



the modern  
**domestic**  
**woman**

KATIE  
MC CALL

Rooted in barefoot beginnings and guided by seasons, Katie McCall is a mother, writer, and maker whose life and work honor slow living, nourishment, and the beauty of intention.

FEBRUARY 2026 1

# February 2026

# MDW MAG

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



## Dear MDW Community,

February has always been the hardest month for me. The holidays are long behind us, spring still feels impossibly far away, and the gray always settles in deeper than I expect. This is the time of year when I find myself watching far too many gardening shows – dreaming of soil, green shoots, and the promise that something is growing, even when nothing looks alive yet.

That feeling shaped this entire issue.

These pages are all about returning to ourselves, to what feels grounding, and to the kind of care that doesn't demand immediate results. At the heart of these pages is our February profile of Katie McCall, whose story reflects everything we value at MDW: intentional living, meaningful work, and spaces that allow us to breathe. Katie reminds us that slow living isn't about perfection; it's a practice we return to again and again, especially when life pulls us off center.

Throughout this issue, you'll find reflections on loving your body through change, redefining self-love beyond surface fixes, creating homes that support who you're becoming, and reconnecting with joy through movement, creativity, and rest. You'll also see our continued commitment to community through MDW Cares support groups, events, vetted providers, and resources designed to meet women where they are, without urgency or judgment.

If February is a hard month for you, I hope this issue feels like a lovely companion. A reminder that rest counts, that tending yourself matters, and that growth doesn't always look busy or visible. Sometimes it looks like waiting. Trusting.

*And believing that something green is already on its way.*

Elizabeth Rago  
MDW Founder & Editor

PS – What's your favorite garden show?  
Mine is Monty Don's Gardener's World.  
Team Nigel alllll the way! #iykyk



 DOWNLOAD



Tap on the cute icons or QR codes to shop instantly or learn more about the product featured.

# PARTNER

## A MAGAZINE WORTH SAVORING & SAVING

A 65+ page, full-color MDW magazine packed with mental health resources, local recs, and soulful lifestyle inspo. Plus a thoughtful free gift every issue.

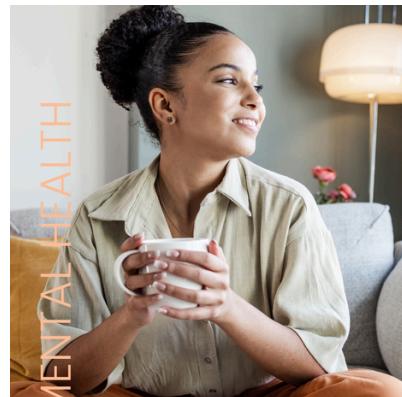
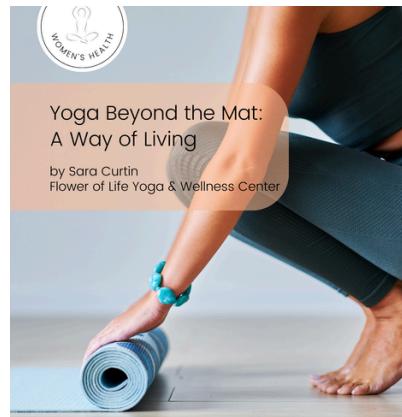
Pick your plan:

- \$15/single issue
- \$65/6 months
- \$120/1 year

Save it, share it, revisit it.



Subscribe



# SUBSCRIBE

CAUSES  
Brands with a big heart and even bigger impact.

At MDW, we're passionate about spotlighting brands that don't just sell products, but create real impact. Meet Talitha Coffee Roasters.

Co-founded by the incredible Jenny Barber, Talitha is a specialty coffee brand on a mission: bringing high-quality, locally roasted coffee with the changing support for survivors of human trafficking.

Through the Talitha Survivor Care Network, they partner with nonprofits to provide housing, healthcare, job training, and meaningful employment.

This is what we mean by lifestyle with purpose.

This is why we care about where your coffee comes from.

And this is why we care about where your coffee comes from.



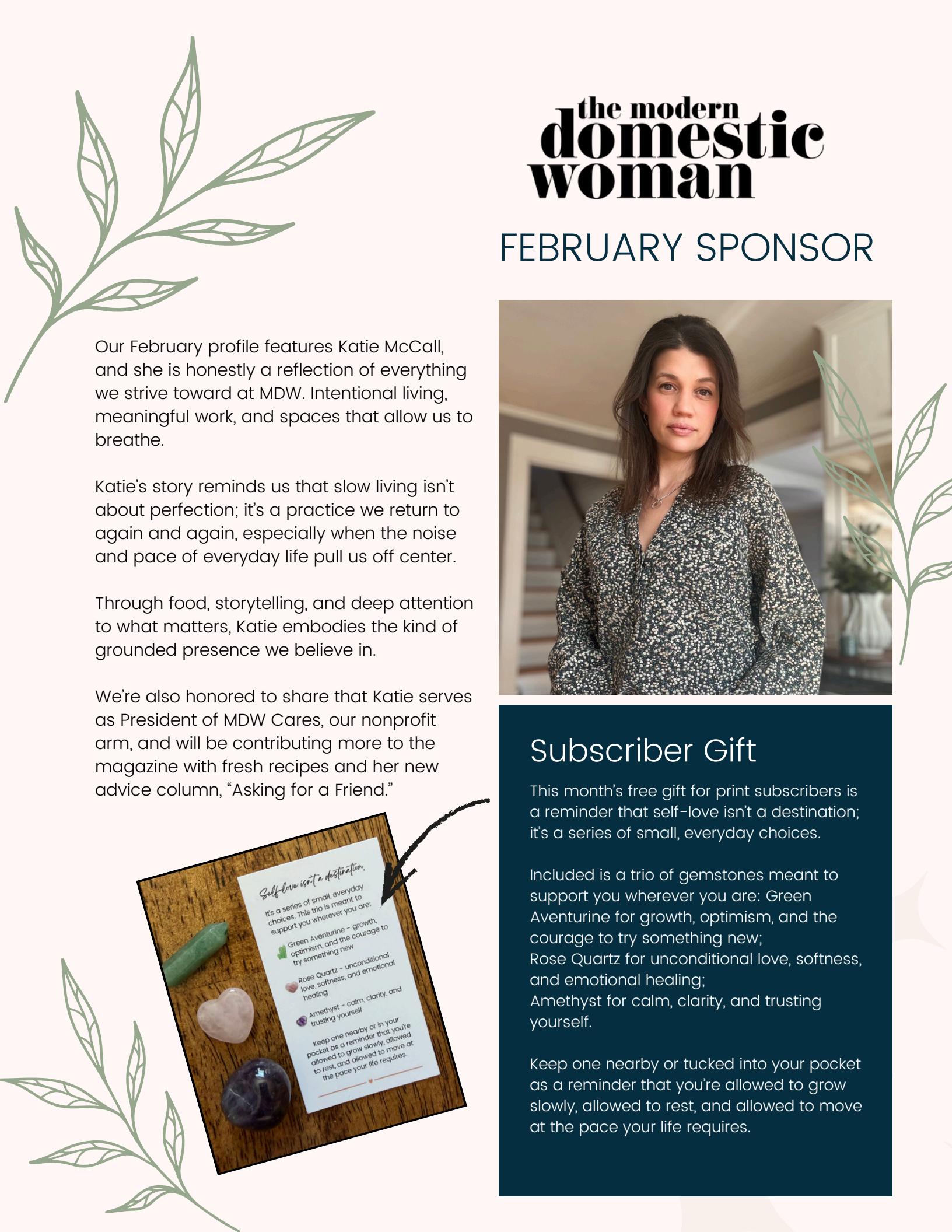
## JOIN OUR FIRST YEAR OF PRINT & MAKE AN IMPACT

Become a Year-1 Founding Partner and reach a deeply engaged MDW audience across print + digital.

Accessible rates (\$50–\$350) with options from quarter-page ads to full sponsor features (article, gift inclusion, socials).

Email

[themerndomesticwoman@gmail.com](mailto:themerndomesticwoman@gmail.com)  
to inquire about partnerships.



# the modern domestic woman

## FEBRUARY SPONSOR

Our February profile features Katie McCall, and she is honestly a reflection of everything we strive toward at MDW. Intentional living, meaningful work, and spaces that allow us to breathe.

Katie's story reminds us that slow living isn't about perfection; it's a practice we return to again and again, especially when the noise and pace of everyday life pull us off center.

Through food, storytelling, and deep attention to what matters, Katie embodies the kind of grounded presence we believe in.

We're also honored to share that Katie serves as President of MDW Cares, our nonprofit arm, and will be contributing more to the magazine with fresh recipes and her new advice column, "Asking for a Friend."



### Subscriber Gift

This month's free gift for print subscribers is a reminder that self-love isn't a destination; it's a series of small, everyday choices.

Included is a trio of gemstones meant to support you wherever you are: Green Aventurine for growth, optimism, and the courage to try something new; Rose Quartz for unconditional love, softness, and emotional healing; Amethyst for calm, clarity, and trusting yourself.

Keep one nearby or tucked into your pocket as a reminder that you're allowed to grow slowly, allowed to rest, and allowed to move at the pace your life requires.



TABLE OF  
CONTENTS

6 PROFILE

11 MDW CARES

18 BODY CARE

27 SLOW LIVING

37 WOMEN'S HEALTH

43 GIFTING

49 HOME

60 RELATIONSHIPS

65 PARENTING



# — Profile

## The Beauty of a Life Lived Slowly



When she thinks back to the four acres where she grew up, Katie McCall's body remembers before her mind does. "I immediately return to my 6-year-old self, running barefoot through the grass on a warm summer day," she says. She can still feel the soft blades slipping between her toes, smell the wildflowers and dirt drifting from her mother's garden, hear birds chattering overhead, and the weeping willow branches whispering in the wind. "I can close my eyes and be instantly transported to this place and time."

That barefoot memory never really left...it shows up in how Katie builds, how she tends, and how she knows when it's time to let go.

Food and nature were never separate in her childhood. They arrived together, taught from two distinct but deeply complementary worlds. From her father's Jewish upbringing outside of Chicago came tradition, ritual, and gathering. His father owned a delicatessen, and the foods of Katie's childhood carried lineage: lox and bagels, potato latkes, challah, matzo ball soup.

"Food was intricately tied to the various religious celebrations," she recalls, moments when extended family crowded the kitchen, elbow to elbow, preparing dishes together. Those traditions are now ones she passes down to her own children.

From her mother and her grandfather came an education rooted in patience and seasons. Her grandfather was an avid gardener, forever tending small plots of asparagus, squash, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Katie's mother carried those lessons forward, showing her children how to plant a seed, tend to it, harvest what it produced, and turn it into a meal. Spring meant foraging for morel mushrooms. Summer meant picking wild black raspberries and transforming them into her mother's famous jam.

“I was shown from a young age that food didn’t just ~~come~~ from the grocery store,” Katie says. “It took time, energy, and hard work.”

Those early lessons shaped her not just as a chef, but as a mother. And as someone who understands process as sacred.

Before food became her professional language, writing was her first home. From a young age, Katie gravitated toward storytelling as a way to document memory and make meaning. She journaled family vacations and road trips. She wrote a poem in third grade about her family dog after it passed away. Her imagination spilled into dozens of illustrated short stories throughout elementary and middle school.

