunt around.” She tells this story while sitting on the enclosed porch of her home in Brunswick, a few months out from the much anticipated October release of *Olive, Again*, the sequel to *Olive Kitteridge*. The publicity whirlwind had begun in the spring, with talks and trips, including one to New York for Book Expo, the biggest booksellers event annually.

Typically Strout writes her first draft long hand, but in that cafe, she started to type on her laptop, keeping up with Olive as she continually popped into her head. “I didn’t have to do anything,” she says. By the end of the weekend, she’d sketched out a story called “The Poet.”

She was in the middle of writing *Anything is Possible*, a 2017 sequel of sorts to *My Name is Lucy Barton*. Like *Olive Kitteridge*, *Anything is Possible* is a collection of stories, but featuring Lucy’s people. So after Strout reworked the draft of “The Poet” back at home, she put the story aside. “I thought, ‘Oh, well, OK, so I have an Olive story. And then...’”

The door to the porch opens and Jim Tierney, Strout’s husband, pokes his head in. He’s tall and thin, like Strout, with a shock of silver hair and bright blue eyes. He’s heading out for a walk. The laundry is in the spin cycle. He’s checking in: “Are you guys safe down here?”

Having affirmed all is well, he departs. Tierney, 72, who teaches at Harvard Law School and is a former Maine Attorney General and state legislator, met Strout at a reading of *Olive Kitteridge* in New York not long after its publication. He stood up and identified himself as being from Lisbon Falls and asked a question. Both of them were divorced, with grown children (Strout has a daughter, Zarina). They had one date, or maybe two, they can’t recall, and then moved in together. They married in 2011 and di-

vide their time between New York and Brunswick, where Tierney grew up and went to school. Strout, 63, grew up in Harpswell, on a road lined with Strout relatives, and in Durham, New Hampshire, where her father taught at the University of New Hampshire and her mother taught English.

Back from her European trip, Strout was working in her studio in Brunswick, looking through folders and found the leftover scraps from *Olive Kitteridge*. “I had all these handwritten scenes of Olive that I had not used,” she says. “It was like, oh, OK, let’s see what she’s up to.” She started the book as soon as *Anything is Possible* was done. “Even maybe before.”

Her only worry, she says, was, “Will Olive still have her pop? But for me she did.”

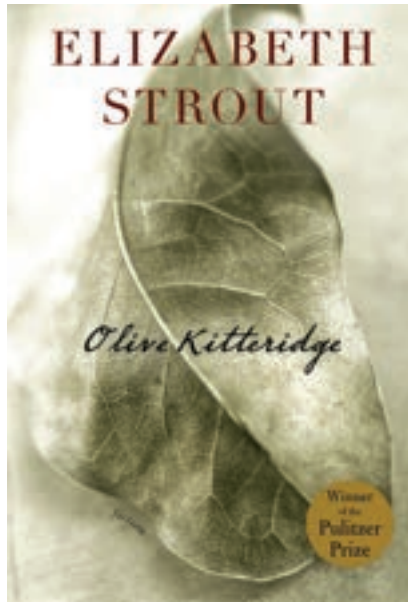
Her editor at Random House, Susan Kamil, had never asked about more Olive stories. They’ve worked together on four books, beginning with *The Burgess Boys*. “I totally trust that she knows where she is headed with every manuscript and respect her creative process,” Kamil said in an email. Her response to Olive’s return? “Pure joy,” Kamil says.

Four books in six years. Before that there were three in a decade. Stories sneaking in about past characters while she’s in the middle of another book. *Olive, Again* not even published yet and Strout says she is almost finished with another book. Is this just the natural result of a writer who didn’t publish until she was in her early 40s, unleashing stories bottled up for decades?

“I don’t know that I was bottled up as much as I just couldn’t find my voice,” Strout says. She wrote from the time she was a small child, but from 20 to 40, she was seriously focused on developing her craft. “I spent years and years and years trying to find my storytelling voice and then I found it. And also, I got older, so there were more life experiences that arrived, that one can use in various ways in their work. But I was apprenticing that entire time. I was really working those first 20 years.” Back then, she sent story after story out, and got a steady stream of rejections, including from *The New Yorker*. She couldn’t find an agent and she assumed, based on the rejections, that the stories weren’t good enough. So she’d rework them. Then Daniel Menaker, the same editor who had kept rejecting her (kindly) at *The New Yorker*, moved on to an editing job at Random House. He read *Amy and Isabelle* and loved it so much he helped Strout find an agent. Random House published it in 1998. It was a bestseller and a finalist for the Pen/Faulkner Award. That was when Strout began to feel she’d found her voice. “That was the biggest leap for me to get over,” she says.

Now she’s in a powerfully creative phase. “It is kind of crazy,” she says. “So I think I will slow down,” she adds, not entirely convincingly.

On the porch, hanging pots of flowers, that Tierney got at the farmers market and has been assiduously watering, have dripped on the windowsill, leaving behind a little dirt. Strout wipes at with her finger and remarks on how easily things get dirty. At one point in her life, she says, she was a house cleaner, scrubbing houses “up and down the coast.” In *Olive, Again* Olive encounters a sensitive teenager named Kayley Callaghan, who cleans houses in Crosby,



including for a widow who makes Kayley use a toothbrush on the kitchen tiles. “That’s why I can write about people like Kayley Callaghan,” Strout says. “I’ve scrubbed that tile before, with a toothbrush.”

INSPIRATION AND IMAGINATION

It’s a safe bet that whatever question Tierney asked at the reading where they met, it wasn’t the age-old one posed at every public author event ever: “Where do you get your inspiration/ideas?” That question often seems like a quest to prove that fiction isn’t so much an act of imagination as it is about rearranging lived experiences. The writers who get it really right, who paint humanity in the clearest strokes, tend to be grilled particularly intensely on these matters. In both a 2017 *New Yorker* profile and a 2016 interview with Terry Gross on *Fresh Air*, there was an underlying sense of the interviewers going spelunking in Strout’s past, as if in turning over the right rock, they’d find out who Olive Kitteridge was before Strout put her on the page. That there is a traceable model for her, or for Lucy Barton, and they all lead back to Strout and her Maine roots.

That is a pointless exercise on many levels. Olive is everywhere. Shortly after our interview, I’m loading groceries into my car at Hannaford when a woman loading her own car says to me, “I like your pants.” I’ve barely had time to glance down at my pants, striped, in loud colors, and look up with a smile when she adds, “I wouldn’t wear them, but I like them.” Olive.

But how does Strout get it so right, it meaning the human condition generally? How does she tune herself into the frequency at which Olive and all the others can be found? The first time Olive showed up in Strout’s head, she was loading the dishwasher and had a perfect view out of Olive’s eyes as she stood by a picnic table at her son Christopher’s wedding.

It’s history she’s recording, Strout says. Not literally, but if a century from now, there are still books and someone finds those written by Elizabeth Strout, she hopes they understand that she was serving as a literary historian of American culture. Her characters are people of Puritan stock, the kind she knows best, but who are fading in relevance—or so

Strout hopes—as culture expands and diversifies and shifts. “I am trying to record,” she says. “Whether people recognize that or not is not something I can control, but that is what I am up to.”

WHAT ABOUT JIM?

Maybe because of all that previous spelunking, some of the people close to Strout aren’t eager to be interviewed. They pass on word that their friendships with her are sacred, which makes sense. There is also the possibility that they don’t want to disrupt any part of her creative process. Then Strout suggests talking to Tierney.

Tierney is crazy about Strout. When he says “my wife” those two words have the heft of a love sonnet, one so sincere that even a skeptic like Olive might refrain from rolling her eyes. Setting up the interview, he sends an email summarizing his wife’s success as a writer:

Liz writes.

She doesn’t do book reviews. She doesn’t do literary criticism. She very rarely blurbs. She isn’t on any Boards. She is off the speaking circuit. She doesn’t do literary parties. She doesn’t do festivals. She doesn’t hang out with movie stars or critics. She doesn’t go to openings. She doesn’t go to the theatre or the opera. She writes, and she writes for readers. Sometimes that may be hard for people to understand, but it really is that simple.

None of this is in dispute. Strout doesn’t have a work ethic so much as she has a work imperative. It was fun and pleasing to have *Olive Kitteridge* adapted into a miniseries for HBO, starring Frances McDormand, but Strout didn’t need that to happen. She helped with the adaptation of *My Name is Lucy Barton* for stage, which wowed audiences in London (Laura Linney will be reprising the one-woman play on Broadway in January). But these were extras. These are not the real thing, which is writing. A few days later, Tierney sits on their porch and elaborates.

“What is it like to live with Liz Strout?” he says. “She notices everything and she never forgets.” He repeats it for emphasis. “You’ll see this reflected in her writing in ways that, even for me, who has lived here my whole life, I don’t see. She sees things.”

At restaurants, for example. “We’re not foodies, but we like to go out to eat.” (Translation, they are more likely to be found at Fairground Cafe at the Topsham Fair Mall than The Drifter’s Wife.) Strout notices that when waitresses offer to wrap up food for customers, Mainers will ask to take home their french fries, the soggiest of leftovers. Or that Maine people don’t use umbrellas or like to shake hands. “She notices all these kinds of things,” Tierney says. “I mention those three examples, but there are many, many more.” And these are the kind of details that tend to show up, in natural ways in characters on the page.

He credits Strout’s mother, Beverly, who taught writing to high school students, for some of those observational powers. Strout herself describes her mother as “probably the smartest person I’ve ever met. In terms of emotionally laser-like, she just...boy, she knows it.” Strout’s mother is 92, but her fascination with people has not dwindled. Tierney tells a story about Strout driving her mother to Walmart last summer. It was a hot day and her mother was staying in the car, but she asked her daughter to park close to the entrance—rather than in the shade—so she could watch people come and go.

“That is something that Liz got from her mother,” Tierney says. “This unstoppable, insatiable curiosity about the human condition. And to know details. Liz notices trees and weather and she knows all about flowers and all that stuff. That came from her childhood.” Her childhood in Harpswell, where the woods were often her primary companions. But he believes there is credit due her father, Richard (Dick) Strout, as well, who died in 1998. Dick and Beverly first met at Edward Little High School in Auburn, where he was president of his class and the captain of the football team. Not necessarily a great student, but from what Tierney has heard, “dogged.” Dick Strout served a year in the Navy after Edward Little and went on to the University of Maine, where he and Beverly reconnected. He became a parasitologist, specializing in tropical diseases. He developed a diagnosis for one of them, Chagas.

