

HOLIDAY 2026

CHERYL CRYER

A lifelong learner and passionate educator, Cheryl is dedicated to making holistic health approachable while connecting people with the resources they need to thrive.

the modern domestic woman

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A MAGAZINE WORTH SAVORING & SAVING

A 100 page, full-color MDW magazine packed with mental health resources, local recs, and soulful lifestyle inspo.

Purchase at the MDW Shop or in person at our two local stockists:

Urban Apothecary
104 1st Street
Batavia, IL

The Pep Line
201 Cedar Avenue
St. Charles, IL

MDW Shop

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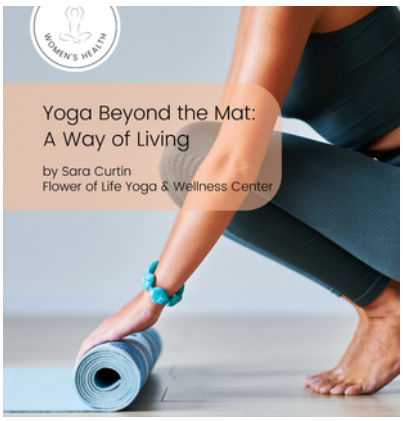



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Holiday 2026

MDW MAG

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear MDW Community,

Let's be honest with each other for a minute: you're tired. I'm tired. Somewhere between the back-to-school forms and the first frost, the year slipped out the side door, and now here comes December, jingling its bells and asking us to be merry on command.

If you're reading this with a cup of coffee you've reheated twice, a to-do list longer than your arm, and only a foggy memory of the last time you sat down without something to fold, welcome. You're among friends!

Every year, this issue is a labor of love. And every year, while making it, I'm reminded of the same truth: the holidays don't need more from us. They need more of us. Rested-ish and a bit more present. We spend so much of this season building cozy spaces for the people we love. We fluff the pillows, light the candles, and make the whole house smell like cinnamon and good intentions. Then we stand in the doorway of the warm little world we've made… and forget to step inside. I know I do. Life gets lifing, as it does, and the first thing to slide to the back burner is usually us.

This year, I'm making a case for quality over quantity. At the table, that means fewer dishes made with more love. The good butter. The loaf from the baker who knows your name. A meal you actually sit down to enjoy instead of eating standing over the sink. In our gifting, it means less stuff and more meaning. One beautiful thing made by hands you can shake will always outshine a dozen things that arrive in a box and leave you breaking down cardboard at 11 p.m.

Because here's what I believe with my whole heart: the charm of where we live isn't just the twinkling lights on 3rd Street in Geneva(though, swoon). It's the people behind the counters. Nearly everyone in these pages is a local small business owner - someone who took a leap, signed a lease, and decided our community was worth betting on. When we shift our reason for giving, from checking names off a list to choosing something with a story, we aren't just giving a gift. We're helping keep the lights on in the shops that make our towns feel like home. That's a gift that gets to be given twice.

In the spirit of full transparency, I have one confession: the clogs. They are not local. They are, however, ridiculously cute. I own them, and I could not help myself. Every editor is allowed one indulgence, and those are mine. Think of them as proof that I practice what I preach about treating yourself.

So pour something warm. Put your feet up (clogs optional, but encouraged). Flip through slowly. Dog-ear the pages, circle your favorites, and then go say hello to the makers who poured themselves into each one of these articles and products.

And please, try to take care of yourself this season.

With love and so much whimsy,

Elizabeth Rago
MDW Founder & Editor



DOWNLOAD

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

About the Photographer

Becky Burger of Bloom & Gather Photography captured our cover girl, Cheryl Cryer, for this issue. Becky has a fabulous ability to truly see you, capturing not just how you look, but your spirit. Becky has since relocated from Illinois to the Springfield, Missouri area, and we will miss her dearly; however, she does venture up to the Western Suburbs every now and then.

If you know anyone who lives near the Springfield area - or you'd like to get on the Illinois waitlist - look Becky up!

Learn more about Becky's work in the QR code



Becky Burger











BLOOM & GATHER
Photography

TABLE OF CONTENTS

7 PROFILE

14 MDW CARES

21 MENTAL HEALTH

29 MENTAL HEALTH

47 GIFTS

59 SLOW LIVING

72 STYLE

84 BEAUTY

90 WOMEN'S HEALTH



Profile



Meet Cheryl Cryer

Behind every tincture, tea blend, salve, and hemp formulation in Urban Apothecary is Cheryl Cryer, a woman who has spent years learning not only how plants interact with the human body, but how to build a business in an industry where the rules rarely stay the same for long.

Long before Urban Apothecary became a go-to destination for plant-based wellness around the United States with a brick-and-mortar shop in downtown Batavia, Illinois, Cheryl built her career somewhere entirely different.