Writing, she says, gave her something cooking alone couldn’t at that stage of life: a way to connect – to the world, and to herself.

“The more I wrote, the more fulfilled and authentically whole I felt,” Katie explains. She was drawn to beauty in the mundane and wanted to share those moments with others. If her words could spark joy or shift how someone saw a person, a place, or themselves, she felt she had done her job. At the time, food remained personal rather than performative. Journalism made sense. It was the right fit for who she was then.

Chicago brought momentum, opportunity, and prestige – and it took its toll. Katie worked as a food writer before returning to culinary school at Le Cordon Bleu, eventually training under some of the city’s most respected chefs. The kitchens taught her technique and discipline that would shape her career, and she valued the camaraderie of working toward a shared goal. But the pace was unforgiving.

“My inner light was slowly dying out,” she says. Food prepared under rigid time constraints became stressful and competitive. She was burnt out physically and mentally, craving a way of cooking that felt warm and personal rather than rushed and dictated. That chapter, she realizes now, showed her exactly what she didn’t want.

Photographer:  
Victoria C Photography



The clarity came in the early hours of the morning. After a 16-plus-hour shift, she returned home at 1:00 a.m., only to face a 4:30 a.m. alarm for brunch service. Her body was broken, cuts and burns along her forearms, exhaustion settling deep into her bones.

*“This can’t be it,” she remembers thinking.  
“There has to be more than this.”*

She longed for slowness, autonomy, and creative challenge on her own terms. That longing eventually led her back home and into partnership with her mother.

Two Wild Seeds began not as a bakery, but as a way to stay connected. The name itself came from Katie’s older sister, Leslie, during a time of transition when Katie and her mother were preparing to open a brick-and-mortar space in St. Charles, and Leslie had moved across the country.

The original Two Wild Seeds was a lifestyle blog, a shared space for food, beauty, natural remedies, art, nature, and décor. When the bakery opened, the name followed naturally, becoming a physical expression of the family’s creative vision.

The bakery allowed Katie and her mother to share more than recipes. It held their aesthetic, their traditions, and the small personal details they loved (books, candles, jewelry, gifts), woven into the experience of food. Building something with family was both deeply meaningful and undeniably challenging.

The lines between work and personal life blurred. Family dinners often turned into bakery discussions, and boundaries had to be drawn to protect their relationship.

Still, when Katie looks back, those years are among her most cherished memories: late nights dancing in the bakery while preparing thousands of biscuits and cakes, carefully transporting wedding cakes, bonding with a staff that became family. The experience taught her perseverance, patience, confidence, and grace. “Allowing myself to make mistakes along the way and curb my constant desire for perfection,” she says. “I’m still working on that one.”



# The Shift to Motherhood

When the bakery closed in 2021, the feeling was not grief but relief. After twelve years in the food industry, her body was tired. She was pregnant with her second child. Their lease was ending, and the pandemic had devastated their wedding business. Closing the doors marked the end of a chapter, both physically and emotionally.

What followed was quieter, and harder in different ways.

Katie stepped into full-time motherhood, teaching her children the rhythms of slow living: home-cooked meals, gardening, crafting, time outdoors. Much of it felt dreamy. And yet, she questioned herself.

Was she doing enough? Was she letting down her community - or herself? For the first time, she wasn't defined by a title she could point to.



"I spent most of my young adulthood identifying myself by the things I did and the accomplishments I achieved," she reflects. Letting go of those identifiers forced her to learn who she was without them. Over time, she accepted that she didn't need to be producing for anyone else to be fulfilled. Her family was enough.

That philosophy is reflected in the 1905 farmhouse she and her family have been restoring since 2019 - a home that asks for patience daily. Cracked plaster, slanted floors, drafts that come from nowhere. It's imperfect and full of history, and Katie finds beauty in that. Tackling projects slowly, one at a time, has become a reminder to live seasonally and mindfully.

While social media often glorifies spotless kitchens and grand entryways, Katie finds joy in the small details of her own modest home: the victory garden along the driveway, cozy reading nooks, sunlight filling the front room, the elm tree canopying the backyard, the scent of lilacs drifting into the screened-in porch, the squeak of old steps as her children race downstairs each morning.



"There's always beauty in something just slightly broken and imperfect," she says.

Today, Katie still recognizes the barefoot child she once was. She teaches dance barefoot or in socks, grounded by the floor beneath her. She describes herself as free-spirited and fearless, always learning, always evolving. Though she once worried that moving between creative outlets meant never fully mastering one thing, she's made peace with her nature. Change keeps her alive.

Motherhood has reshaped her relationship with time and creativity. While her children now occupy the hours she once spent cooking or writing, she understands that projects can wait. Childhood cannot. "I only get these moments in the here and now with my children at this exact age, on this exact day," she says.

The values she hopes they absorb are simple and profound: appreciation for process, curiosity, independence, and connection to nature. They forage, garden, cook, explore museums, ask questions, and get their hands dirty.

And in those moments, picking berries, foraging for morels, making jam, Katie sometimes feels herself return to that barefoot six-year-old. Only now, she says, it's even better.





## MDW Cares

MDW Cares is a mutual aid network for women navigating life's many transitions, from motherhood to career shifts to divorce and beyond. We connect you with trusted local resources and community support so you don't have to walk the journey alone.

The following pages highlight events, support groups and therapists with immediate openings to help you find care when you need it most.

# MDW February Events



## SELF LOVE WORKSHOP

FEBRUARY 21, 2026 3:30 PM - 5:30 PM

Gather Bakery  
Geneva, IL

**RSVP**

## MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

FEBRUARY 25, 2026 7:15 PM

Batavia Library, Batavia, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP



## COME AS YOU ARE COFFEE: SUPPORT GROUP FOR ALL WOMEN

FEB. 28, 2026 8:00 AM

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP

## DIVORCED MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

MARCH 12, 2026 8:00 AM

Virtual Bi-Weekly Meet Up

Text 630-474-5275 to RSVP

MDW CARES PRESENTS...

# Self-Love:

A GUIDED AFTERNOON OF  
REFLECTION AND CONNECTION

Join us for a thoughtfully guided afternoon of reflection and connection, centered around three essential guideposts of self-love. This gathering is for women who are ready to nurture a deeper relationship with themselves.

3:30 PM -  
5:30 PM

SATURDAY  
FEB. 21

Gather Bakery  
Geneva, IL

\$25 includes a  
cup of tea or  
coffee, journal  
and swag bag.



Sign up  
here!



# Divorced Moms Support Circle

*Single motherhood isn't about perfection, but about learning to trust the quiet strength you carry.*



## Join us virtually!

When: Saturdays 2x monthly

Date: Every other Saturday

Time: 8 AM - 9 AM

Where: Virtual Zoom (link provided after sign up)

Cost: FREE



## A safe space for...

- Divorced moms rebuilding their lives.
- Moms feeling overwhelmed, isolated, or emotionally drained.
- Single moms seeking connection and support.
- Moms navigating co-parenting with a difficult or high-conflict ex.
- Moms currently going through a divorce.
- Moms wanting a community that gets what they're carrying.

Please pre-register here to receive your link:  
Call/text: 630-474-5275 or E-mail: [carrie@noreilahealing.com](mailto:carrie@noreilahealing.com)



# The Board.

We gathered around a table, coffee in hand, and officially came together as the MDW Cares board, marking the beginning of a shared commitment that's been a decade in the making. What started as an idea shaped by lived experience, hard seasons, deep listening, and a desire to support women navigating life transitions has now become a collective mission: to build safe, supportive spaces and real-world resources rooted in care, community, and connection.

Long before this moment, the work was already happening—through small actions, consistent care, and a commitment to community impact over time. With our nonprofit status in place, we're ready to hit the ground running, expanding what we've already been doing to better support women where the need continues to show up. I'm deeply grateful to be joined by these women, whose insight, heart, and lived experience help guide what comes next: (from left to right)

Yewande Banire (Vice President)  
Katie McCall (President)  
Kate Durham (Secretary)  
Elizabeth Rago (Executive Director)  
Sarah Klaper (Treasurer)  
Zoe Sherwin (Community Outreach)

We're honored to serve this community and committed to showing up with care, consistency, laughter, and heart.



[mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com)

# MDW PROVIDERS

At MDW Cares, we don't recommend people willy-nilly. Every professional we refer you to is thoughtfully vetted, because when you're seeking support, quality, trust, and alignment matter. We want you to know that anyone you find here is someone we would confidently recommend to a friend, a sister, or ourselves.

Our referrals must align with our core values of compassion, empowerment, and inclusivity. They must approach their work with empathy, honoring each person's lived experience, and creating spaces where all women and families feel welcomed, respected, and supported. That's why we're proud to feature three trusted professionals below, each of whom reflects these values in both their work and impact.

If you need additional resources, visit [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com)



**Laura Jaramillo, LCPC**  
Glen Ellyn & Naperville, IL



**Emma Ortiz, M.S. Ed,  
LCPC**  
Aurora, IL



**Ashley Roberts, PhD,  
LCPC**  
Wheaton, IL

With nearly two decades of experience, Laura weaves clinical trauma therapy, somatic healing, and spiritual reconnection to help clients come home to safety, softness, and a deeper sense of wholeness.

Her approach honors the truth that healing is not something to fix or rush, but a relationship.

"I've been there. I know what it's like to feel fractured—to long for safety, softness, and something deeper than coping. That longing is what led me to study not just psychology, but the sacred art of healing."

Emma helps clients reframe therapy as a shared journey rather than something to fear or "fix." Working with children, teens, couples, and families, she blends evidence-based approaches like CBT, DBT, and the ARC model through a trauma-informed, culturally responsive lens that honors each person's strengths.

Her work is rooted in creating a safe, non-judgmental space where differences are respected, trust is built, and both challenges and victories are held with care.

Ashley specializes in supporting people through grief in all its forms; from the loss of loved ones to shifts in identity, faith, and life seasons. She offers a compassionate, steady space to make sense of what hurts, normalize the anxiety or sadness that can accompany change, and reconnect with self-understanding.

Grounded in the belief that healing happens in the right environment, Ashley also incorporates Enneagram coaching for clients seeking deeper insight and growth.

 [support@lauralistsens.com](mailto:support@lauralistsens.com)

 [lauralistsens.com](http://lauralistsens.com)

 [@laura\\_listens\\_](https://www.instagram.com/laura_listens_)

 630-733-9108

 [gracefultherapy.com](http://gracefultherapy.com)

 [@gracefultherapyllc](https://www.instagram.com/@gracefultherapyllc)

 [hello@evergreencounseling.co](mailto:hello@evergreencounseling.co)

 630-480-0060

 [evergreencounseling.co](http://evergreencounseling.co)

# RESOURCE

This guide was created for women launching their own businesses with a focus on protecting mental health while chasing big dreams.

Inside, you'll find practical tools, reflection prompts, and gentle reminders that boundaries, rest, and support are part of success, not distractions from it.

Think of it as a grounded companion to help you build confidently, care for yourself deeply, and define success on your own terms.

**the modern  
domestic  
woman**



A MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE FOR  
WOMEN STARTING THEIR  
OWN BUSINESS

MDW guides help you unpack topics and provide practical tools to help you in your everyday.

Reviewed and approved by a licensed mental health practitioner.