“How does this translate to Liz?” Tierney says. “Her mother is a hard worker too, but Liz is the hardest worker I know. I work very hard, and she works much harder.” He thinks her attention to detail and language is not dissimilar to the attention Dick Strout must have paid to his study of tropical diseases. “This woman will write a sentence over and over. It’s not just about getting the sentence right. It’s about getting the phrase right. It’s about getting the word right. The internal syllables within the word. If they do not sound right, they will not



“These people all live with us,” says Strout’s husband, Jim Tierney, of her characters. Including Olive. They talk about them regularly. Other things they have in common include a deep affinity to Maine, law degrees, love of reading and a shared sense of humor. “It is a great way to live. I feel very fortunate. We laugh a lot.”

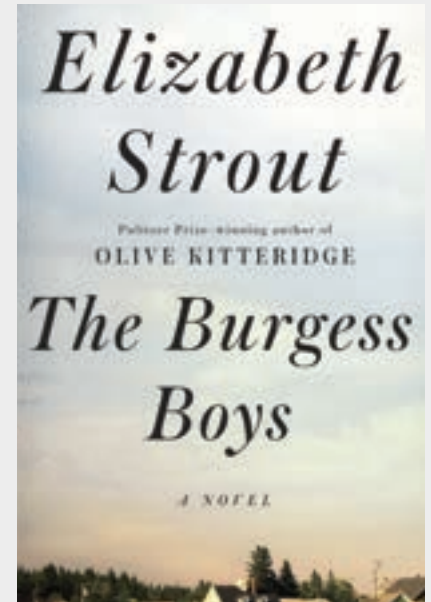
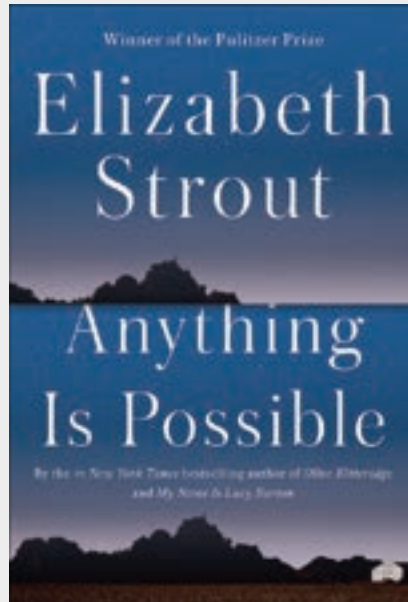
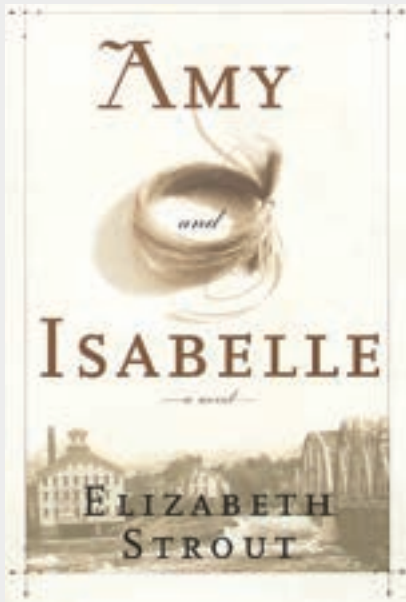
go in the book.”

As the publisher and editor-in-chief at Random House, Susan Kamil edits only a few authors, including Strout. “To be honest, one doesn’t really ‘edit’ Liz Strout,” Kamil says. “When the material comes to me it is in such fine shape—by that I mean she has thought through absolutely everything on the page before she shares it—that mostly I’m in her hands, she is not in mine.”

TUNING IN

Strout always wanted to be a writer, although she has said she also wanted to be an actress. You see that in her gestures sometimes. Strout’s fingers move through the air in ways that recall the way Olive waves or Lucy

Barton’s mother flutters her fingers through the air. She also played piano seriously during her youth. The summer before she started college at Bates, Strout apprenticed at what is now the Maine Summer Music Theater, building and painting sets on the Bowdoin College campus. She worked “like a dog,” Tierney says, but in free moments, she’d slip into a nearby college building where there was a piano to practice. She did the same when she got to Bates and again at Syracuse University, where she studied law, seeking out pianos. She was good enough to play at bars to earn money, which was more lucrative than waitressing or house cleaning. Then Strout gave up the piano. Early on in their relationship, she told Tierney she had worked hard on her skills, but would still miss some notes, half notes inside



Four books in six years. Before that there were three in a decade. *Olive, Again* not even published yet and Strout says she is almost finished with another book. Is this just the natural result of a writer who didn't publish until she was in her early 40s, unleashing stories bottled up for decades?

the phrasing, notes so quick she couldn't hear them. It was frustrating and disappointing.

He encouraged her to start playing again. She said no. It had been 25 years, she said. Tierney kept pushing. "Like anybody else, I read *Olive Kitteridge* and I see that Angie O'Meara practices in a church," he says. He asked Jane Connors at Brunswick's First Parish church if she'd mind letting Strout in to practice. And so that business of tuning in to play music began again. Tierney bought her an upright piano for their New York apartment and another for their Brunswick home. "Now she will play two or three hours a day, and I'll say, 'Are you back where you were?' and she'll say, 'Yes I am.'" Now, she says, she can hear the notes within Mozart that she was always reaching for. "I do feel that everything my piano teacher said to me all those years ago comes back to me now with a fresh meaning," Strout says.

"You have on the one hand this capacity to notice everything and remember everything," Tierney says. "And you have this discipline, with a very keen ear that can extract, in a very artistic way. If she was a painter, I'd come home and she'd be covered in paint." But she is a writer and so he comes home and she is sitting in her chair, with her thoughts, or she is at the piano, working out some scene in her head while her fingers make music.

Around this time Tierney breaks off the conversation to ask about *Olive, Again*. "What did you think?" (Pure joy.) The book isn't out yet so

he's eager to talk with someone who has read it. He wants to talk about the past characters who make guest appearances. And about a character named Fergie, who dresses up in Civil War garb for re-enactment exercises on a grassy mall area in Crosby (that sounds a lot like one in Brunswick) and then struggles with a twist in his family life. Tierney loves this story. "You can't get any funnier than Fergie," Tierney says, clutching himself as he recalls various details, like the fact that Fergie's grandson is named after his dog. "Where does she come up with that?"

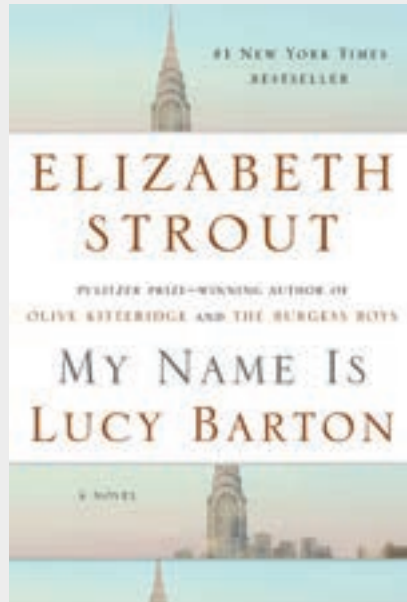
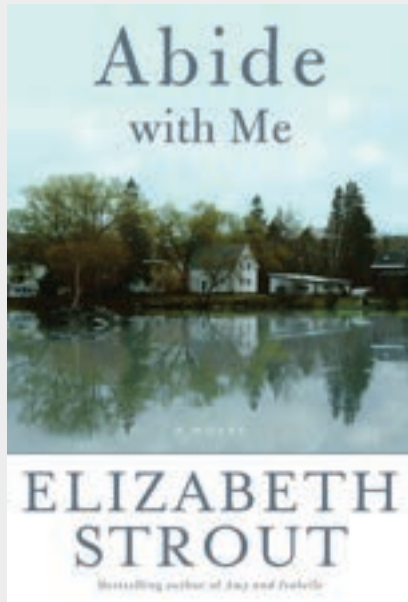
There's affection in that portrait of Fergie. And a sense of community. "It's not sugar-coated," Tierney says. "It's not lobster traps. It's the real deal here."

Without giving away any spoilers (but know this: the last story in *Olive, Again* will make a longtime Strout fan swoon),

there's more that's recognizably Maine in this new book. Both *Olive* books are set in Crosby, an invented place named after Strout's college roommate. But whereas in *Olive Kitteridge* the only real place name is Cook's Corner, in *Olive, Again* there are more references to place, the kind that will make a Mainer who exits 295 at Exit 28 sit up and take notice. Like Cottle's, the name of the supermarket that preceded Hannaford; Strout and Tierney refer to that Hannaford as Cottle's (in Brunswick, many Baby Boomers do the same).

Crosby has things Brunswick doesn't have, like a waterfront and a marina. "In my head Brunswick is not Crosby," Strout says. But maybe she's let more Brunswick into Crosby. "One might say she's spent slightly more

"YOU HAVE ON THE ONE HAND THIS CAPACITY TO NOTICE EVERYTHING AND REMEMBER EVERYTHING," JIM TIERNEY SAYS. "AND YOU HAVE THIS DISCIPLINE, WITH A VERY KEEN EAR THAT CAN EXTRACT, IN A VERY ARTISTIC WAY."



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time here in the last 10 years," Tierney says.

"I guess I also feel more relaxed," Strout says. "Like these are real Maine names, real Maine references. I am writing a piece of fiction. I don't have to have it completely accurate. I can just use the names that are so good. They are. Just. So good."

When she was working on *Anything is Possible*, she and Tierney drove around the Midwest together, stopping in graveyards, where Strout would take note of names. "I do help with names," says Tierney. There's someone in *Olive, Again* who shares a name with a former classmate of Tierney. Actually two of his former classmates.

Strout and Tierney are two people who have a great deal in common. Strout also has a law degree, although she practiced for less than a year before deciding she'd rather be a waitress if it got her more writing time. "Liz is a very good lawyer," Tierney says. "She reads all her own contracts. I have watched her negotiate." They both believe in supporting local institutions and organizations, which is how Strout came to give the graduation speech at the University of Maine Farmington this May. They both read, a lot. Tierney has spent a lifetime buried in legal reading, but he's always made a point—long before he met Strout—to devote a third of his reading time to fiction. She recently finished a two-volume biography of Elvis Presley and another of Aretha Franklin. They like to travel. Italy is a favorite destination,

and for Tierney, Bosnia.