Cheryl used her MBA and new knowledge in herbal medicine and cannabanoid wellness to launch Urban Apothecary in 2017.

Armed with an MBA and decades of experience leading strategic marketing and growth initiatives, she spent more than twenty years helping organizations grow, communicate, and navigate change.

She understood leadership and definitely understood business. What she didn't know at the time was that those same skills would eventually become just as important as understanding medicinal plants.

In 2017, Cheryl pivoted.

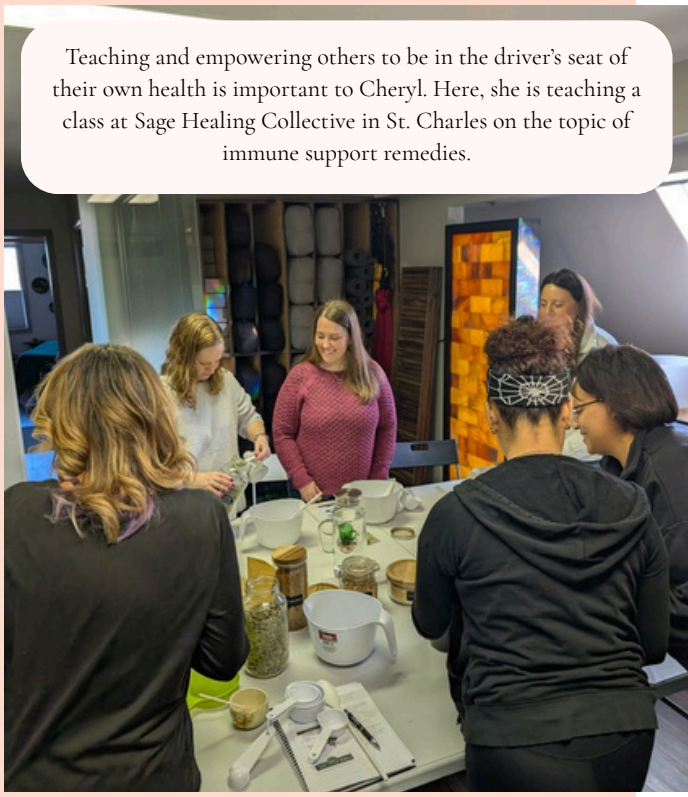
She immersed herself in herbal medicine, cannabinoid wellness, and formulation, earning certification in Medicinal Plants through Cornell University, where competency, not simply course completion, was the expectation. She continued adding to that education with cannabis training, trauma-informed care, and ongoing professional development because Cheryl believes people deserve guidance that is rooted in both science, responsibility, and care.

Today, she is a licensed hemp manufacturer through the Illinois Department of Agriculture, a clinical herbalist and formulator, educator, and founder of Urban Apothecary and Fat Sam's for Pets, creating thoughtfully formulated herbal and cannabanoid products that support stress, sleep, pain, mobility, recovery, and nervous system wellness for both people and their pets.

But Cheryl doesn't wear those titles to impress anyone. She wears them because she believes education is a responsibility.

That belief has shaped nearly every chapter of her career. Prior to building Urban Apothecary, Cheryl has shared her knowledge as an adjunct faculty member at Elgin Community College and the University of Phoenix, teaching the next generation of professionals while continuing to learn herself.

Spend even a few minutes talking with her, and you'll notice Cheryl isn't interested in talking over people's heads. She isn't trying to convince anyone that she has all the answers. Instead, she invites people into the conversation.



Teaching and empowering others to be in the driver's seat of their own health is important to Cheryl. Here, she is teaching a class at Sage Healing Collective in St. Charles on the topic of immune support remedies.

In a world where wellness advice seems to multiply by the hour, Cheryl has made education part of her mission. She wants people to understand how herbs and hemp work with the body so they can become informed participants in their own health rather than passive consumers chasing the next trend.

That commitment to education has become even more important because of the industry she chose.

Building a wellness company around hemp has meant living through years of uncertainty. Regulations have shifted. Public perception has changed. Proposed hemp bans have forced business owners across Illinois to repeatedly rethink products, operations, and long-term plans. For Cheryl, adaptation isn't an occasional challenge; it's part of her business model. Just when one path begins to feel stable, another policy changes, another regulation emerges, or another misconception requires patient explanation instead of frustration.

That ability to pivot isn't confined to her work. Outside of Urban Apothecary, Cheryl coaches with the Aurora 88s Roller Derby team and is an accomplished marathon skater who finds both challenge and restoration on the Fox River Trail. Roller derby demands quick thinking, balance, resilience, and the willingness to change direction in an instant without losing momentum. It's a fitting parallel for the career she's built. In both skating and business, Cheryl has learned that moving forward isn't about avoiding obstacles. It's about adjusting with confidence when they inevitably appear.



Cheryl and Erin Jackson, gold-medal-winning speed skater, Olympian and roller derby player at RollerCon in Las Vegas.