MDW FREE DOWNLOAD

on [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com)

 DOWNLOAD

# BODY CARE





# Love: A Yoga Perspective

by Sara Curtin  
Flower of Life Yoga & Wellness Center

# WHERE MOVEMENT BECOMES MEANING



In yoga, loving the body is how we feel life moving through us, breath by breath. Just by arriving on the mat, we open a quiet moment of connection with ourselves, even in uncertainty. This practice is not about perfection, or appearance. It's about meeting our bodies where they are in that moment.

From a yogic lens, the body is a sacred temple of consciousness. It is the vessel through which we experience joy and grief, sensation and stillness, intuition and connection. To love the body is to honor it as a living expression of spirit, rather than an object to be judged or controlled.

On the mat, this love begins with tuning in and listening. We feel the rhythm of breath, the language of sensation, the signals of ease and fatigue. Instead of pushing past limits, we meet edges with awareness. We pause. We soften. Each posture becomes a conversation, and each inhale an act of reverence. In this way, the practice becomes devotional, not performative.

A year ago, during a Holistic Loving Workshop with Andy Mommaya, I was reminded of how deeply we are cared for by our bodies. Our hearts beat for us 100,000 times a day without request or recognition. Even something as ordinary as grocery shopping carries unseen connection. Countless hands around the world touch the food that nourishes us. Support exists everywhere, even when we forget to notice.

That reflection shifted how I relate to my body and my life. It reminded me that our bodies are always loving us, sustaining us, and carrying us forward, even when we are critical, impatient, or disconnected. It also revealed how interconnected our lives truly are, woven together through invisible acts of care.

Loving all aspects of life does not mean everything feels good. It means making space for all of it. The beauty and the discomfort. The strength and the softness. The seasons of clarity and the seasons of uncertainty. Through breath and mindful movement, yoga teaches us to stay present with what is, rather than resisting or rushing through it. We learn to hold complexity with grace.

Loving all aspects of life does not mean everything feels good. It means making space for all of it. The beauty and the discomfort. The strength and the softness. The seasons of clarity and the seasons of uncertainty. Through breath and mindful movement, yoga teaches us to stay present with what is, rather than resisting or rushing through it. We learn to hold complexity with grace.

One of my favorite spiritual teachers, Ram Dass, reminds us that love is not just an emotion or an action, but a fundamental state of being. True love radiates from within, it sees the divine in everyone, and is practiced through simply "being." In this way, loving our bodies and our lives becomes a way of moving in harmony with the deeper, universal flow of life. It is an invitation to come home. To the breath, To the body and to the simple knowing that you are worthy of love, exactly as you are.

- Sara

## About the Author:

Sara Curtin is the founder and owner of Flower of Life Yoga & Wellness Center, in St. Charles, housed in a 100-year-old ivy-covered cottage, one of St. Charles' historic treasures.



With its original studio pillars and century-old gardens, the space offers a unique backdrop for yoga, Reiki, Acupuncture, and Sound Therapy. Sara began her yoga journey in 2016, earning her RYT 200 and Children's Yoga certifications in Costa Rica, where she also explored transformative practices like Breathwork and Kundalini Yoga.

Since then, she has taught thousands of hours across Hot Yoga, Restorative, Vinyasa, and Yoga Strength, earning her E-RYT designation and co-facilitating teacher trainings. At Flower of Life, Sara blends traditional wisdom with strength-based approaches to help students build resilience, heal, and thrive. Off the mat, she enjoys early mornings, time outdoors with her family, and is currently exploring Tai Chi.

 LEARN MORE

# HAIR



Purple Rain is a cold-weather essential for gray and blonde hair, neutralizing brassiness while deeply hydrating strands that take a beating from Midwest winters.

Organic açai oil and aloe vera smooth frizz, boost shine, and protect hair from dry heat, icy air, and everything in between.

One bar, 75–90 washes, and hair that looks healthy even when the windchill says otherwise.

Purple Rain Shampoo & Conditioner Bar

HUMBLY ORGANICS





# Loving My Body Through Life's Changes

by Elizabeth Rago  
MDW Editor

## LOVING MY BODY

For a long time, I thought loving my body meant fixing it. Improving it. Getting it back to what it used to be. But life had other plans.

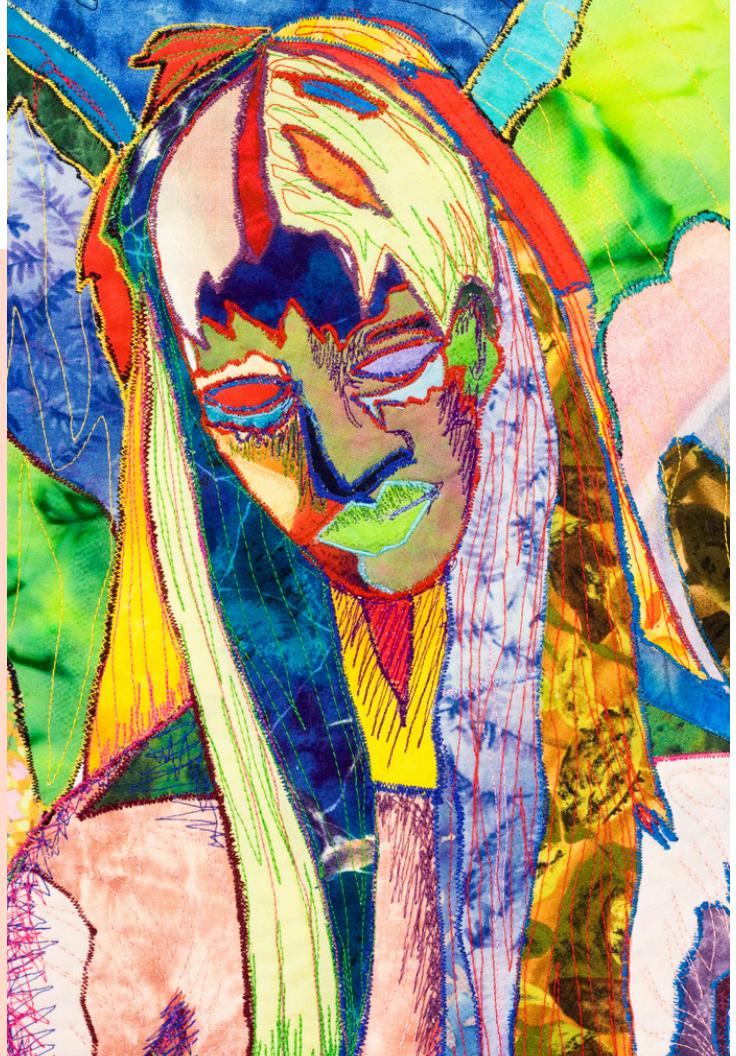
Body changes have a way of sneaking up on us. Sometimes through motherhood, sometimes through hormones, illness, stress, or simply the passage of time. One day, you catch your reflection and realize the body you're living in doesn't feel familiar anymore. And then you ask yourself:

*When did this happen?*

I used to believe progress had to be visible and measurable. Pounds lost, miles logged, routines followed without interruption. But when my body started changing in ways I couldn't muscle through, that definition stopped working.

What I'm learning now is that progress can be small. Sometimes painfully small.

Some days it looks like movement that feels gentle instead of punishing. Other days, it looks like resting without berating myself. It might be drinking water, stretching for five minutes, or noticing when I'm being cruel to myself and choosing to stop. (I wouldn't talk to a friend that way, so why do I do it to myself?)



## I Had to Stop Comparing My Body to Someone Else's Highlight Reel

Scrolling can be brutal when you're already feeling disconnected from your body. I've lost count of the times I've seen a post about "just staying consistent" and felt like it was written for someone living in an entirely different body than mine.

What I keep reminding myself, and what I want to remind you, is that we don't know the full story behind anyone else's body. What we do know is the full complexity of our own.

Comparison has never made me feel more motivated. It's only made me feel more ashamed. These days, when I catch myself spiraling, I try to pause and name one thing my body did for me that day, even if it's breathing, taking one lap around the block instead of knocking out 5 miles on my walking pad, or resisting the urge to press through when I know I should rest.

# Here are 3 Things I've Learned As I Try to Have a Better Relationship with My Body

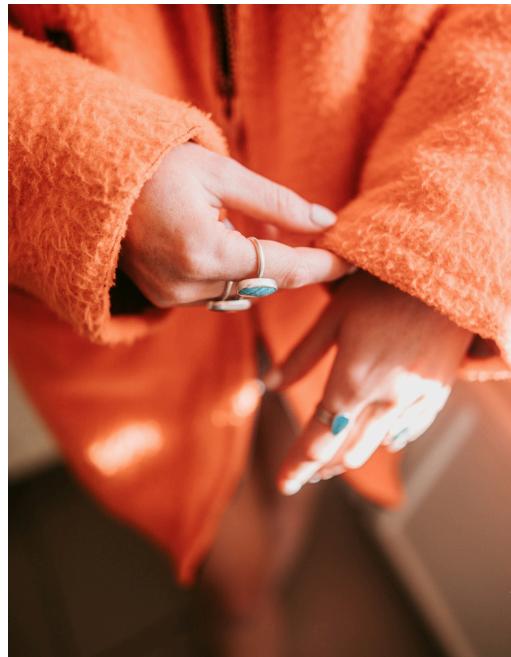
## #1 The Mirror Isn't the Villain

I've stood in front of the mirror and picked myself apart more times than I care to admit. I've mourned the body I used to have while ignoring everything my current body has carried me through.

Here's the internal dialog I'm still practicing: the mirror doesn't know my story.

It doesn't know the exhaustion, the healing, the survival. It doesn't know the days my body showed up for me when I didn't think I could.

When I slow down and look with more compassion, I can see strength instead of loss. And on days when I can't? I try for neutrality. Sometimes being kind to myself is simply not tearing myself down and instead saying out loud, "I'm doing the best I can with what I have."



## #2 Getting Dressed Shouldn't Feel Like a Moral Failing

Let's talk about clothes. Or more specifically, sizing, which is wildly inconsistent and often designed to make us feel like we're the problem.

I've had to remind myself more than once: my body didn't fail my clothes, my clothes stopped fitting my life.

I'm learning to choose pieces that feel good now, not someday. Clothes that complement, breathe, and don't demand I shrink to deserve them. Comfort isn't giving up; it's listening to the needs of my body.

## #3

### I Didn't Heal My Relationship with My Body Alone

One of the most important shifts for me was allowing myself to talk about my body honestly, especially in therapy. Naming the grief, frustration, and anger out loud helped loosen their grip.

Body changes aren't just physical. They're emotional. And we deserve support while we navigate them.

I discussed specific goals with my therapist and shared that I wanted to have a better relationship with exercise, food, and my self-image. These were realistic and supportive goals, not quick fixes.

Most importantly, these steps aligned with my values and where I was at physically and mentally – not where I thought I should be.



## #4

### I Had a Plan & Coping Skills for Tough Days

There have been many tough days. My plan for those stressful moments is to slow the spiral before it becomes a full-blown meltdown. Here are a few things that help me:

- I practice affirmations (EX, “I love my body for how it carries me through life”).
- I give myself permission to take a day off and rest without guilt. (Because when I’m feeling the most irritable about my body, I’m tired.)
- I focus on deep breathing or mindfulness techniques to calm negative thoughts.