Finally, there is room in their household for all the characters who come calling, even prickly Olive. "These people all live with us," Tierney says. "All these characters live here, with us. Our conversations will be impossible for anyone to follow...She will talk about Helen or Jim or Bob or Susan or Tyler or Fergie. Once they are formed, they are very much part of our lives."

He smiles. "It is a great way to live. I feel very fortunate. We laugh a lot."

Susan Kamil agrees that Strout is in a "sweet spot" in her creative life. Asked what she thinks that productivity is owed to, she writes only that "Liz seems to be very happy." Put the same question to Tierney, and ask if it has anything to do with him, the piano-buying extrovert who guards her privacy and makes her laugh, and he considers.

"How can I answer this honestly?" he says. "She is being very productive. She is happy writing. We are very happy, so maybe that helps.

"She loves to write," he goes on. "She can't stop the images coming in. It is impossible."

Back to his point about the piano. "Liz's ear is so good," Tierney says. "She hears a note that the rest of us don't hear." But one we recognize when we see it on the page.

Mary Pols is the editor of *Maine Women Magazine*.



The view from inside the new gallery on Main Street where local and visiting artists can show their work.



Monson Makeover

A major investment by the Libra Foundation is turning Monson, a nearly forgotten town, into a place where creativity flourishes and art is born.

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY SARAH & GORDON HOLMAN



eleste Roberge first visited Monson in the 1980s, photographing the abandoned quarries and buying black slate for her artwork. Years later, when she caught wind of an ambitious, art-centric revitalization taking place there, she wanted to see it for herself. Roberge contacted her friend Todd Watts, a photographer with deep roots in the Monson area, and asked him to show her around. When she saw what had happened to the Piscataquis County town, Roberge says, “I was stunned.”

In June of 2018, Monson Arts welcomed five visual artists and five writers from around the country to their pilot residency program. It was only two years from the program’s initial conception and barely one year since the first Libra Foundation-funded construction crew rolled down Route 6 into Monson. Since then, the charitable entity has purchased about 30 properties—most in varying states of disrepair—to renovate or raze for their impressive Monson Arts project.

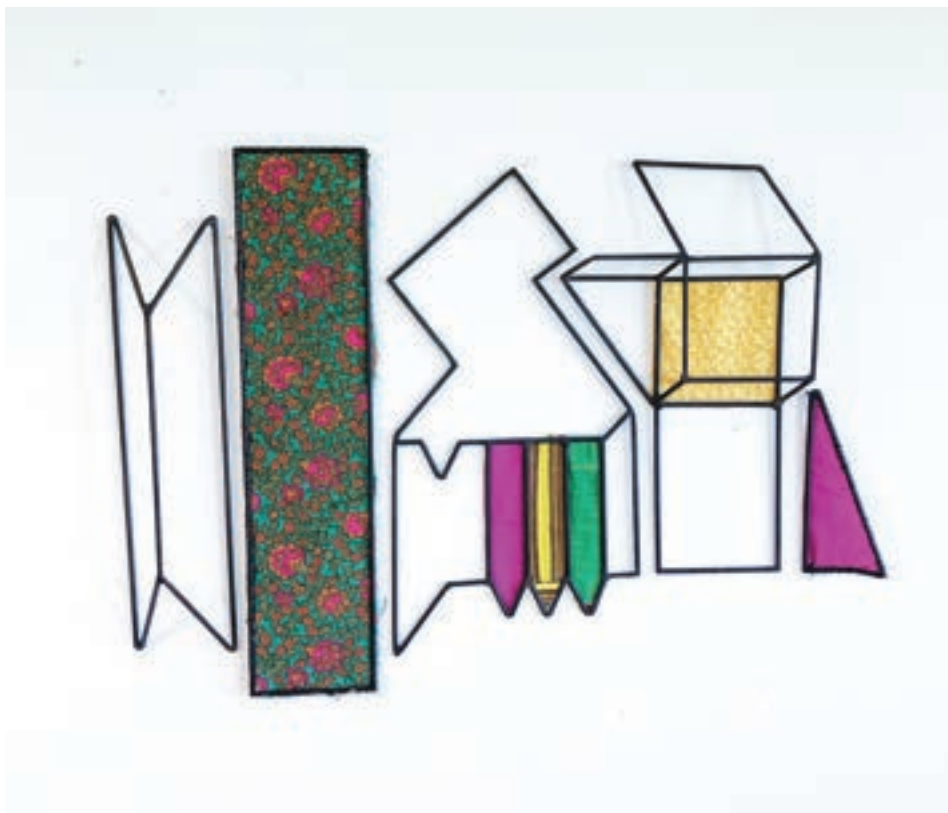
“After I saw [the studios], I thought, ‘Oh, my God, this is serious,’” Roberge says. “I wanted to apply right away.” She wanted to look at the photos she took in the 80s, visit the slate mines again, and rethink the same spaces. The South Portland sculptor, whose *Rising Cairn* was the first piece in Portland Museum of Art’s sculpture garden, was accepted for a 2018 winter residency. “I love snow and northern environments,” Roberge says. “It snowed every other day.

I was thrilled.”

Christina Lihan’s studio during her residency was next door to the newly renovated general store, in the building Monson Arts is also using for their offices and a public gallery. The paper artist from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, had covered two large tables with scraps of thick white paper and the tools she uses to cut and carve. The 40-foot-long studio has big windows that overlook Lake Hebron and was, she says, the best space she’s ever had during a residency. “It is truly amazing what the Libra Foundation has created,” she says.

Libra Foundation supports economic development through philanthropy in the arts, agriculture and recreation and invests in projects throughout Maine. In 2016, they identified Maine’s poorest county, Pisquataquis, for a substantial, arts-focused investment. Alan Bray, a well known painter from Monson, and Watts, who had worked with the mid-20th century photographer Berenice Abbott, were both early advocates. Abbott spent her later years in Monson and nearby Blanchard, before passing away in 1991. “We really became intrigued with the stories of the people up there,” says Craig Denekas, chairman and CEO of Libra Foundation. “The stories were often intricately involved with the arts. It goes all the way back to when most of the slate in the United States was being mined in Monson.”

Monson, like so many rural Maine towns, has a hard-



scrabble past. The mines drew large populations from Finland, Sweden and Wales at the end of the 1800s, infusing the town with an international undertone that remains to this day. Monson is the last provisioning stop on the Appalachian Trail before hikers hit the notorious Hundred Mile Wilderness, the final stretch before Katahdin. But more recently, business closures and job losses have led to a dwindling population (in the area of 650) and even the elimination of Monson's school in 2010. Most of Monson's downtown was for sale, whether posted or not. "We just started asking owners, 'How much can I buy that for?'" Denekas says. The lack of a fully developed strategic plan wasn't necessarily intentional, but the message Libra was getting from locals was clear: Don't tell us what you can do with 20 years of effort. Tell us what you can do now.

While construction crews—all local—began demolition, Denekas and his team were talking with Jessica Tomlinson, director of Artists at Work at Maine College of Art, about developing a residency program. The heads of programs around the state, including Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, SPACE, Hewnoaks

Far left, Christina Lihan, a paper artist from Fort Lauderdale, Florida works in one of the new studio spaces in Monson. Her work is shown in the top photo.

Left, Iranian born artist Parvin Peivandi working on a piece that is part of her textile/metal collection. When she came to Monson, she committed to only making art she could carry home in her suitcase. The fabric used in the wall piece, above, is reminiscent of the colorful clothing worn by the Kurdish woman who protect the border of Iran.



Artist Colony, Monhegan Artists' Residency and Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, came together. Stuart Kestenbaum, Maine's poet laureate and former director of Haystack, offered Denekas some advice, simply as a Maine resident. "I suggested the program engage the community," Kestenbaum says. "It shouldn't just be artists coming in. That's great for artists, but [Monson] has a heritage. It has people who live there."

Denekas agreed wholeheartedly. "It was never intended to be a program from away superimposed upon an area," he says of Monson Arts. "It's intended to integrate." As Kestenbaum finished up a year as MECA's interim president, Libra hired him to consult and design the program. A charismatic, Philippines-born chef named Marilou Ranta was on board to feed residents at The Quarry, a downtown restaurant space renovated by Libra and leased to Ranta (the public can eat dinner there Thursday–Monday by reservation; the residents have a private lunch and a standing dinner reservation at a large common table). The next hurdle was how to populate all the beautiful new residential spaces and studios for the year-round residency. Kestenbaum used his extensive connections, including identifying several art-centric graduate programs and asking each to send a student. Monson Arts continues to reserve a few spaces each year for alumni from partnership schools and writing associations.

Parvin Peivandi, an artist from Iran who immigrated to Canada in 2009, was awarded one of those spots through the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She works in textile and metal and her sculptural pieces, she explains, represent softness juxtaposed with the aggression of war machines; as a child, Peivandi was dramatically affected by the presence of U.S. military forces in the Middle East. She remembers displaced Kurdish women protecting the border of Iran. "They were brave and strong, and also beautiful with colorful clothing." She'd never been to Maine before, and in Monson she was surprised to find a deep connection with local women, many of whom have also struggled in what can be a very challenging physical and emotional environment. "I felt a closeness to them," Peivandi says. "A connection. It was easy to share stories."

Roberge had a similar experience during her winter stay in Monson. "There are so many gifted craftspeople there," she says. Because of the way the residency is set up—which necessitates artists walk from their housing through downtown to reach their studios—she met many locals, all of whom were very glad to speak with her and, in some cases, help her with her art. "That hasn't happened at other residencies I've done," Roberge says.

This kind of organic interaction is exactly what Libra and Monson Arts are hoping for: connections, commonalities and collaborations that lead to a lasting shift in Monson's economy. Celebrating local talent is also a priority for Monson Arts. An exhibit at the gallery on Main Street is called *Artists of the Forest*, curated by folklorist Kathleen Mundell and up through Aug. 11, features the work of six artists from Maine's Northern Forest. "We're not saying, 'look, we brought the art in,'" Kestenbaum says. "We're saying, 'look, there was art here already.'"

To Kestenbaum, getting the community piece right is critical to the success of Monson Arts. That includes working with local schools. This past spring, Maine native and author Anica Rissi worked with students from a middle school in Dover-Foxcroft during a one-day writing workshop at Monson Arts, and next year they'll run regular day-long sessions with high school students from seven area high schools. Alan Bray will teach the visual arts program, while Portland poet Dawn Potter teaches writing. "We don't want to bring a school bus full of kids to visit Monson Arts once a year," Kestenbaum says. "We want local kids saying, 'Yeah, I go to Monson all the time. I'm a painter. That's what I'm going to be.' [We want to] show kids the possibility of thinking creatively."

Program manager Dan Bouthot grew up in Blue Hill, went to Haystack as a teen, and came back to Maine with degrees from Rhode Island School



The Libra Foundation bought 30 buildings around town. Some have already been converted to studio, office and gallery space. The general store (opposite, bottom) serves as a hub. Some studios, above left, are still in progress, using local construction crews.

of Design and California College of the Arts for the Monson Arts job. His hope is that new week-long summer sessions and workshops throughout the year will draw in artists who can't commit an entire month to their work. He also sees the summer sessions, which are open to anyone, as a potential income generator.

Income is an issue at the top of the minds of everyone involved in the project. The Appalachian Trail will always draw hikers to town, and the main drag through Monson is a well trafficked road to Northern Maine. Granted, much of the traffic involves logging trucks but it's also a tourist route to Moosehead Lake. Getting people to stop (and shop) in Monson is key.

From a funding standpoint, Kestenbaum says, "Part of my job is figuring out what mix we need to make it sustainable." Haystack, for example, started with an "angel donor" in the 1950s and now relies on a mix of earned income, contributed income and multiple donors. When—or whether—Libra expects to step away from funding Monson Arts is undetermined; right now the foundation's focus is to "get this up and running," says Denekas. He hopes with some successes and positive exposure, things will fall into place. Libra has also made a commitment to pay property taxes to Monson, even though nonprofits have tax exemptions available to them. The foundation uses the same voluntary tax model at their expansive Pineland Farms property in New Gloucester, and Monson Arts is technically a program of the nonprofit entity Pineland Farms Inc. As for continuing to find artists who want to come to rural Maine, Bouthot isn't worried. "As long as we can offer a stipend and word gets out that it's a great place to be with amazing spaces and food, I think we'll always have people applying," he says.

Monson Arts is already receiving about eight times more applications

than they have space for. Last year it hosted 40 artists and writers from 14 states and two from outside the U.S. (the United Kingdom and Iran). The 11 Mainers attending included one from Greenville, just a few miles from Monson. An independent jury chooses from the pool of applicants. It's Bouthot's job to make sure artists get the space and equipment they

need. There's a new metal shop, which Peivandi used, and a fully outfitted woodshop. In one of the buildings still under renovation, writers studios flank the second floor, with a large common space overlooking Lake Hebron.

Although the foundation hasn't disclosed the exact amount they've spent in Monson so far, Denekas says a number around \$10 million is "about right." They're not done; a medical and dental clinic in Monson's former elementary school is scheduled to open soon. Libra wants Monson to be known as a haven for creativity, but also as a place where businesses and young families can thrive. "It is an accretion of possibilities," Kestenbaum says of the project. "Once

one thing is happening, then more things can happen because of it."

Two years ago, the *Boston Globe's* coverage of Monson Arts pointed out that rural Maine is not SoHo and begged the question: Will the artists come?

So far, the answer seems to be a resounding yes.

"We've done nine residencies now," Denekas says. "That means 90 influential artists have driven up a road they never knew existed, spent a month in Monson, and are going to back to tell their friends to check it out. It's been a great start to the whole thing."

Sarah Holman is a writer living in Portland. She is enthusiastic about cheese plates, thrift shop treasures and old houses in need of saving. Find her online at storiesandsidebars.com.

"It was never intended to be a program from away superimposed upon an area," Libra Foundation's Craig Denekas says of Monson Arts. "It's intended to integrate."

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How Maine *Moves*

SOUTHERN MAINE IS IN A CONTEMPORARY DANCE RESURGENCE, THANKS TO COMMUNITY BUILDING BY A TIGHTLY KNIT GROUP OF PERFORMERS AND ORGANIZERS.

BY CHELSEA TERRIS SCOTT

Allie James, above, working on a routine. *Photo by Nikki Carrara*
Far right, Sara Juli performing her work *Tense Vagina: An Actual Diagnosis*. *Photo by Kristofer Alan Thompson*



Dancer and choreographer Vanessa Anspaugh describes Maine's burgeoning contemporary dance community as brimming with "frontier energy." She came to Maine from New York, where she'd built her career, for a one-year teaching position at Bowdoin College. When the job was done Anspaugh decided to stay; she'd fallen in love with Maine. "This is such a magical place with such sweet community support for dance." And it's growing, thanks to a small but mighty group of dedicated artists who are revitalizing the performative art form, creating opportunities for dancers and enthusiasts alike. "It's always a small pool, the number of people interested in contemporary dance," Anspaugh says. "Here, those few people are bringing a lot of optimism, energy, and support [to contemporary dance]. They're ready to share ideas."

She's not the only dance artist to relocate to Maine in recent years, drawn by factors like the affordability of rehearsal space, which includes both studios and Maine's vast and varied outdoor landscape, usable to dancers who aren't afraid to step out of the studio and into a less predictable environment. "There's a sense of possibility here that I don't feel even in New York, where resources are exhausted," Anspaugh says. She works with Asher Woodworth, a local multidisciplinary artist, once a week for inquiry-based dance sessions. They're exploring ideas rather than focusing on productions. "In New York, no one could afford to do that."

Established performance artist Sara Juli, who combines dance, comedy and storytelling in her solo acts, left a busy performance schedule in New York for Portland four years ago. Juli thought Portland would be a good place to raise children while retaining a robust connection to the arts. "I decided to make SPACE Gallery my home," she says. She debuted her first Maine show there in 2015, *Tense Vagina: An Actual Diagnosis*, before taking it on an international tour. Her latest solo performance, *Burnt-Out Wife*, will also debut there this October, promoted by the non-profit performing arts giant Portland Ovations, which is responsible for bringings acts like Blue Man Group and the Russian National Ballet to the area. Juli's billing among larger acts is the direct result of the growing local focus on dance.

She has been a vital part of that, networking on the behalf of contemporary dance nonstop since her arrival in Maine. When Juli's not busy with her day job, running Surala Consulting, a non-profit she founded to help artists and organizations achieve their fundraising goals, she's advocating for dance for Maine. She

co-developed Moving Target Portland, a program that provides "improvisational, somatic, queer and/or post-modern practices for professionals and aspiring dance and performance artists of greater Portland." Participants meet every Sunday from September to May and pay what they can to experience a diverse offering of teachers, styles and contemporary dance approaches.

Maine has some history with dance. The Bates Dance Festival, which wraps up early this month, and for which Juli serves on the advisory council, was founded in 1984. And in 1968, Millicent Monks, an arts enthusiast and member of the Carnegie family, founded Ram Island Dance, an organization that would provide classes, performances and modern and contemporary dance programs until 2001, when she shifted her focus to arts sponsorship rather than the running of a dance company. Local dancers who still participate actively in the scene here credit Ram Island Dance with nurturing their development as artists and grounding a movement in Southern Maine.

"When Ram Island closed in 2001, there was a bit of a lull," says Kate Marchesseault, owner of Portland's Casco Bay Movers dance studio and director of Portland Youth Dance. She had danced with Ram Island for its last two years. "There weren't as many young, professional dancers who had the time and energy to come together, take classes. There was a shift and a void left." Juli stepped into it, boldly, doing everything from coordinating with Marchesseault to offer dancers \$10 rehearsal space at Casco Bay Movers to establishing a twice-annual choreography lab series to help dancers improve through critical feedback. "She laid so much groundwork," says Bates Dance Festival director Shoshona Currier. "She gets it done."

Juli and Marchesseault joined forces on a project that empowers both professional and developing talent in one annual showcase, Maine Moves. Now in its third year, Maine Moves features works by both established dancers and one youth dancer or choreographer selected from Marchesseault's Portland Youth Dance company. Student participants present their own work alongside seasoned dancers and receive professional photos as well as mentoring, giving them a taste of what a dance career could be like and the skills to pursue it. "We need about 10 more Sara Julis," says Marchesseault. "We understand that this is a small place and it makes us better if we help each other."

If dance is the car, then marketing is the engine. No one knows this better than Riley Watts, founder of Portland Dance Month, which offers

promotional materials and a calendar of dance events occurring each fall in Portland. The internationally renowned dancer returned to his home state of Maine three years ago. His idea to bring together multiple performances in Portland under a single marketing umbrella evolved organically, he says. "Sara [Juli] had



gotten some money from the Maine Arts Commission and we were producing Moving In Space at SPACE Gallery. Then we had a Moving Target workshop," he says. He looked at the calendar and realized how many dance shows were coming up. It made sense to figure out a way to group and highlight them. (This year's Portland Dance Month falls between Oct. 4 and Nov. 23, and features performances at Maine State Ballet, Creative Portland, SPACE Gallery and a variety of other venues.)

Watts says that events like Maine Moves and Moving Target add up; they're contributing to that frontier energy Vanessa Anspaugh describes. "We bring people to perform here, then they go home and say how awesome it is to perform in Portland, and how we invest in them." In some cases, Watts says, those artists return to perform or teach again, and perhaps decide to relocate to Maine.

Like Anspaugh. And Allie James and Laura Nicoll, native Mainers lured back to their home state. James, a choreographer and the admissions director for the Bates Dance Festival,



Choreographer and dancer Laura Nicoll has been drawn back to the state part time to make and produce dances. She likes working within natural spaces. *Photo courtesy of Laura Nicoll*

grew up in Portland. “I always felt like I wanted more of a performing dance community,” James says. She went to college in Chicago and danced both there and in New York. But five years ago James noticed something happening in her home state. Namely a “renewed energy” in the dance community. “This young group of artists are now engaged in work around identity and politics and being supported in ways that I haven’t seen before,” James says. Her own work focuses heavily on identity and her sense of self as a woman of color in a largely white state. She recently collaborated on a dance piece titled *On Rage/Praise* with René Johnson, artistic director of Maine’s Theatre Ensemble of Color, which was featured in Maine Moves last fall and is currently in further development. The lack of competition among dancers here and their willingness to collaborate has been “life-giving,” James says.

Nicoll grew up on Mount Desert Island and moved away to pursue her career. For the last three years, she has been back making dance in Maine, splitting her time between here and Brooklyn, New York. She teaches workshops and creates dance with both the Bates Dance Festival and Maine Moves and stays with family and friends across the state while she’s doing it. She and her brother, Rufus Morgan Kreilkamp Nicoll of Deer Isle, collaborate often on multidisciplinary arts endeavors through KREILKAMP NICOLL, their performance art company.