I don't have this all figured out. I still have hard days. There are moments when my body feels unfamiliar, uncooperative, or simply tired in ways I didn't expect. But I'm learning that loving my body through life's changes doesn't mean loving every part of it every day.

It means choosing compassion over criticism. Curiosity over control. Listening instead of pushing. And allowing rest when rest is needed, without guilt or apology.

It also means paying close attention to whom I let into my life. I surround myself with women who don't criticize me or question my worth, but remind me on the days I forget, that my body is not a problem to solve. Women who model softness, strength, humor, and honesty. Women who speak about their own bodies with care, and who extend that same care to mine.

If you're in a season where your body feels unfamiliar or frustrating, know this: you are not alone. There is room for grace here. There is room to move slowly.

You're allowed to take this one small, imperfect step at a time.

*XO, Elizabeth*

"You can be the most beautiful person in the world and everybody sees light and rainbows when they look at you, but if you yourself don't know it, all of that doesn't even matter.

Every second that you spend on doubting your worth, every moment that you use to criticize yourself, is a second of your life wasted, is a moment of your life thrown away.

It's not like you have forever, so don't waste any of your seconds. Don't throw even one of your moments away." - C. JoyBell C.

## About the Author:

Elizabeth Rago is the founder of MDW Media LLC, a women's media company, and MDW Cares, a nonprofit dedicated to helping women navigate through life's toughest transitions.

Through MDW, she celebrates and supports organizations that help women from all backgrounds find strength, healing, and connection.

Elizabeth built MDW on the belief that empathy and kindness are not signs of weakness but acts of courage, especially in a culture that often forgets their power. Her work champions the idea that when women come together, share their stories, and lift one another up, real change begins.



LOW LIVING



# RITUAL



These handmade mini mindful candles are the perfect way to slow down, 20 minutes at a time.

Made from 100% ethically sourced beeswax, each honey-scented candle burns clean and calm, turning a small pause into a meaningful ritual.

Thoughtfully designed with a brass stand and refill option, this is wellness that's simple, sustainable, and doable for busy gals.

Mini Mindful Moments ® Candle Set

MODO CREATIVE



# KITS

This punch needle kit makes learning a new craft feel refreshingly doable. No overwhelm, no guesswork. Every kit includes all your supplies plus clear video instruction making for an easy entry point into slow, satisfying making. Even better, The Urban Acres offers a whole lineup of kits, from florals to whimsical designs, plus kid-friendly options – making it simple for everyone to find a pattern that sparks joy.



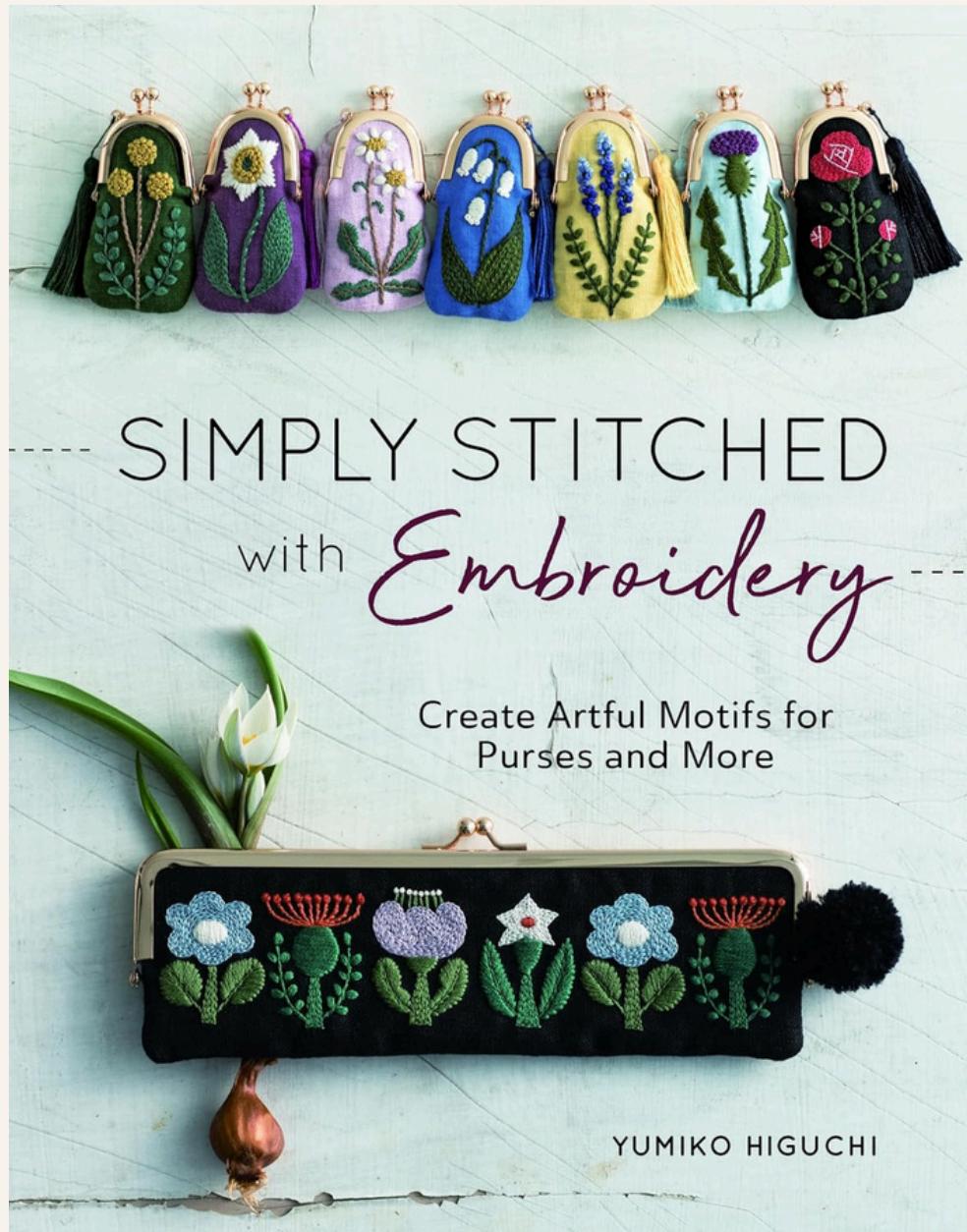
Blue Floral Punch Needle Kit – Beginner Kit

THE URBAN ACRES



# BOOK

This charming book invites you into Yumiko Higuchi's world of folk-inspired florals and animals, pairing her signature embroidery motifs with beautiful, functional bag projects. With clear step-by-step photos, full-size templates, and approachable techniques, it's an inspiring blend of creativity and practicality.



Simply Stitched with Embroidery by Yumiko Higuchi

Shop at your favorite book seller!



## RADICCHIO & ENDIVE SALAD

By Katie McCall

# Finding Freshness in Winter Greens

The winters are long, cold, and harsh here in Illinois – and oftentimes, I find myself stuck in a rut, preparing a rather mundane cycle of family meals. Though hearty and comforting, they tend to be carb-forward, lacking the effortless vibrancy of my spring and summer dishes. So on my most recent trip to the grocery store, I diverged from my normal route in the produce section and forced myself to choose two seasonal ingredients – radicchio and endive – that I rarely (if ever) cook with.

Full disclosure: Radicchio and endive are both members of the chicory family, known for their distinct bitter taste; however, because these greens are currently in season, they'll naturally yield a milder, sweeter flavor. Nonetheless, one should be prepared for a less delicate flavor than accustomed to with most lettuces.

Well-knowing the intense flavor profiles of these lettuces (particularly when prepared raw), I wanted to incorporate other notes to achieve a palatable balance: brightness and tang from fresh dill, a pop of nutty, salty Parmesan, a pungent yet sweet kick from thinly sliced red onions, and a super simple honey-forward vinaigrette to curb the overarching bitterness.



My four-year-old daughter helped prepare the salad, and we shared a few bites afterward.

Though slightly too bitter for her taste, she happily thumbed through the remaining components, grabbing bites of arugula, dill and Parmesan. The more I ate it, the more I fell in love with the complexity of flavors ... each bite presented something different and almost addicting.

Aside from stepping outside of my comfort zone and adding a new salad to the menu lineup, these greens boast some serious health benefits. Radicchio is not only high in antioxidants, but also in vitamins and minerals, such as copper, zinc, and Vitamin K.

With its bright flavors, this salad makes a delicious accompaniment to any main dish, especially unctuous braised meats, roasted chicken, or a hearty bean soup. I encourage you, too, to try something new this month – something that might even scare you a bit ... chances are, you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Enjoy!

– Katie

## METHOD

Begin by thoroughly washing and drying the greens. Then, thinly slice the radicchio and endive, as well as the red onion. Place all of the lettuces and onions into a bowl; top with the fresh dill and Parmesan. Set aside.

In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, vinegar, honey, salt, and pepper. Whisk until well-combined, then drizzle over the salad. Toss gently until evenly coated.

Serves 2.

## INGREDIENTS

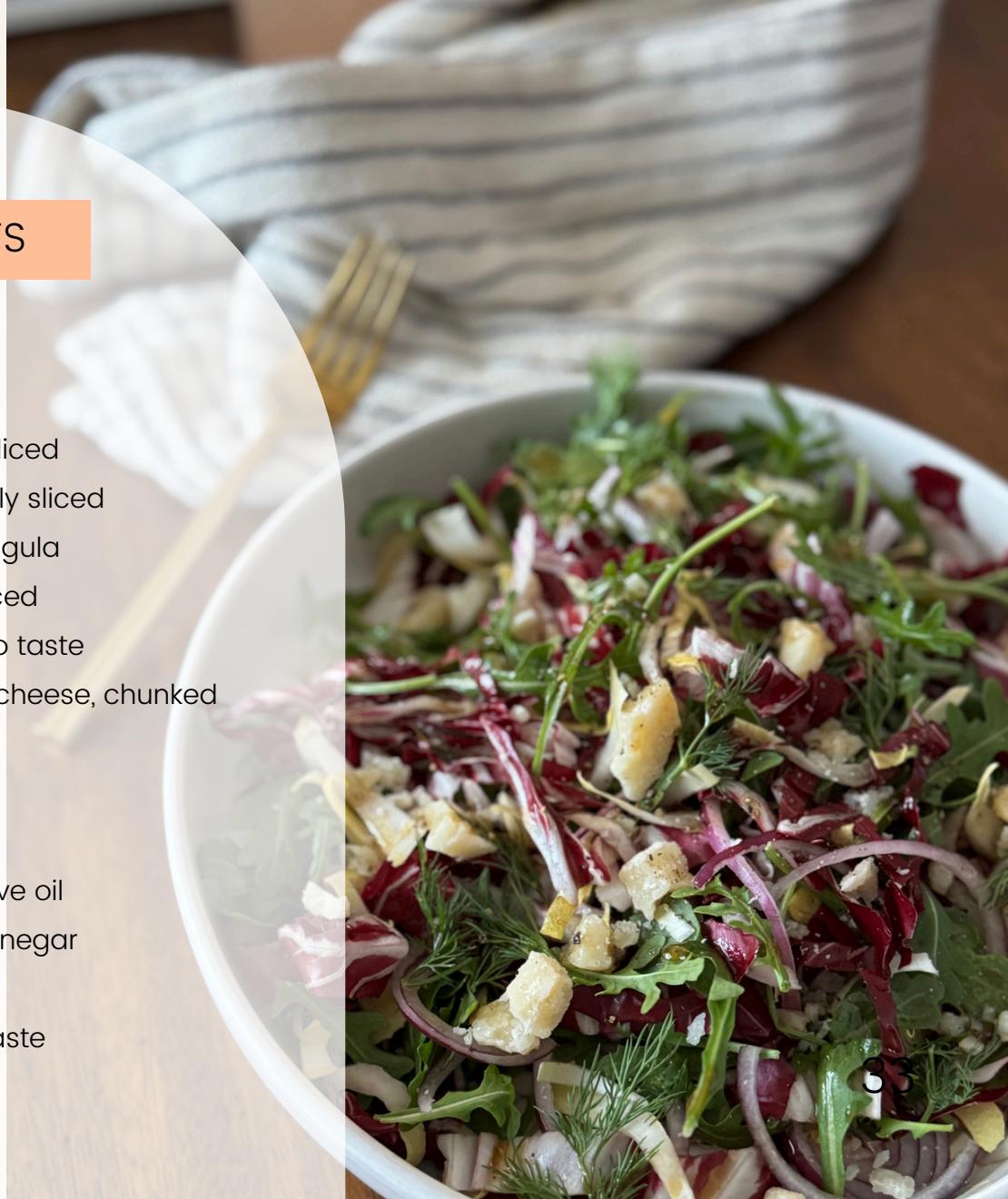
Recipe

Salad:

- 1 c. radicchio, thinly sliced
- 1 head of endive, thinly sliced
- 1 large handful of arugula
- $\frac{1}{4}$  red onion, finely sliced
- 1-2 sprigs fresh dill; to taste
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c. fresh Parmesan cheese, chunked or coarsely grated

Fig & Honey Vinaigrette:

- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp fig balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp raw honey
- Salt and pepper to taste



## *About the Author:*

Katie McCall is a Midwestern writer, cook, and community builder with a deep-rooted love for nature, food, and family. Raised in the rural suburbs of Chicago, she spent her childhood foraging for morel mushrooms, picking green beans, and learning early on that nourishment is about far more than what's on the plate.

She holds a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Illinois and later honed her culinary skills at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts. Katie went on to co-found Two Wild Seeds, a gluten-free bakery she ran alongside her mother in St. Charles, Illinois. Though the bakery closed in 2021, her relationship with food—as storytelling, care, and connection—continues through her writing and creative work.

Katie currently serves as President of MDW Cares, where she helps guide the organization's mission to create accessible, supportive resources for women navigating life transitions. Her leadership is grounded in the belief that community care, honest conversation, and small daily acts of nourishment can change lives.

When she's not writing or cooking, Katie can be found tending her garden, restoring her 1905 farmhouse, wandering farmers' markets and antique shops, or experimenting with new ways to live thoughtfully and creatively. She is endlessly curious, deeply grounded, and always searching for what makes life feel both meaningful and delicious.



# What's your sign?





## CAPRICORN (DEC. 22 – JAN. 19)

You came into the world mid-winter, which means you're wired for endurance, but lately, you're craving delight, not discipline. February invites you to loosen your grip just enough to remember that structure doesn't have to be joyless. You don't need a new plan. You need a new perspective. **Something new to try this week:** Do one task in the "wrong" order on purpose. Start with dessert. Write the email after the walk. See what happens.



## CANCER (JUNE 21 – JULY 22)

Your inner world is louder than usual, and that's not a problem; it's information. February asks you to listen without immediately fixing, explaining, or reframing. There's wisdom in your first, quiet reactions. **Something new to try this week:** Write a note to yourself that doesn't have a message to improve your body or spirit. Raw feelings encouraged.



## AQUARIUS (JAN. 20 – FEB. 18)

Ah yes, the birthday sign everyone thinks they understand. This season isn't about hearts or romance; it's about visibility. You're being asked to take up space without explaining yourself. No disclaimers. No pre-emptive apologies. Just presence. **Something new to try this week:** Wear something that makes you feel slightly overdressed for your own life. Even if you're just going to the grocery store.



## LEO (JULY 23 – AUG. 22)

You're used to being the spark, the leader, the one who brings the energy. February flips the script and asks: What happens when you receive instead? Let someone else plan. Decide. Initiate. **Something new to try this week:** Say "surprise me" and mean it - about food, plans, or even a conversation topic.



## PISCES (FEB. 19 – MAR. 20)

You're standing at the edge of something new, whether you've named it yet or not. February is a liminal hallway for you - a place to pause before the door opens. Don't rush. Curiosity is doing important background work right now. **Something new to try this week:** Ask one question you don't actually need the answer to, just to see where the conversation goes.



## VIRGO (AUG. 23 – SEPT. 22)

Your brain is in optimization mode, but February suggests that not everything needs refining. Some things are allowed to stay half-done, imperfect, or unresolved for a bit longer. **Something new to try this week:** Stop one task at 80% complete and walk away for a bit to regroup your thought process. Come back and edit without abandon. (Psssst, the end result will be so much better than pushing through.)



## ARIES (MAR. 21 – APR. 19)

Your energy is buzzing, but it's unfocused, like a thousand browser tabs open at once. February isn't asking you to do more. It's asking you to choose what deserves your fire. Not everything needs your spark. **Something new to try this week:** Delete one app, unsubscribe from one list, or abandon one obligation that drains you.



## LIBRA (SEPT. 23 – OCT. 22)

You're renegotiating balance, between yourself and others, effort and ease. February brings clarity around where you've been over-compromising. Harmony doesn't require self-erasure. **Something new to try this week:** Say no without providing a follow-up explanation. Just this once, and see how it feels.



## TAURUS (APR. 20 – MAY 20)

You're craving beauty, but not the curated kind. You want texture. Mess. Proof that something was made by human hands. February invites you to slow your consumption and increase your creation, however small. **Something new to try this week:** Make something purely decorative and slightly impractical. A collage. A simmer pot. A terrible poem.



## SCORPIO (OCT. 23 – NOV. 21)

You're shedding something. An assumption, a role, an old narrative. February doesn't demand transformation, just honesty about what no longer fits. That awareness alone is powerful. **Something new to try this week:** Light a candle and name (out loud or privately) one thing you're done carrying. Then, moisturize.



## GEMINI (MAY 21 – JUNE 20)

You've been holding a lot of other people's thoughts, feelings, and logistics. February offers a chance to set some of that down - not dramatically, just intentionally. You're allowed to be unreachable sometimes. **Something new to try this week:** Leave your phone in another room for one hour and notice what you reach for instead.



## SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22 – DEC. 21)

You're dreaming again, but this time with more wisdom and fewer illusions. February supports grounded imagination. Visions that can really take shape, not just live in your head. **Something new to try this week:** Take one dreamy idea and give it a physical form: a sketch, a list, a voice memo. Ooooooh! Can you feel it coming to life??

# WOMEN'S HEALTH





## Column: Asking for a Friend

by Katie McCall

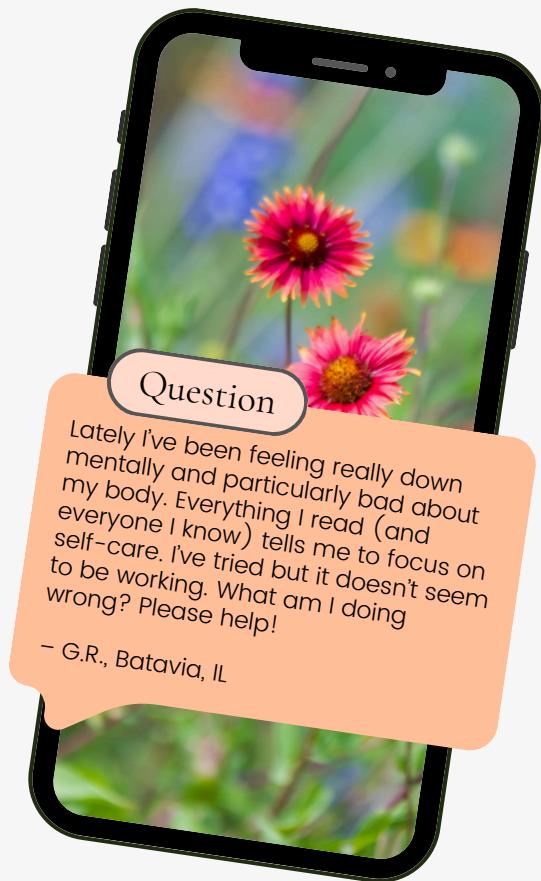
Hi, G.R.! First and foremost, I want to assure you – you’re not alone! I, too, amongst many women, feel this on a daily basis, especially after the holidays have passed and we’re constantly hammered with societal “New Year, New You” rhetoric. We’re constantly told how to eat healthier, tighten our waistlines, and achieve younger-looking skin in three easy steps.

In recent years, self-care has been a buzzword filled with promise to manage stress, boost mood, and mitigate burnout ... but does it actually work?

Red light therapy, “everything” showers, connecting with loved ones, meditation, hot tea by the fireplace, nourishing foods, daily exercise, 8-plus hours of sleep – the list goes on. I’ve tried them all, and while they might be a band-aid at the moment, offering temporary relief, I’m here to tell you that the cut beneath needs attention first.

The intention behind self-care is to focus on the mind, body, and spirit to better one’s overall mental and physical health, yet one cannot fully commit to a plan of self-care without first addressing the issue of **self-love**. Self-love goes deeper than self-care; it is a commitment and practice of learning to accept, appreciate, and care for oneself unconditionally ... something that certainly cannot happen overnight or be fixed with a superfruit face mask.

From my own experience, I’ve learned that the most striking difference between self-care and self-love is that self-love will inherently look very different for each individual – there is no one-size-fits-all instant fix. This naturally removes the pressure of whether or not “it’s working.” Self-love is based solely on personal experience, desires, and ultimately, discovering what sparks authentic joy in one’s soul. So where does one begin on this complicated (often messy) journey toward self-love? Let’s dive in.



### Question

Lately I've been feeling really down mentally and particularly bad about my body. Everything I read (and everyone I know) tells me to focus on self-care. I've tried but it doesn't seem to be working. What am I doing wrong? Please help!

– G.R., Batavia, IL



*Have a question  
you'd like to ask Katie?*

Life, relationships, style, home decor, food, feelings – we’re talking about it!

Send your question to Katie at  
[katie.mdwcares@gmail.com](mailto:katie.mdwcares@gmail.com)

And don’t forget to follow her on IG

[@katielmccall](https://www.instagram.com/katielmccall)





After much introspection and personal research, I've broken self-love into three categories to serve as guideposts:

- Self-Awareness & Self-Compassion
- Establishing Healthy Boundaries
- Cultivating Personal Joy

Self-awareness begins with a raw, deep look inward, identifying potential triggers that create feelings of “less than.” This is commonly linked to physical vanity – appearance, weight – as well as internal negative self-talk that questions our value and worth within the world and our relationships. Past life experiences, relationships, and personal trauma are often responsible for such feelings, so the goal here is to simply identify them, becoming hyper-aware of why we think and feel the way we do.