Then there is choreographer Megan Wolf, who is about to relocate to Maine from Los Angeles. The move is partly inspired by her

mother, an artist who lives in Deer Isle, but also, Wolf says, ticking off a list: “Sara Juli, the Living Room, Indigo Arts Alliance in Portland. I’m excited to see support for a strongly diverse community of artists and perspectives.” Wolf will perform in Maine Moves this November and plans to connect with the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts as she develops new roots. “After 15 years of forging community in L.A., I feel like that will continue to feed into my work here.”

For many, the term contemporary dance might call to mind images of Martha Graham ensconced in a dark infinity cloth, twisting her body in a manner that couldn’t be more different from the recognizable postures of a formal dance type like ballet. Graham was the height of avant-garde cool. We’re in a different era now, says Currier, of the Bates Dance Festival. “We’re in a contemporary dance time, as opposed to modern or post-modern. Contemporary dance is embodied thinking, not just solving problems and finding answers.”

Currier is a native Mainer who thought when she left in 1997 that she’d never be able to make a living in the performing arts in Maine. In 2017 she left Chicago, where she was the director of performing arts for the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, and succeeded Laura Faure as director of the Bates Dance Festival. She felt she’d landed in a whole different atmosphere. Her mission at Bates is hyper-local. “We’re one of the more visible platforms for contemporary dance in Maine, so I want to make sure that we are using that platform to

elevate local work. Not using only fly-ins, or focusing only on European talent. We hold up our local touring, performing, hustling artists. We need to shine a light on them as well.”

It helps that some of them can’t, or won’t, be confined to a stage or behind a ticket booth. Two years ago Sara Juli made an appearance at a Portland City Council meeting to perform an excerpt of *Shadow Artist*, a piece that included spoken word, some panting and at one point, climbing onto a bemused spectator. A local television station called it “kooky” but the way the mood changed in the council chambers from a nervous “what is this?” to appreciative laughter and clapping felt like a persuasion, revealing the power of pushing boundaries and seeking out new audiences.

Then in 2018 Laura Nicoll used the streets of Portland as her stage for a piece during Portland Dance Month called *PROMENADE*. For two hours she traversed the streets in a journey that took her from the Casco Bay Ferry Terminal to the offices of Creative Portland, performing non-confrontational dance as she moved from one location to the other. She was solo then. Now she’s working on a new version. But the next time she performs it, she won’t be alone. A troupe of six performers will promenade through the streets. That’s the beauty of Maine’s dance community’s frontier energy; it makes for good company.

Chelsea Terris Scott is a writer and educator. She lives with her husband and their two daughters in Portland.



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MAVERICK

Caretaker



A wildly inventive artist takes on yet-another role as manager of a summer artists' community in Lovell

BY DEBRA SPARK // PHOTOS BY BONNIE DURHAM

Pamela Moulton is an exuberant sculptor, choreographer and installation and performance artist. She is also a caretaker, of people and of places. She tends the gardens at Hewnoaks.

Most artists make art, and no matter how devoted, all-consuming, or even obsessive, that is the end of the matter. A few rare others seem to be art, their very lives a creation, everything a surprise, from where they live, to how they live, to what they do. Pamela Moulton takes things one step even further. Her imagination brings worlds into being.

At Hewnoaks Artist Colony in Lovell, where she is the on-site manager for a lakeside summer artists residency, she creates a mood where writers, performers and visual artists (including herself) can be inspired. She's the den mother, the "wondrous greeter," as one past resident put it. But her world-building history dates back decades. Like the time she wrote a poem about an abandoned house on Swan's Island that came true. It was the mid-1990s and Moulton was the chef and general helper for the annual Sweet Chariot Music Festival on the island in Jericho Bay.

Everyone who lived on Swan's Island at that time knew the large abandoned house on Atlantic Loop Road. But only Moulton imagined the house overlooking Acadia's Cadillac Mountain might have an inner life. One summer, she stayed with friends who lived in a cottage next door to it. She'd recently met Alban Maino, a French filmmaker, on an airplane—"in limbo" she says—and invited him to the festival. Together, they crawled through a broken window to explore.

The visit inspired Moulton to write a poem, one in which the house and an oak tree converse, the house upset about its ongoing violation—windows broken, critters entering and now this couple. Only in the poem, the couple break in for loving reasons. They tend the property, bringing it back to life.

After she wrote her piece, and with encouragement from Maino, who would eventually become her husband, Moulton—an exuberant sculptor, choreographer and installation and performance artist—visited the town clerk to



Left, her own work often considers issues of sustainability and sometimes is even wearable, like this skirt made from found materials. Right, when Moulton isn't changing light-bulbs or chasing away bats for the writers, artists and performers in residence, she gets her own studio time. Here she's assembling a new sculpture made from knitted items.

learn who owned the abandoned house. Name and address in hand, she mailed off her poem (accompanied by illustrations). Two months later, while sitting in Manhattan's Central Park, she received a phone call from the owner, E. Taylor Chewing, who lived in a Newport, Rhode Island, mansion. He wanted to come to New York to meet her. A meeting was scheduled at the Sherry Netherland's Hotel. Chewing arrived with his wife. Understatedly elegant, charming and somewhat formal, he struck her as an old-world gentleman. He offered Moulton and Maino his island house for the summer, insisting a lawyer draw up a contract to solidify the arrangement. The couple would pay Chewing \$1 every five years as they restored the house. Each year, a different significant improvement would be made—a well dug, a foundation laid. Until new electric and plumbing were installed, Moulton and Maino bathed in the island quarry and showered at their friends' house next door.

The arrangement continued over 15 summers, with Chewing sometimes arriving on his yacht for a visit. Moulton would cook a fancy French dinner for his family at the house. The next night, Chewing's chef would present an exotic dinner on the yacht. At season's end, when they closed the house and boarded the windows, Moulton painted clouds on the wood, so the structure would not look too forlorn. Though the property has since been sold, people on Swan's still refer to the home as the Cloud House.

When Moulton began spending winters in

France to be with Maino, she brought worlds into being in a different way, creating sculptures, installations, and ephemeral works of art. Maino had been living in Paris but they knew they couldn't afford a studio for her frequently oversized work there. Instead, the couple landed in Clapiers in the south of France, again through a generous offer. A chance meeting at the international art fair FIAC led Moulton to invite two elderly men for tea, one who owned a castle overlooking a vineyard. By the end of the visit, the owner had invited Moulton and Maino to live on his property.

The couple stayed for the next eight years, fully immersing themselves in the life of the chateau and its surrounds. Later, the couple and their son Matice moved to Pontlevoy in the Loire Valley, to be closer to Maino's family. There Moulton became the on-site director of cultural programming at the village's ancient former Benedictine abbey, staging numerous ambulatory, multi-disciplinary, multi-sensory collaborative art projects. In one, she created the illusion that the abbey's interior had been turned upside down by hanging chairs and tables from the ceiling and cloaking the space (and the students) in black, save for fluorescent dots on the students' bodies. Visitors entered over a floor of orange and lemon peels to witness a dance of colored dots. After eight years at Pontlevoy, family moved to the Portland area.

Moulton is, at all times, multiply employed and working on numerous projects. She has designed life-sized puppets, wild circus sets,

fanciful multimedia environments for toys, and elaborate costumes with a Lady Gaga-outlandishness (minus the pushy sexuality). She made a gown of quail's eggs. She's been a teacher and guest artist, working on projects with children in the slums of Mumbai and at an Albanian orphanage, as well as university students at the abbey. Here in Maine, she's made large and fuzzy colorful sculptures with school children, taught wearable art to teens at Maine College of Art and co-facilitated art efforts that pair university students with elderly residents with dementia at The Cedars retirement community in Portland.

The newest line item on her dizzyingly full CV is with Hewnoaks on Kezar Lake in Lovell. Established in 1901 on an old farm, Hewnoaks was originally the location of a hand-woven and hand-dyed rug operation run by Marion Larrabee Volk. Volk and her artist husband, Doug, invited people like Frank Benson, John Calvin Stevens, William Merritt Chase and Childe Hassam to visit.

Their last heir, their daughter-in-law Jessie, left the property to the University of Maine Foundation with a request that it be used, if possible for the study and promotion of art. Starting in 2013, the Hewnoaks buildings began to be used for artist residencies. Now, each year, fifty artists are chosen from a pool of applicants (up to 200) for one to two weeks stays in the property's four cabins. Here they can concentrate on their work without interruption (no families are invited).

As summer manager, Moulton lives in the

property's central Tudor-style farmhouse and has her own studio on a giant screened in porch on the property. Moulton settles residents in, doing everything from changing light bulbs to fetching blankets to catching bats. She maintains the gardens and puts fresh flowers in artists' rooms. She offers tips on where to hike—"I know all the secret spots"—and has been known to lead group swims across Kezar Lake. This year is her third summer as manager but she has insider knowledge comes from long familiarity with the area. She descends from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and her relatives (though from a different branch of the family) pepper the Lovell/Fryeburg area. Should she wish, Moulton can swim over to her cousins' on the other side of the lake.

Moulton was a resident herself at Hewnoaks in 2016, a plus for executive director Nat May, as he wanted the summer manager "to know what it is like to be invited into a support system and given encouragement in your practice, which is a big part of what Hewnoaks is for." May also appreciated that Moulton's experience at the Pontlevoy abbey meant she would know how to manage a historic property with old facilities.

Printmaker Pilar Nadel, a 2017 resident, is the one who called Moulton a "wonderous greeter." Other former residents, writer Jennifer Lunden and painter Hilary Irons, the co-director and co-founder of Portland's Able Baker Contemporary gallery, both speak of Moulton as being incredibly warm, naturally generous and curious about others and their artistic practice. But she's noninvasive, they say, engaging if she senses that is wished for, hanging back if not.

Moulton's own work is sculptural, using unnatural materials to reproduce natural things and sometimes vice versa, at times as a way of engaging with the destruction of the environment. She's made a large revolving egg, whose surface is covered with antique marbles and quails' eggs whose interiors have been encrusted with automobile glass from fatal accidents. Other pieces include a carpet-sized wall hanging out of flattened metal Coke bottle caps; sculptures out of colorful knitted gloves; and a 14-foot coral-shaped tower covered in tiny whelk shells. When Portland poet laureate Linda Aldrich was a Hewnoaks resident, she described a circular woven Moulton wall piece as "a pattern of nest-building or the matrix of longing surrounding a heart."

That Moulton's art would engender more art seems just right. "Magic attracts magic," as the Portland-based photographer Jocelyn Lee once said. The piece Aldrich describes is on


Moulton sometimes leads swimming parties, guiding residents across Kezar Lake. Moulton has roots in the Lovell area and should she wish, she can swim to visit cousins on the other side of the lake.



loan to the Urban Farm Fermentory. ("They give me a deal on kombucha," Moulton notes of the arrangement.) More of her work—a short-lived "yarn bomb" placing yarn and other materials around trees in the Portland Museum of Art's sculpture garden—will briefly mark the September end of Portland Museum of Art's *In the Vanguard*, an exhibition of mid-century work from the Haystack Mountain School of Craft. Sometimes Moulton is part of her own installations. But likely not this time; she finds

it hard to leave Hewnoaks once she is there. "I don't want to miss anything," Moulton says. "I feel so fortunate to have met this community. It's a total dream job."

Debra Spark is the author of five books of fiction, including *Unknown Caller*, *The Pretty Girl*, and *Good for the Jews*. Other books include *Curious Attractions: Essays on Fiction Writing*, and the anthology *Twenty Under Thirty*. She is a professor at Colby College.



FUNNY WOMAN

HOW A POLITICAL
OPERATIVE USES
COMEDY TO STAY SANE
AMID THE 24-HOUR
NEWS CYCLE

BY VICTORIA BONNEY
PHOTO BY HEIDI KIRN

I used to lose sleep over the sexts I sent in my 20s, but now I figure if those photos ever surface at least people will know how thin I was.

If you laughed at that, thank you. If you didn't, well, welcome to the vulnerable art of mining your life for stand-up comedy—something I've just started to do at the ripe old age of 34.

Maybe this foray isn't so out of left field. Throughout my life I've been described as irreverent. I wasn't always sure that was a compliment, but I do like making people laugh. And I do share a hometown with comedy legends Sarah Silverman, Seth Meyers and Adam Sandler—all of whom I idolized while I was growing up in Manchester, New Hampshire. A steady diet of Ed McMahon's *Star Search* in the late 80s made me interested enough in performing that I begged my mother to let me try out for modeling and acting jobs. That led to a brief career as a child actor with landmark roles such as "Unnamed Blond Girl" in Polaroid and Frosted Flakes commercials. Sadly, my stardom came to an end when I was about 6, after some traumatic incidents involving first a Dorothy Hamill haircut and then a perm that cost me friends on the playground.

Despite these early influences, I never considered that I'd get up on a stage and tell jokes to total strangers. But these aren't normal times, are they? You know the flood of disturbing breaking news headlines that you just want to tune out? I can't. It's my job

to consume them. I'm the communications director for Maine's First District Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, and as luck would have it, I was hired the week Donald Trump was inaugurated. You remember that period when Twitter became the official presidential bully pulpit? It was my duty to immerse myself in it—every covfefe word of it.

Needless to say, this media diet has had an impact. Reading the comment section of every political post drove me to question if there was any common ground left between us, and if satire was even possible anymore. Not to mention having a front row seat for some very disturbing political events, from government shutdowns to visiting detention facilities where children were in cages, shivering under Mylar blankets at the U.S./Mexico border. I could either let all of this make me cynical, heartbroken and speechless or try to find some meaning in it. That's where stand-up comedy came in.

After two years of Onion-esque push-alerts on my smartphone, my brain needed a creative escape hatch from the 24-hour news cycle. Something—anything. In February, I joined a dozen other novices in an comedy workshop, taught by Tim Ferrell, a former writer for Comedy Central. Over eight weeks, I created, reworked and shaped a nine-minute comedy set that I hoped would allow me to channel my angst into material that could give others relief during these turbulent times.

During the Bush years I found such an antidote in the *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central. Most mornings in college, I set my VHS tape recorder to record the show. I was so into it, I would research any references in Jon Stewart's jokes that I didn't know because I wanted to be in on them. Stewart used comedy to politically engage my generation and demonstrated how to disarm people with humor during divisive times. When I started the workshop, I wanted to find a way to do that, too. Instead of hitting people over the head with the injustice of, say, prescription drug costs, I tried to craft jokes so that people could relate to big social problems. Like the one I wrote about a guy I met on a dating app who asked me as soon as he swiped right how much debt I have. I told him that I had a little bit of cash saved in case I get sick. "Like back pain cash or type 2 diabetes money?" he asked. To which I replied, "Sir, I am driving a Kia in my profile

photo, you think I can afford insulin? Swipe left."

This joke is about health care costs, of course, but also about the economic pressure on Millennials as well as the torture that is modern dating. In short, it's relatable. I have another joke about how anyone running for president in 2024 should have to disclose whether they've ever spent time on Tinder or Bumble because if they haven't, they do not know true human suffering and should be disqualified. This one always gets a laugh because it's a universal truth that online dating is hell.

But writing jokes is wholly different than delivering them. On stage, it's just you and a mic—there's no hiding. I learned right away that confidence and energy are 90 percent of my act. If I'm going to say something bold, I need to own it. When I first started performing jokes, I would mumble over words and my workshop cohorts would say, "I missed that. Can you say it again?" If it continued to be garbled, that told me I wasn't comfortable saying that joke. I'd scrap that one and move on.

Like it or not, the moment you walk on stage, a comedy audience makes a snap judgment about you. You're there to make them laugh and you're not a famous headliner (yet) so you better own all the stereotypes associated with your appearance or you'll lose them out of the gate. That's why I opened my first comedy show with a joke about how hard it is to be a white,

blonde woman these days because even though I get easily approved for credit cards, I don't know how to insert my chip card properly. Although this a joke about privilege and dumb blondes, who among us really can properly insert their chip card? I rest my case.

After two months of workshoping and practicing in front of the mirror, my dog, the workshop participants and my (semi-)willing friends, I delivered my set in front of a crowd of about a hundred at One Longfellow Square in Portland in mid-April. To my relief, I didn't speed

through the act. I took my time, hit the punchlines and guess what? People laughed—some even chortled. Since then I've performed at open mic nights around Maine. They're a bit like Weight Watchers meetings: they hold you accountable and you make progress alongside new friends. And, in my case, I confess to sins like self-medicating with pints of Ben & Jerry's just to get through a week of Trump tweets.

Friends have asked me if this is going to be a second career. The short answer is no. I don't have the time or energy to be on the open mic circuit every week. I'm extremely fortunate to have a day job that I enjoy and derive immense purpose from—daily Twitter monitoring duties notwithstanding. I have a boss who appreciates art, respects creative expression and actually made time to come to my first gig. I cannot stress what it means to have that kind of support. But for now, this will remain a passion project, something fun that also feeds my personal growth. In September I'm taking what I've learned about public storytelling to a new level. I'll be participating in Soundbites, Maine Public radio's version of The Moth. I plan to tell the story of the first time I met my father, even though he had no idea who I was, and the second time I saw him, when he was in a box ready for burial. There might be tears. But I promise, there will also be laughs.

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THE NEW SHARE CROPPERS

Daybreak Growers Alliance puts a different spin on the CSA model, bringing farms together in collaboration, instead of competition.

BY AMY PARADYSZ // PHOTOS BY KELSEY KOBIK

Adrienne Lee uses a team of draft horses to plow and fertilize her fields at New Beat Farm in Knox. But to deliver the results of the growing season? She's all about online platforms, algorithms and teaming up with farmers who might have been considered competitors in a different time.

Lee founded Daybreak Growers Alliance, a collaboration between 25 farms in Waldo and Kennebec counties designed to give customers more of what they want—and to help farms plan their future crops. It's like a big community supported agriculture (CSA) farm share, packed with choices from many farmers. It's led by three women, Christa Bahner, owner-operator of Bahner Farm in Belmont, and Colleen Hanlon-Smith, who used to manage the Unity Food Hub but recently became an owner of a peach farm in Albion, the Locust Grove.

"We're trying to marry the traditional CSA model with customers' needs for convenience and flexibility," says Hanlon-Smith.

Daybreak Growers Alliance stepped into a void in their region. For two years, the Unity Food Hub in Unity had run a small food aggregation and distribution program, but in 2018, it decided to shift its focus

Left: Farmers, friends and now partners in a super-sized CSA, in the fields at New Beat Farm. From left, Adrienne Lee, Christa Bahner and Colleen Hanlon-Smith.

Top right, clockwise: Bahner, Lee, Hanlon-Smith; The co-founders and New Beat Farm employees gather in the packing shed to prep farm shares.

to other programs. That left about a half-dozen farms that had been primary sellers through the hub wanting another collaborative option. “They didn’t know what that would look like except they wanted it to be farmer-driven,” Lee says.

Lee had already been running a small collaborative CSA program with operations based at New Beat Farm and was encouraged when she was able to break even after the first year. She and her husband Ken Lawsom run a busy operation of their own, producing dozens of varieties of vegetables and flowers, tending a flock of sheep and running a commercial cider press. If they were going to work their farm while growing a multi-farm collaborative, they couldn’t do it alone. That’s why early this year, Lee legally incorporated Daybreak Growers Alliance with Bahner and Hanlon-Smith.

“It’s an inspiring group of women,” Lee says. “Farming is not only a job for us, it’s a lifestyle and it’s almost our form of activism, of providing a service to the community.”

Her farm gets the second half of its name from the sound the horse hooves make on the ground as they work the land. It’s a *new beat* because while its equipment might look old-fashioned, New Beat is very much focused on the future. As Lee points out, tractors don’t naturally fertilize while they are plowing the way horses do. She and Lawsom are building a sustainable agricultural ecosystem.

As are her colleagues, each in their own ways. Bahner Farm, which is certified organic, had an existing CSA program. Most of its customers moved over to Daybreak’s new farm share. “That was our buy-in,” says Bahner, who is a vegetable producer. “Instead of fighting to get our piece of our pie, we’re just making a bigger pie.”