In the same breath, once we've identified the triggers, we must learn the art of self-compassion. This speaks to removing blame and treating your inner self with grace, kindness, and understanding. As one would easily offer a friend or family member consolation in times of distress or need, allowing yourself the same compassion is key. It's easy to have everyone else's back – but how often do we have our own? Striving to be your own cheerleader and advocate is essential.

Once we've explored our triggers and sources of negative self-talk, we need to create healthy boundaries that allow us to lean into areas of our lives that make us feel safe and nurtured rather than unstable and threatened. Begin by analyzing emotional and physical interaction with friends, family, partners, co-workers – even acquaintances or complete strangers on social media. Embrace who or what makes you feel seen, loved, and celebrated ... and slowly step back from the rest.

In terms of physical boundaries, consider what type of socialization aligns with your personal growth and happiness. Though difficult at first, learning to decipher between environments of comfort – versus those that will knowingly ensue feelings of guilt or shame – will be critical toward your path of peace.

Last but not least, we arrive at my favorite category of self-love: cultivating personal joy.

Close your eyes and think about who or what makes you feel warm and fuzzy inside ... What do you immediately gravitate toward? What are you naturally good at? For me, my children, creative work, and personal rituals make me feel authentically whole. The notion of creating something from nothing ... cooking a homemade meal, crafting with my kids, writing, planting a garden, or the intentional process of preparing matcha in the morning.

These acts are simple yet meaningful and further support the overall feeling of self-love because they magnify the essence of who I am – not who society tells me to be.



## At-Home Practice:

Now it's your turn! Rip off the bandaid, grab a journal, and start putting pen to paper. Find the category of self-love that immediately speaks to you and jot down any thoughts that come to mind.

Another method is creating a two-column list of what you love about yourself and then the areas that cause discomfort – physically and emotionally.

Next, analyze the list using the tools of self-love mentioned above:

What are the triggers? What boundaries can be set? And ultimately, how can you slowly incorporate daily acts of self-care to further support self-love and spark joy in your life?

Trust the process and give yourself grace, my friend. - *Katie*

*Katie's Faves:*  
Softcover Journal &  
Gel Pens from  
Harvey's Tales  
in Geneva, IL



*Katie's Ritual:*  
Preparing Matcha with  
a Matcha Ceremonial  
Kit from Tea Tree  
in Batavia, IL.



# HEALING

Sage Healing's essential oil services use high-quality, pharmaceutical-grade oils derived from plants, herbs, and roots to support the body's natural balance and sense of well-being.

Each session follows a thoughtfully designed protocol of 8–10 oils, layered along the spine, scalp, and feet to gently support different body systems.

The experience is deeply grounding and restorative, designed to encourage relaxation, immune support, and the body's own ability to reset and release what no longer serves it.



Healing Oil Therapy

SAGE HEALING COLLECTIVE



GIFTING



# LOVE BUG



Each of these porcelain little beings is completely one of a kind! Hand-carved, detailed, and finished with movable wire legs and antennae so they can strike their own tiny pose.

Glazed in layered color with a glossy finish that won't fade, they're full of quiet personality and charm. We love little bits of art that make us smile every time we notice it.

Porcelain Love Bug

CLAY HIVE CO.





# dottir

Dottir Shop is rooted in founder Lauren's Nordic heritage, drawing inspiration from Scandinavian women who dress for themselves. Embracing simplicity, function, and effortless elegance over fleeting trends.

[www.dottir.shop](http://www.dottir.shop)



# POUCH



Zeebra Tall Tool Pouch

ATENTI

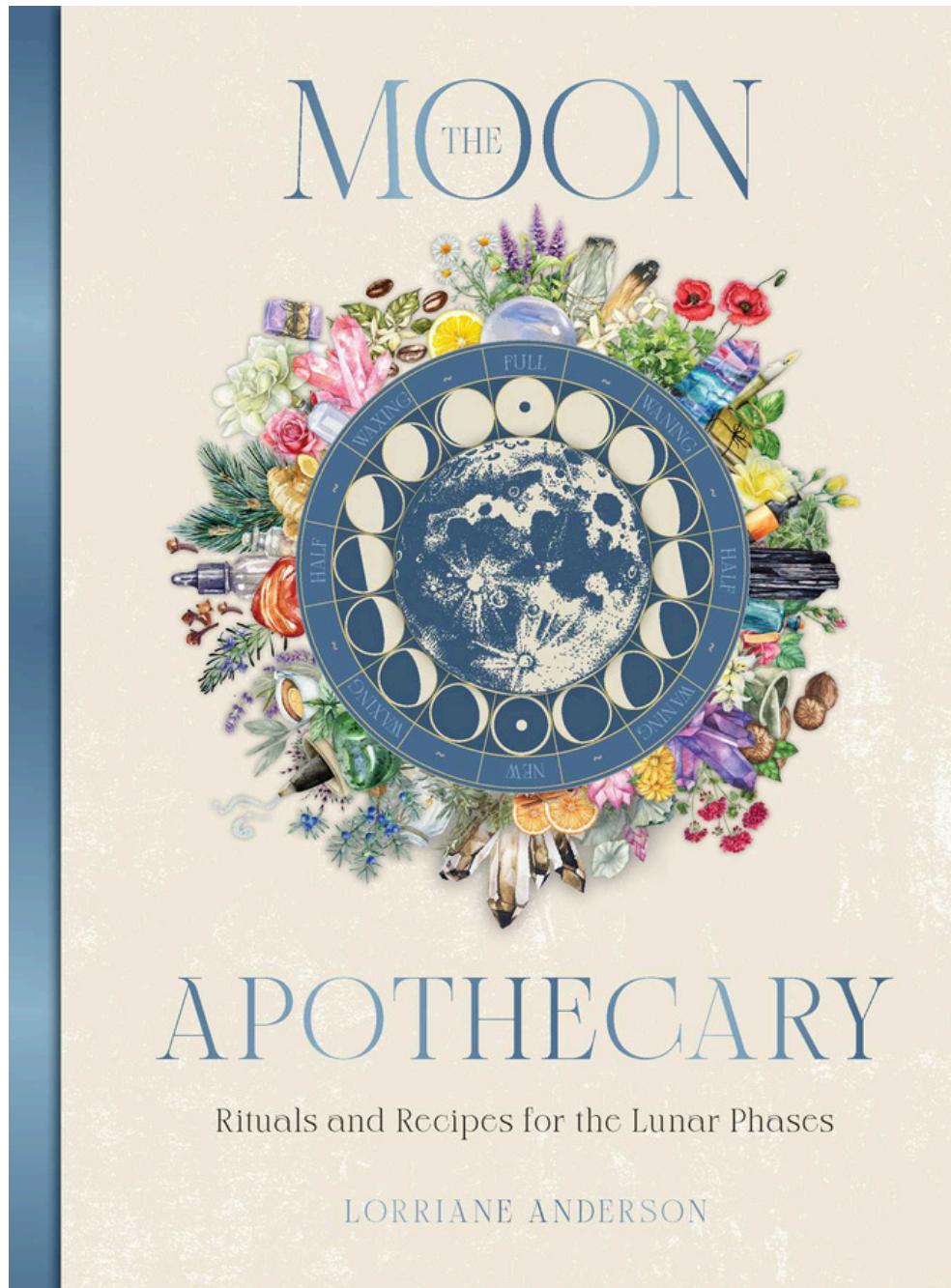


This velvet zebra pouch is proof that practical can still be fun. Designed for needlework tools but perfectly happy moonlighting as a wallet or casual clutch.

With a hot pink velvet front, zebra-print back, and water-repellent lining, it keeps essentials organized while adding a pop of personality to whatever you're carrying (or creating).

# BOOK

Part lunar almanac, part spellbook for everyday life, this whimsical guide invites you to sync your self-care with the moon's many moods. Filled with moon-phase rituals, beauty potions, teas, baths, and small moments of magic, it helps you turn intention into nourishment, one glowing, cosmic routine at a time.



Moon Apothecary by Lorriane Anderson

Shop at your favorite book seller!

# SCENT



We've never met an Illuminate Space candle that we didn't swoon over, and this Love Candle Mood Box is no exception.

With six surprise scents, each paired with an affirmation and simple activity, this set is a cozy, heart-opening experience that celebrates love in all its forms (including the kind you give yourself).

LOVE: Candle Mood Box

ILLUMINATE SPACE



HOME





# Your Home Is Giving You Feedback: Here's How to Listen

by Blakely Kresl

# How do we create spaces that reflect our inner world or the inner world we're growing toward?

There's a subtle relationship between how we feel and the spaces we move through each day. When our environment feels supportive, it's easier to feel settled. When something feels off in our space, we often feel it internally too.

Stopping, or rather slowing down to notice our own signals, invites us to learn what makes us feel comfortable in a space, and more importantly, why. We all deserve to come home to a space that feels supportive and reflects whatever it is we want to feel.

Think about the spaces where you spend the most time. Our environments serve a purpose beyond aesthetics. They can energize us, restore us, or quietly drain us. We have the power to notice what depletes and what replenishes, and to make small, intentional shifts (additions or removals) in each room to feel more purposeful.

This process isn't just about rooms, it's about listening. This can look like many things, but at its core, it means noticing how a space makes you feel and trusting those responses. Whether you're looking to redecorate, revamp, shift the atmosphere of your space, or ignite something new within yourself, here is a gentle guide to noticing what your space is asking for.

*First and foremost, I invite you to wonder.*

Take a little extra time tonight. Hold your cup of tea. Walk through your space more slowly than usual. Notice what comes up. Let yourself listen. Quietly take in your inner dialogue and just take your space in.

Guide yourself through these questions.

*Start with noticing.*

Where in your home do you actually relax without trying?  
Which room do you end up in at the end of the day?  
Where do you sit or stand when you need a moment to breathe?  
Which space feels easiest to be in right now?  
Which room do you linger in without thinking about it?



*Name the spaces that feel loud or draining.*

No judgment, just observation.

- Are there any rooms you just avoid or rush through?
- Where do you feel overstimulated, cluttered, or tense?
- Which spaces feel unfinished or quietly nagging?

The space isn't failing. You're simply receiving feedback here.



*Clarify how you want each space to support you if it's not already.*

This can be about both function and feeling, not just aesthetics. Some examples that may resonate:

- Kitchen: energizing, expressive, alive
- Bedroom: simple, quiet, calming
- Living room: grounded, welcoming
- Bathroom: clean, soothing, restorative

Ask yourself:

"How do I want to feel when I'm in this room?"

# Notice what's helping vs. what's not

- What already works in this space?
- What pulls at my attention?
- What feels like friction, even if it's small?

Often it's not "too much stuff," but misaligned stuff.

Things that may simply need to be relocated, repurposed, or released.



Now, experiment with one small shift (choose one room) and most importantly, take your time

Nothing too extravagant. Just one change you can make right now. Here are some ideas:

?

What's one thing you could remove that might make this space feel lighter?

?

Would better lighting, fewer surfaces, or one clear spot help here?

?

Is there something you use daily that could live somewhere more convenient?

?

If you changed just one thing, what would make the biggest difference?

Your home evolves with you.

Your needs change. Your space can too. Creating a home that truly reflects you takes time because you are ever-changing, and that's a good thing. Reminders to keep with you as you shift your space:

*Homes or personal environments aren't meant to be static.  
Life phases deserve different kinds of support.  
It's normal and okay to outgrow your own spaces.*

There is often a pause between noticing something feels off and deciding what to do about it. In that pause, we have space to check in with ourselves and understand what we need in that moment. What might feel unfinished at first is often just space. Space to adjust, refine, and support ourselves in a new way.