In some ways, the model for Daybreak—delivery of curated local food to individual customers—is something that Hanlon-Smith experimented with during the summers of 2005 and 2006 when she was a Bates College student. She called it Peak Season. Residents of Peaks Island would place orders from about 40 farms, and Hanlon-Smith would take the products—bread, fruits and veggies—over on

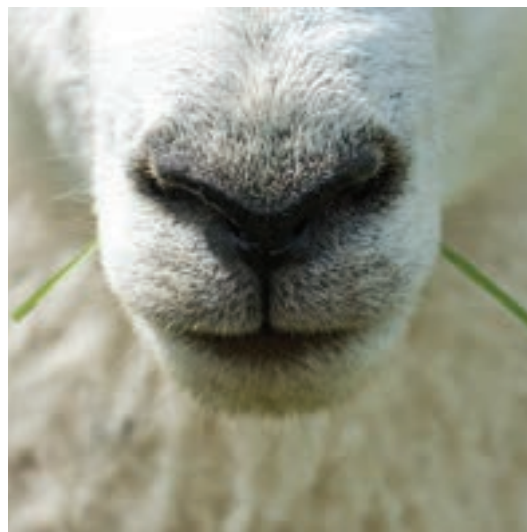
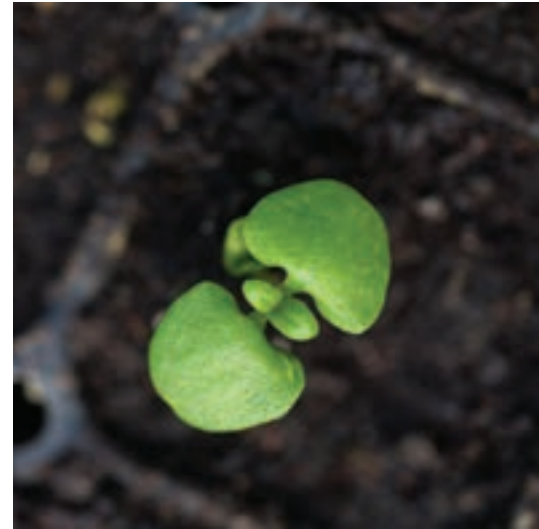


the ferries. Eventually Rosemont Market and Whole Foods started delivering to Peaks, and Hanlon-Smith went on to be the first executive director of the Maine Federation of Farmers’ Markets.

“My first real connection to the land was to say, ‘Maine has more and more farmers, and how do we grow this connection to the market?’” Hanlon-Smith says. “I’ve been on a mission to find the best Maine-grown food since those college years, being an eater and working with a lot of those farmers.”

The sisterhood of Daybreak is selecting some

of the best foods that Maine is producing from some of the best farmers, she says. Particularly in the town where she lives, Freedom. “For being a rural, largely poor small town, there’s a lot of energy around food and farming in Freedom, as well as in Waldo County and Maine in general.” The alliance is already working with these small, diversified farms to crop plan, she says. “Before they buy their seeds, we’re anticipating what our demand will be. Most of the farms are pretty diversified. When we crop plan, we hone in on those items that they should grow in greater quantity where the quality is good, the



Top row, left to right: What's in the box varies from week to week; Christa Bahner prepping farm shares; A tiny basil seedling. Bottom row, left to right: Colleen Hanlon-Smith packing farm shares; one of New Beat's lambs on pasture; Adrienne Lee checks stacks of share boxes.

margin is good and they can scale production.”

Daybreak has 250 shareholders who subscribe in eight-week periods for a “share”—a popular option being the “Local 25,” a large grocery bag of certified organic vegetables for \$25.

“What we’ve done is customize an online platform—not just a vegetables share and a meat share but fruit, yogurt, eggs and cheese,” says Hanlon-Smith. “The customer can decide how often they want to receive a share and can put a share on hold or swap out or add to it.”

The online platform, Harvie, gives the customer a chance to rate all the different crops with emojis on a scale of 1 (“not for me”) to 5 (“love it”). “If you really like something and it’s available in this week’s box, you’ll get it,” Lee says.

Harvie also keeps track of the 17 delivery locations—and counting—in and around Portland, Midcoast and Central Maine. Where there are 10 or more subscribers near the current delivery route, a new delivery site pops up. Pickup locations in Portland range from Bunker Brewing to a law office to the back of someone’s garage on Brighton Avenue.

The customer gets an email a few days before delivery, listing what’s in

their share, and they can swap things in or out—or just trust the process. At the delivery site, the customer moves their share from the green lidded plastic box labeled with their name to their reusable bags.

Behind the scenes, Lee balances customer demand and the number of farms and what they’re producing. “We don’t add new farms unless we have a gap, not always a different crop but seasonality—like a farm might have early season greens but not have them later on,” she says.

Bahner has a seven-day-a-week farm stand open from May to October, and she does the farmers market circuit all summer. But in the colder months when she grows winter greens—spinach, arugula, baby kale and baby lettuce mix—she wants to reserve weekends for time with her two children. “I can concentrate on growing, and Daybreak markets and distributes the products,” Bahner says. “This is a great way for us to get into markets all over the state without having a vehicle on the road.”

Amy Paradysz is a freelance writer from Scarborough. She signed up for a share and selected happy-face emojis for just about everything farmed in Maine except jalapeños.

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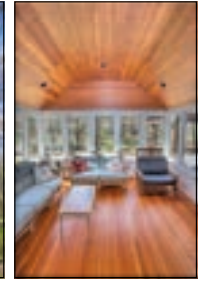


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ARTFUL DRESSING

For this Maine artist, clothes are an alternate canvas.

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMANDA WHITEGIVER

Emilie Stark-Menneg is a Maine artist who is rapidly making a name for herself on the national scene. She's had a number of solo shows, including at the Elizabeth Moss Gallery in Falmouth, and has been part of group shows in New York, Denver and Pittsburgh. We visited her at the cottage where she lives in Harpswell with her partner, artist John Bisbee, their dogs and a closet full of thrift store finds.

WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?

The skirt and top are from NYC fashion designer Rachel Antonoff. The cardigan was from Second Time Around, which has sadly closed. Sandals from Estilo in Brunswick. The swan brooch was from my grandmother. The bracelet was designed and fabricated by my partner, John Bisbee.

DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE IN ONE SENTENCE. (IT CAN BE A LONG ONE.)

Lets just say, I'd fit right in at a gathering of fairies and witches, casting spells and dancing till dawn.

IS IT "MAINE" STYLE? IF SO, HOW?

For me, Maine style is about ease and flexibility, clothes that take you from the campfire up the mountain, outfits that have adventure stitched into them. Sprinkle on enchantment and time travel and I am sold.

FIRST OUTFIT YOU REMEMBER PICKING OUT AND LOVING, FEELING GREAT IN?

When I was a kid I used to pick out my outfits the night before school. I remember, carefully laying them on my bed, each article of clothing in the exact position as if I was assembling a full person. A couple years ago, I discovered Samantha Pleet, a NYC designer who makes the most magical clothes. I remember skipping through a misty meadow in her tricolored silk dress and feeling like I was made of stardust.

LAST MEMORABLE OUTFIT:

When I was living in Pittsburgh, I used to frequent this fabulous secondhand clothing shop. One day, the owner said, "I have just the thing for you," before she disappeared into the back. She returned with a "Voila!", a

sparkly red romper that screamed 1970s disco. I've been dancing ever since.

FAVORITE BRICKS AND MORTAR PLACE TO BUY CLOTHING IN MAINE?

Weekend Vintage in Portland and Estilo in Brunswick. I also love Cabot Mill Antiques, where I've found some clothing treasures.

BEST CLOTHING SHOES OR ACCESSORY BARGAIN OF ALL TIME:

An Alexander McQueen pencil skirt from Second Time Around. I scored this total gem for pocket change.

MOST YOU EVER SPENT ON SOMETHING TO WEAR?

I think I spent around \$400 on a Rodebjer dress. Eeek!

WAS IT WORTH IT?

Yes! Still one of my favorite dresses of all time.

WHO IS YOUR STYLE ICON OF ALL TIME?

British fashion designer Alexander McQueen. I was totally blown away by the 2018 documentary film, *McQueen*. Watching the film was like watching my dreams and nightmares come alive in all their terror and beauty.

MOUNTAINS OR COAST?

Ocean, please. I hope to live on a boat someday.

WHAT WOULD YOU REFUSE TO WEAR?

Khakis.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT "GO TO" OUTFIT OR ITEM OF CLOTHING?

A lightweight cotton dress from the 50s. Once I made John drive an hour out of our way to "Who is Sylvia," a vintage clothing store in Woodstock, Vermont. I bought two dresses for a song. As soon as the tulips blossom, they are my go-to outfits. Infinitely versatile, I can wear them while painting in the studio and then to a summer soiree.

WHAT DO YOU CHANGE INTO AFTER A LONG DAY?

Soft pants and a T equals 100% cozy.

Amanda Whitegiver is a lifestyle family photographer who adores dark chocolate and singing with her two daughters.

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AN AUGUST FOR THE BOOKS

Check out these author recommendations

BY AMY CANFIELD

If you haven't made a dent in your summer must-read list yet, you better hop to it. No excuses. What better month than August to plop yourself down outdoors with a great book, a cold drink and a few hours to escape from the tourists and the frantic pace of our too-short summers?

There's a feast of good reads out there this season, no matter what your taste in genres runs to. We asked some favorite women writers in Maine to tell us what they've been reading.

Photo credits, top left and clockwise: Matt Cosby, Michael Lionstar, Karin Diana, Liz Norton



JESSICA ANTHONY

The Convalescent, Enter the Aardvark,
coming March 2020

I'm reading a biography of Patricia Highsmith called *The Talented Miss Highsmith* by Joan Schenkar. Highsmith is the original thrillist, one who cut her teeth writing copy for comic books. The biography is, so far, one of the most salacious, hilarious and deliciously wicked (and true!) mother/daughter stories I've read in some time.



SUSAN CONLEY

Elsey Come Home,
The Foremost Good Fortune

Reading *Normal People* by Sally Rooney feels like going back to college with my two new, wildly likable, incredibly sexy, genius best friends. We have all stayed out very late at the Dublin bar, but it's the proverbial morning now and I still can't stop reading.



SARAH BLAKE

The Guest Book, The Postmistress

Prairie Fever by Michael Roberts. I can't stop thinking about this book about two sisters and their schoolteacher in 1917 in Oklahoma. The sisters ride four miles to their one-room schoolhouse every day in the middle of winter, wrapped and pinned in a blanket to keep them warm, the horse knowing the way. A story of the secret language of sisters, of longing for a life beyond the confines of your family, of love, of the sorrow of typhoid deaths, of farm poverty, and above all of the immense beauty of the prairie, the wide open sky and land, this may be one of the most moving, perfect novels I've read in a long time. Indescribable, really—but essential, like all great books.



CHRISTINA BAKER KLINE

Orphan Train, A Piece of the World

I'm a little old to be obsessed with the Irish wunderkind Sally Rooney, but I am; I just devoured her two novels. (*Normal People, Conversations with Friends*). And I also loved *Ghost Wall* by Sarah Moss, a creepily atmospheric slip of a novel. I'm now diving into Rebecca Makkai's *The Great Believers*, having had dinner with her [recently] and found her delightfully brilliant (and shame on me for not reading it sooner). My summer reading will also include *Searching for Sylvie Lee* by Jean Kwok—the book is getting a lot of buzz.

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| I'D RATHER BE READING |



JOAN DEMPSEY

This is How it Begins

I'm on a Greg Iles kick. I devoured all three thrillers in his epic Southern trilogy about both modern and historical race relations in Mississippi: *Natchez Burning*, *The Bone Tree* and *Mississippi Blood*. They are each massive, engrossing page-turners, chock full of compelling characters, intense politics and unflinching descriptions of life in the Deep South during the early '60s and how that history resounds today. Prepare to cancel everything—you'll want to keep reading!



LILY KING

Euphoria, Father of the Rain

I've just started Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian* and am loving it. It's set during and after World War I and tells the story of an innocent young man from Nablus, in what was then Ottoman Palestine, who gets caught between the East and the West and love and duty at the moment when the British take over his country and, along with the French, chop up the Middle East.

Photo credits, top left and clockwise: Greta Rybus, Tim Coburn, Shane Thomas McMillan, Winky Lewis



LINDA HOLMES

Evvie Drake Starts Over

We Cast *A Shadow* by Maurice Carlos Ruffin. It's a wild sort of speculative-fiction satire about race and wealth, and I just ate it up. It's fantastic.



MIRA PTACIN

Poor Your Soul, The In-Betweens: The Spiritualists, Mediums, and Legends of Camp Etna, coming in October

I'm quadruple-fisting this summer with two novels and two books of nonfiction. First: Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous*; I am blown away by its beauty and craftsmanship. Next, *Patsy* by Nicole Dennis-Benin—she's a phenomenal storyteller. Because I volunteer in a women's prison and want to learn more about domestic violence, my dearest friend Linda Holtlander lent me *No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us* by Rachel Louise Snyder, and finally I'm reading *A Gift from the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh (for the very first time!) because I'm in Maine and I'm a woman so how could I not?

Amy Canfield is a Maine Woman Magazine editor who has a number of books stacked to enjoy this month.



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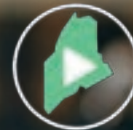
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GIVE ME SPACE

Creating (and demanding) space for creativity

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED
BY SARAH HOLMAN



Above, the “art cabinet” at Amy Jaffe’s house in Portland. Once upon a time, it was where she kept the wedding china and heirlooms. Now it’s filled art and craft supplies for her family. Top left, The designation of the space is more important than the size of it; a sewing room can even be a sewing closet.

Many women find joy, peace and fulfillment through hands-on creative endeavors. Classics like painting or pottery and crafts like knitting, beading, embroidery and adult coloring books keep our creative juices flowing and can help us deal with stress, but only when we can access our craft quickly and without adding work to our day. Having a designated space for projects is critical, and there are ways to find it, claim it and maximize it in your home, regardless of square footage.

This model of allocated creative space is one I grew up with. As a child, I had a lot of creative freedom, but there was a hard stop at the sewing closet door. The things inside belonged to my mother. The ultimate crime was grabbing her sewing scissors to cut paper or, worse, cardboard. My mother, Nancy Werner, is a talented seamstress who always has a sewing area in her home. “It’s a non-negotiable item when buying a house,” she says. “If there isn’t an obvious space, I’m figuring out how to create one.” (They’ve owned six houses since I left for college with my treasured craft trunk in tow.)

There was an oddball dead space at the end of the kitchen in her first home. “One day I just saw my sewing space there.” She and my dad built a closet with shelves, a countertop and most important, bifold doors. “It was amazing,” she says. “I could sew while the kids played and still see what they were doing. When it was time to make lunch or go outside, I could just close the doors.”

Amy Jaffe, a mom of two young children, came to a similar conclusion in her Portland home. As with many houses built in the early 1900s, Jaffe’s dining room features a built-in china cabinet with glass doors. She filled it with wedding china, an inherited tea set and special pieces like a glass seder plate and a 70s fondue set that belonged to her parents. The Jaffes enjoyed displaying these precious items and entertained regularly in the dining room. But when her oldest daughter began eating in a highchair, “I began to let go of my expectations that a dining room should be a formal adult space.” The dining room, she realized, was actually the center of their daily family life. Around that same time, Jaffe’s daughter began

to show interest in arts and crafts, and supplies accumulated. It was time to give up the china cabinet.

Jaffe moved all the glassware, china and entertaining items into storage. She relocated items like liquor, matches and candles to the very top shelf of the cabinet. The bottom shelf became an area for blank paper, coloring books and crayons—items she was happy to have kids grab by themselves at any time. The next shelf up was designated for “special art items” like Cray Pas, paints, kits, stamps and every caregiver’s worst enemy, Perler beads. The third shelf was a place for supervision-required items (scissors, tape, glue) and things Jaffe and her husband would need for their own artsy projects (wrapping paper, stapler, paper cutter). Now at ages 6 and 9, Jaffe’s kids pull a chair over to grab some of those once off-limits items. “I don’t have a problem with that,” Jaffe says. “They are being resourceful and creative, independent of me.”

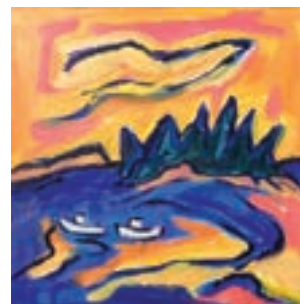
The designation of the space is more important than the size of the space itself. A smaller space can force organization. “In one house we owned I had a whole room upstairs for my sewing,” my mom says. “It was always a disaster.” Once or twice a year, Jaffe declares an art cabinet re-org. It’s a full-day, full-family affair, starting with removing everything from the 3-foot-deep shelves. Easy tasks are tackled first—grouping pens and markers, testing and tossing spent supplies—followed by assessing all the random odds with the question: Do we really need this? Eventually there is a new order to the cabinet, but also, Jaffe says, new inspiration, especially when the re-org unearths a forgotten item. “Now suddenly we’re onto a crocheting project, throwing clay on a wheel, or hanging a piece of forgotten art.”

At a young age I understood not just how incredibly talented my mother was, but also how much joy her sewing space brought her. “I know lots of people believe creativity and chaos go together,” she says. “But I can’t focus on being creative when I’m surrounded by chaos. I know when I open the doors to my sewing closet, everything will be as I left it and as I need it to be in order to create.” Her reverence for the creative process taught me that it is OK to demand space for art, even if it’s simply designating a special box or a drawer as your own. It also taught me to keep my hands off my mother’s sewing scissors.

Sarah Holman is a writer living in Portland. She is enthusiastic about cheese plates, thrift shop treasures and old houses in need of saving. Find her online at storiesandsidebars.com.



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Dear Evangeline,
I have this old friend who lives far away, but we have been in a 35-year friendship. We get together periodically with our girlfriends, in various great locations. It hasn't worked out the last couple of years, but this year she proposed we unite for an island getaway. Then she dragged her feet all the way and at the last minute, as we'd all rearranged our schedules and found child care etc., she bailed. I'm so angry with her now. This is a pattern. We all love her and enjoy her company, but she's high maintenance. Should I talk to her about it or just let it go? The friendship feels so frayed I wonder, is it worth it?
—Brenda from Standish

I'm so sorry your old friend didn't come to the reunion, Brenda, for you, and also for her, since that weekend sounds like a blast and she started out wanting to do it. Reading this, I was reminded of how frustrated I used to get as a kid because Charlie Brown kept accepting Lucy's invite to kick the football even though we (and, surely, he?) knew she was going to pull it away. Fool me once, fool me twice and all that. Why didn't he just tell her to stuff it and walk away?

Why don't we tell people in our lives who establish a pattern of disappointing behavior to stuff it? And more insanely, why is it we often covet their attention more than the valiant and true companions who are always there, who always show up? It's a glitch in our natures, I think; a shared masochism. The standard advice here would be to de-friend your friend; i.e. stop lining up to kick a ball your friend doesn't have the decency to hold. That might feel really good in the moment, like what she deserves. When that hot feeling of being taken advantage of and disrespected rises, it feels like righteous anger, which—you know if you have looked at any self-help Pinterest stories—always stems from fear. In this case, the fear is obliteration. Being bailed on by a friend feels like an erasure; lashing out, cutting all ties, ghosting is a way the ego can stake some territory again.

But after 35 years of friendship, it might be good to pause and ask yourself, specifically, what your friend truly deserves. Or more importantly, you? The mere fact that you are writing me about this and not immediately blocking her on Facebook or Snapchat or wherever, makes me believe that you don't want to totally give up on her. That despite her dippy cancellations and

expensive do-overs, you still love her. You just wish she'd change: treat you better; follow through; recognize that you went out of your way to meet her expectations, and she did jack to meet yours. In short, that your friendship matters—to her specifically and (more profoundly) to everyone else.

In relationships, we all fear being perceived like ever-persistent Charlie—weak and gullible; that somehow if we keep showing up after we get pushed aside it's proof that we are losers, but that is only our own self-doubt talking and not what I think your friend would tell you if you called her up and honestly asked her (without reprimand) if she cares about you. To serve you a little red-hot truth here: Her reasons for not showing up are hers to grapple with, and, in all likelihood, may have very little to do with you. For all you know she had expensive dental work or her mother just got diagnosed with an illness, or she's in an illicit affair or broke or smoking too much weed and is embarrassed to show herself in all her frailty to friends who she imagines have it all together. Most humans, even our closest ones, aren't thinking about us even remotely as often as we imagine they are—not because they don't care, but because life is hard and chaotic for everyone, and humans are mostly just trying to deal everyday with little earthquakes.

You want your friend to live up to your idea of her, and your beliefs about how much she values your friendship—because YOU value her friendship and you have ideas around how that value is shown (showing up, doing activities together). She may have totally different ideas about what she needs—your challenge, as her friend, is to love her for who she is, if you can, for who she really is.

THIS is why I think Charles Shultz always has Charlie come back to engage with Lucy. He knows damn well she's going to rip that football away, but Shultz makes it clear that Lucy's failings are not Charlie's. The whole strip shows his quality. His heart. His loyalty. So feel good that you are the friend who shows up. You live up to your own values. Have compassion for your scattered friend who doesn't (and ask yourself what kind of crazy things are going on in her life to miss that unbelievably fun-sounding weekend?). Tell her straight out that you were disappointed that she missed the trip and whenever she can get her act together to see you, you will check your calendar. Let her know she can rely on your love, always, but not your availability. Be true to who YOU are, be kind, and then leave her to figure out her issues without a lot of judgment from you. Meanwhile, plan next year's reunion with the other women who also showed up, because those ladies are speaking your language.

—Tenderly, E



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