So much of our daily experience in our environment is shaped by these small choices.

When we give ourselves permission to respond thoughtfully, rather than react automatically to feel a sense of completion, change feels more possible. Our spaces don't need to be perfect to support us. They just need to meet us where we are.



## About the Author:

Blakely Kresl  
Women's Wellness & Lifestyle Writer

Blakely is a contributing writer for The Modern Domestic Woman and a freelance writer, content creator, and social media strategist with a deep love for working alongside small businesses and community-driven organizations. With hands-on experience across marketing, PR, and brand strategy, she specializes in helping purpose-led brands tell their stories in ways that feel authentic, human, and connective.

She has supported mission-based companies like FemPAQ, a sustainable menstrual health brand focused on period equity and destigmatization, and Asami Naturals, an African tea company rooted in tradition and wellness. Whether she's developing content, coordinating events, managing farmers market outreach, or shaping digital campaigns, Blakely brings curiosity, empathy, and a community-first mindset to every project, believing that the most meaningful brands are built through shared stories and genuine connection.

Reach out to learn more about working with Blakely at  
[blakelykreslmedia@gmail.com](mailto:blakelykreslmedia@gmail.com)



[blakelykreslmedia.com](http://blakelykreslmedia.com)



# TEA TOWEL

Beautiful design meets real-life utility.

Geometry towels are crafted from recycled microfiber that dries faster than cotton, absorbs more, and stays fresher between uses.

An everyday essential that works smarter and treads lighter.



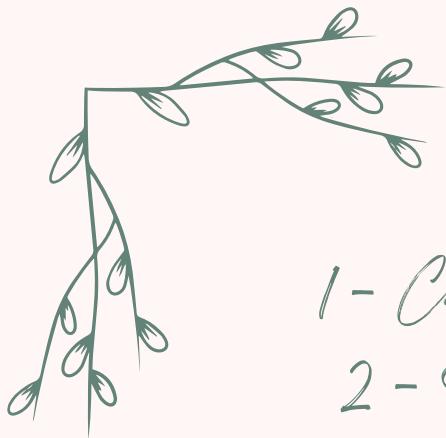
Geometry Tea Towels

PRETTY PAGES

*In store only*  
138 S. Oak Ave, Bartlett, IL

# February Home *finds*





- 1 - Camila Pink Glass Vase
- 2 - Soft Pink Roses Print
- 3 - Phara Floor Lamp
- 4 - Totem Taper Candles
- 5 - Tyrol Accent Chair
- 6 - Kapli Rug



Shop in St. Charles or  
[at thepepline.com](http://thepepline.com)

# COASTER

This set of four plush velvet coasters brings a soft layer of elegance to everyday living.

Designed to mix beautifully with matching placemats, runners, and napkins, they make any table feel considered without trying too hard.

Also, an easy, thoughtful hostess gift for people who notice the details and love timeless style.



Round Ruffle Velvet Coaster Set

ARTE ITALICA



# CLEANER

A little bottle with big clean energy. This non-toxic, pet-safe all-purpose cleaner concentrate keeps your home sparkling while cutting back on plastic and waste. Just dilute, shake, and get to it. Made with simple ingredients and a fresh, uplifting scent, one bottle creates multiple refills and even pulls double duty as a floor cleaner for everyday life's messes.



All Purpose Cleaner Refill Concentrate

ILLUMINATE SPACE



# RELATIONSHIPS



# Navigating Intimacy with Chronic Pain

Let's dive into a topic that many might shy away from – intimacy in relationships, and the unique challenges it presents when chronic pain enters the picture.

Intimacy is a vital element that weaves emotional connections and mutual fulfillment into the fabric of a relationship. But what happens when chronic pain becomes an uninvited guest?

That's what therapist Robyn Ashbaugh, LMFT, is here to help us better understand.



# The Intricate Dance of Chronic Pain and Intimacy:

Dealing with chronic pain can throw a curveball into the dynamics of physical and emotional intimacy. It's like navigating through a maze of diminished desire and grappling with the physical limitations that come hand in hand with persistent pain.

Couples may find themselves facing communication barriers and emotional strain, risking the overall health of their relationship.

Recognizing and addressing these challenges is crucial for sustaining a thriving partnership.

Chronic pain weaves a complex web of challenges, impacting both desire and the ability to engage in sexual activities. The discomfort and pain become constant companions, leading to a decreased libido and hindering certain sexual positions or activities.

But it's not just about the physical aspects – the emotional toll of chronic pain can also cast a profound shadow on relationships, breeding anxiety, depression, and a sense of inadequacy. This emotional strain extends to partners, who may grapple with feelings of helplessness or frustration in their attempts to provide support.

Amidst the challenges posed by chronic pain, open communication, empathy, and mutual understanding become the lifelines for couples.

Acknowledging and addressing the unique hurdles are priorities for sustaining a thriving partnership. It's a journey that requires patience, vulnerability, and a shared commitment to weathering the storm together.

So, what are some ways you can help manage your sex life when dealing with chronic pain?

Keep reading below to find some practical ways you can help navigate these struggles, and remember, the key is not to give up, but to adapt and evolve together.



# 3 ways to navigate intimacy when dealing with chronic pain:

1

## Communicate with Your Partner

- Choose the right time and setting by creating a comfortable space for open discussions.
- Use “I” statements: this allows you to express personal feelings without assigning blame. This helps make sure your partner doesn’t need to get on the defense and allows for more productive conversations.
- Share specific ways your partner can support you. By collaborating on strategies can help you both work as a team to better enhance mutual understanding.

2

## Exploring Alternative Intimacy

- Emotional intimacy through communication and shared experiences is one way you can focus on non-physical connections.
- Non-physical expressions of love and affection: Discover ways to express love without physical strain. Maybe it’s words of affirmation or simply a gentle hug that can make a big difference.
- Low impact/low pain variations of sexual intimacy: Find alternative approaches to maintain intimacy.

3

## Intimacy-Friendly Strategies

- Experiment with different positions: Find what works and feels comfortable.
- Use pillows or support: Alleviate pressure on sensitive areas for a more comfortable experience.
- Consider incorporating heat or cold therapy: Explore therapeutic approaches for pain relief.



# Adapting Without Abandoning Love

Navigating intimacy with chronic pain is undoubtedly a challenging journey, but it's one that can strengthen the bonds of a relationship. Open communication, empathy, and a willingness to adapt are the keys to overcoming obstacles.

So, let's face these challenges head-on, embrace the journey, and remember – the most important thing is not to give up on love, connection, and the beautiful dance of intimacy.

## *About the Author:*

Robyn Ashbaugh brings warmth, honesty, and even a little humor into the room, because she knows real change happens when you feel safe enough to be yourself.

Her style is down-to-earth and practical—she helps clients get to the root of what's really going on, and then gives them the tools to move forward with confidence. She's passionate about helping people build strong, healthy relationships—without losing their sense of individuality along the way.

Whether you're navigating intimacy, exploring nontraditional relationships, living with chronic illness, or simply trying to feel more comfortable in your own skin, Robyn creates a space where you can be open, challenged, and supported.

Robyn has advanced training in Gottman Method Couples Therapy, is affirming of kink, polyamory, and LGBTQ+ clients, and is currently working toward her AASECT Sex Therapy Certificate. But beyond her credentials, what makes Robyn stand out is her ability to connect quickly, meet you exactly where you are, and remind you that growth doesn't have to feel clinical—it can feel human. Reach out at:

4932 Main Street, Downers Grove, IL 60515  
[Info@SolidFoundationstherapy.com](mailto:Info@SolidFoundationstherapy.com)  
(630) 633-8532



[solidfoundationstherapy.com](http://solidfoundationstherapy.com)



# PARENTING



# The science behind WHY ROCKING CALMS THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

By Laura Van Zandt  
Pediatric Sleep Consultant  
Nurtured Nights



When you think about improving sleep, you probably picture blackout curtains, bedtime routines, or avoiding caffeine (if you are an adult!); however, there's another powerful player in the sleep game that's often overlooked: your vestibular system. You may have heard about this sensory system if your child receives Occupational Therapy support, or maybe you happened upon it during your own research to help your child sleep.

For those who don't know, the vestibular system (inner ear + brainstem nuclei) detects head motion and orientation using the semicircular canals (angular acceleration) and the otolith organs – the utricle & saccule (linear acceleration and gravity). I know those are some pretty fancy words, so let's break it down a little more for everyone.

- Semicircular canals – tell your brain when your head is turning or spinning.
- Otolith organs (utricle and saccule) – tell your brain when you're moving in a straight line or tilting, and help you sense gravity.

This little sensory powerhouse in your inner ear does much more than keep you balanced; it also connects to the very brain centers that regulate when and how we sleep. And research is showing that gentle vestibular stimulation, like rocking, can help people fall asleep faster, sleep more deeply, and even improve memory. Let's explore how it works and what that means for both kids and adults.

# What is the Vestibular System?

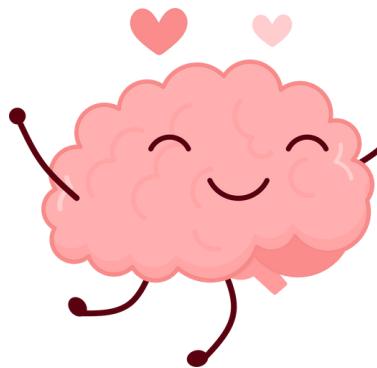
The vestibular system sits inside your inner ear and includes three semicircular canals plus two otolith organs (the utricle and saccule). These tiny structures detect head movement, speed, and position relative to gravity. The signals then travel to the vestibular nuclei in the brainstem. From there, they connect to:

- The cerebellum (movement coordination)
- Eye movement centers
- Postural control systems
- Autonomic centers (which influence heart rate and blood pressure)
- And importantly, brain areas that control arousal, circadian rhythms, and sleep.



## How Does Vestibular Input Affect Sleep?

The vestibular system influences sleep in a few key ways:



#1 – Arousal regulation – It sends information to the brainstem and hypothalamic regions that help switch us between wakefulness and sleep.

#2 – Brain rhythm synchronization – Rhythmic motion (like gentle rocking) can pace brain oscillations, making it easier to transition into deep, restorative sleep.

#3 – Circadian timing – Vestibular input can act as a subtle time cue for your internal body clock, complementing light exposure.

## What the Science Says

Over the past decade, researchers have been studying how vestibular stimulation impacts sleep, and the results are compelling.

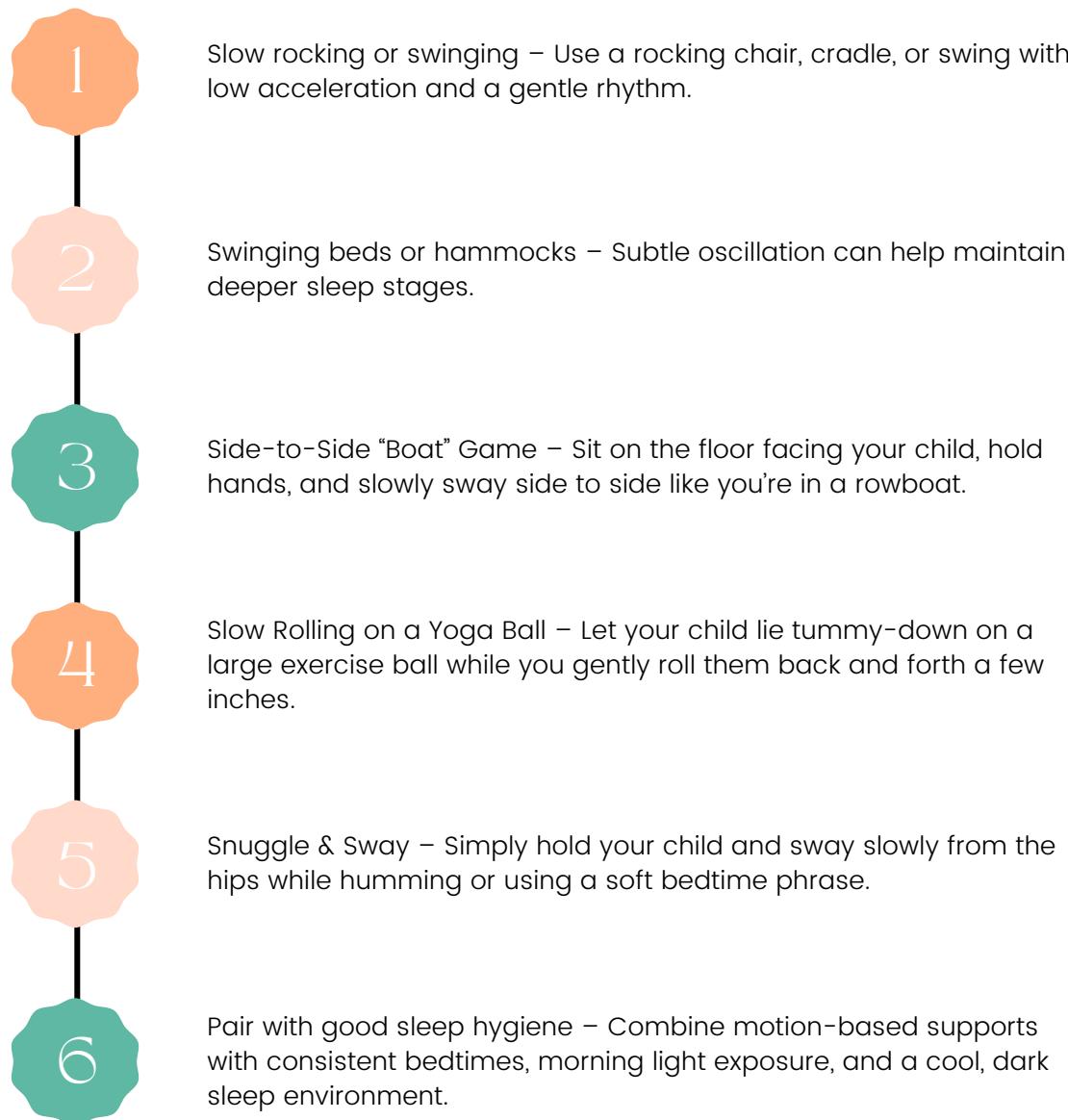
- Gentle rocking improves sleep onset and depth. Studies in both humans and animals show that slow, rhythmic motion helps people fall asleep faster and increases time spent in deep non-REM sleep.
- Naps get better, too. Rocking during a nap can lead to more sleep spindles (brief bursts of brain activity linked to memory consolidation).
- Electrical vestibular stimulation (eVNS) is showing promise for insomnia. Early trials suggest that low-level stimulation of vestibular nerves might help improve sleep quality in adults.
- Vestibular problems often mean sleep problems. People with chronic dizziness, vestibular migraine, or balance disorders have much higher rates of insomnia and disrupted sleep.

# Who Can Benefit?

- Infants and toddlers – Rocking is a natural, evolutionarily conserved way to help babies settle. It's effective when done slowly and safely.
- Adults with insomnia – Gentle motion could be used as an adjunct to other treatments.
- People with vestibular disorders – Addressing dizziness and balance issues may also improve sleep, and treating sleep problems can reduce vestibular symptoms.

## Practical Sleep Supports Using Vestibular Principles

Here are some evidence-backed ways to incorporate vestibular input into a sleep routine:



- 1 Slow rocking or swinging – Use a rocking chair, cradle, or swing with low acceleration and a gentle rhythm.
- 2 Swinging beds or hammocks – Subtle oscillation can help maintain deeper sleep stages.
- 3 Side-to-Side “Boat” Game – Sit on the floor facing your child, hold hands, and slowly sway side to side like you’re in a rowboat.
- 4 Slow Rolling on a Yoga Ball – Let your child lie tummy-down on a large exercise ball while you gently roll them back and forth a few inches.
- 5 Snuggle & Sway – Simply hold your child and sway slowly from the hips while humming or using a soft bedtime phrase.
- 6 Pair with good sleep hygiene – Combine motion-based supports with consistent bedtimes, morning light exposure, and a cool, dark sleep environment.



# Remember! Don't Wake the Nervous System!



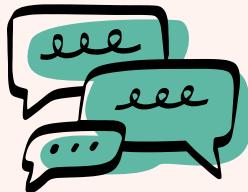
These signs mean the activity is waking up the nervous system rather than helping it relax.

In that case, switch to still, calming activities like reading, deep-pressure hugs, or listening to soft music.

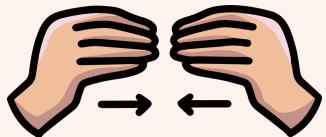
Giggles or loud bursts of laughter that don't settle down



Talking more instead of getting quieter



Asking for "faster" or "more" repeatedly



Increased squirming, wiggling, or jumping up afterward



Wider-eyed, "wired" look instead of heavy-lidded or yawning



## Let's wrap it all up:

Your vestibular system isn't just for balance — it's deeply connected to the brain's sleep and circadian centers. By tapping into it with gentle, rhythmic stimulation, you can help speed up sleep onset, deepen rest, and potentially improve memory.

Whether it's rocking your baby to sleep, dozing in a hammock, or exploring new vestibular-based therapies, motion may just be the missing ingredient in your sleep routine.

## About the Author



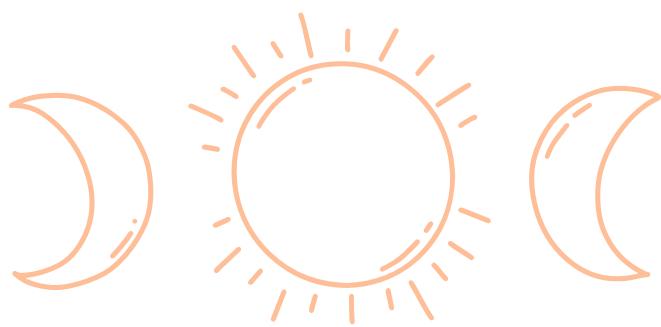
### Laura Van Zandt Pediatric Sleep Consultant Nurtured Nights

Laura is a pediatric occupational therapist with over 15 years of experience, advanced training in sensory integration, NDT, and DIR/Floortime, and a deep commitment to understanding each child's unique profile.

Her lived experience as a mom, combined with her professional background, shapes her compassionate, relationship-centered approach with families. She is also a certified pediatric sleep consultant and brings the same clinical reasoning, accessibility, and dedication to making support both sustainable and financially approachable.

At the core of Laura's work, whether in OT or sleep consulting, is a belief in empathy, collaboration, and empowering parents to feel confident and connected.

Connect with Laura to craft your custom sleep plan at [nurturednightsleep@gmail.com](mailto:nurturednightsleep@gmail.com) or visit [nurturednightsleep.com](http://nurturednightsleep.com)



# 2026 ST. CHARLES SWIM LESSONS

Join us for the 2026 summer swim lessons at St. Charles North High School, focusing on swimming skills and water safety for children of all ability levels.

This program is led by the wonderful staff of competitive swimmers from St. Charles North and East High School Swimming and Diving Teams.

**\$75  
per week**  
**Monday - Thursday**  
**\$18.75 per day**

**ALL AGES & ABILITY LEVELS  
OFFERED IN EVERY CLASS. BRAND  
NEW TO THE WATER OR REFINING  
SKILLS - WE'VE GOT YOU!**

## Class Times

**Class 1/ 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM**  
**Class 2/ 10:40 AM - 11:10 AM**  
**Class 3/ 11:20 AM - 11:50 AM**  
**Class 4/ 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM**  
**Class 5/ 12:40 PM - 1:10 PM**  
**Class 6/ 1:20 PM - 1:50 PM**  
**Class 7/ 2:00 PM - 2:30 PM**  
**(Sessions 1 and 3 Only)**

## Summer Session Dates

**Session 1/ June 1 - June 4**  
**Session 2/ June 8 - June 11**  
**Session 3/ June 15 - June 18**  
**Session 4/ June 22 - June 25**  
**Session 5/ June 29 - July 2**  
**Session 6/ July 6 - July 9**  
**Session 7/ July 13 - July 16**  
**Session 8/ July 20 - 23**  
**(Classes 1- 4 only)**



## Register here!

Questions?

Contact Coach Rob Rooney

331-228-6375

[Robert.Rooney@ad303.org](mailto:Robert.Rooney@ad303.org)



# about **the modern domestic woman**

## Supporting women from all walks of life.

At The Modern Domestic Woman (MDW), we are committed to addressing the holistic needs of women and recognizing the challenges they face in various aspects of life. Our vision is to create a nurturing environment where every woman feels supported and encouraged to thrive, regardless of their circumstances. Through our workshops and resource-sharing initiatives, MDW equips women with the tools and knowledge they need to overcome challenges and pursue their goals with confidence. We believe in providing practical resources tailored to women's needs, ensuring that they have access to essential support services.

MDW focuses on 3 pillars of living:

**MENTAL HEALTH** - MDW Cares is our support community of women rooted in making mental health a priority instead of an afterthought. Because nobody can pour from an empty cup.

**LIFESTYLE** - MDW loves creating safe spaces; at home and in the body you call home. We encourage a healthy lifestyle that meets you where you're at. Not where someone else wants you to be. We also love pretty things at MDW and celebrate style and the artistry of creatives.

**ADVOCACY** - At MDW, we go out into our communities and support women in crisis. We actively partner with organizations that support the rights, recovery, and well-being of women.

Beyond referrals, MDW has free support groups and community education workshops, and an informative and fun blog with free downloadable resources.

For more information, visit [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com) or follow MDW on your favorite social platform @themoderndomesticwoman

Have a question or need a referral? Email us at [themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com](mailto:themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com)



# From One Woman's Story To a Shared Mission

At its heart, MDW Cares is about turning lived experience into lasting impact.

"What started as survival has become service," says founder Elizabeth Rago. "MDW Cares is the tangible extension of what The Modern Domestic Woman has always stood for, showing up for each other with compassion, courage, and care."

From workshops and magazine stories to one-on-one support and community partnerships, MDW Cares is growing into a movement of women helping women, right here, right now.

## Get Involved

Follow along as MDW Cares continues to grow and connect women across our community.

Visit [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com)

Follow us on social  
[@themoderndomesticwoman](https://www.instagram.com/themoderndomesticwoman)



## Donate





Copyright 2026