The constant pivots are exhausting, but they have never changed the reason she started. If anything, they've reinforced it.

Helping people has never depended on a single product, because true service depends on meeting people where they are.

That philosophy extends well beyond the customers who walk through Urban Apothecary's doors.

For nearly two years, Emily Zaidman has been an essential part of both Urban Apothecary and Fat Sam's for Pets. Emily lives with a disorder of the corpus callosum (DCC), but Cheryl has never defined her by a diagnosis. Instead, she saw what Emily was capable of and created space for her to thrive.

Today, Emily helps package products, label inventory, and keeps the shop running day after day. She has become a trusted and valued part of the business.



Inclusion in action: Cheryl Cryer with her employee, Emily Zaidman (above), who was born with a disorder of the corpus callosum (DCC), a rare brain difference in which the bridge between the brain's two hemispheres didn't fully develop.

Cheryl's commitment to inclusion shows every day what neurodivergent people bring to a workplace that makes room for them.

"I am capable of doing great things, and you can do them too," Emily shared. "We can hold meaningful jobs, we can be involved, and we belong right here in the heart of our community."

In many ways, that message reflects Cheryl's philosophy as much as Emily's. Whether she's teaching customers about herbal medicine, mentoring students in the classroom, or building opportunities within her own business, Cheryl has always believed that people flourish when someone is willing to see their potential before their limitations.

That philosophy is evident throughout Urban Apothecary. The shelves are filled with small-batch teas, tinctures, salves, mushrooms, herbal remedies, and hemp formulations crafted with organically sourced ingredients, but the products are only part of the experience. The conversations matter just as much. Cheryl believes people deserve a place where they can ask questions without judgment and learn at their own pace. A place where they can just “be”.

No Finish Line For the Determined Soul

The same mindset has shaped her work beyond the storefront.

She has spoken publicly about cannabinoid wellness and formulation, co-authored educational work on CBD, participated in legislative conversations surrounding hemp, and helped bridge the gap between emerging plant medicine and everyday consumers.

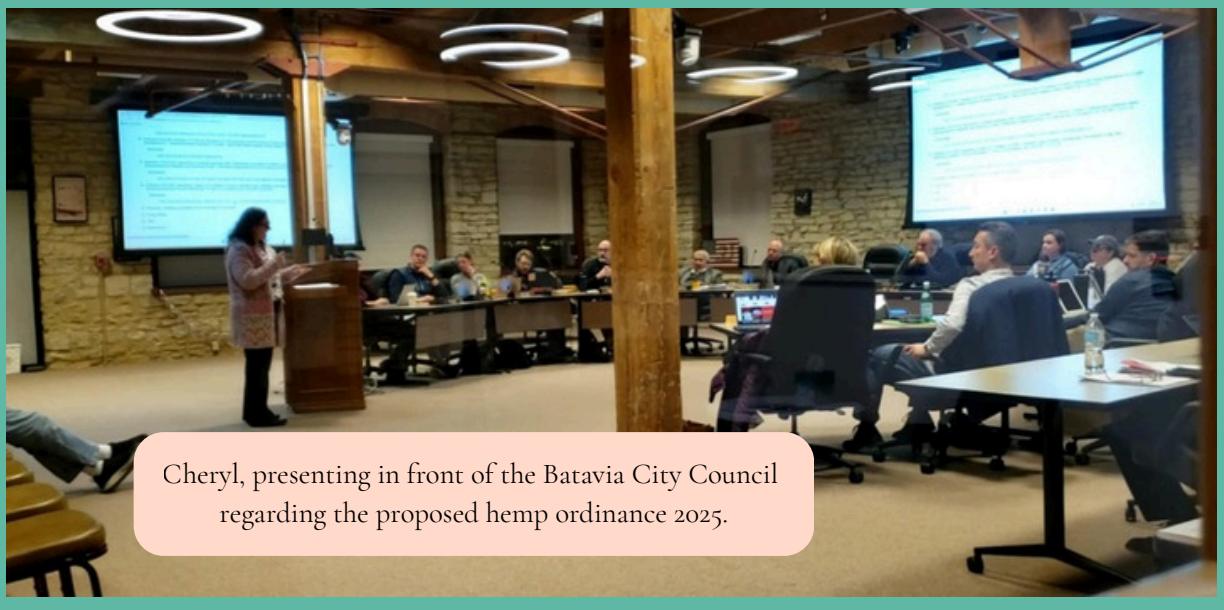
Even now, Cheryl continues looking ahead.

As the wellness landscape evolves, so do her businesses. Cheryl's exploring new opportunities for Fat Sam's for Pets, including expanding into dehydrated pet snacks, while continuing to formulate products for practitioners, retailers, and individuals seeking thoughtful, evidence-informed wellness solutions.

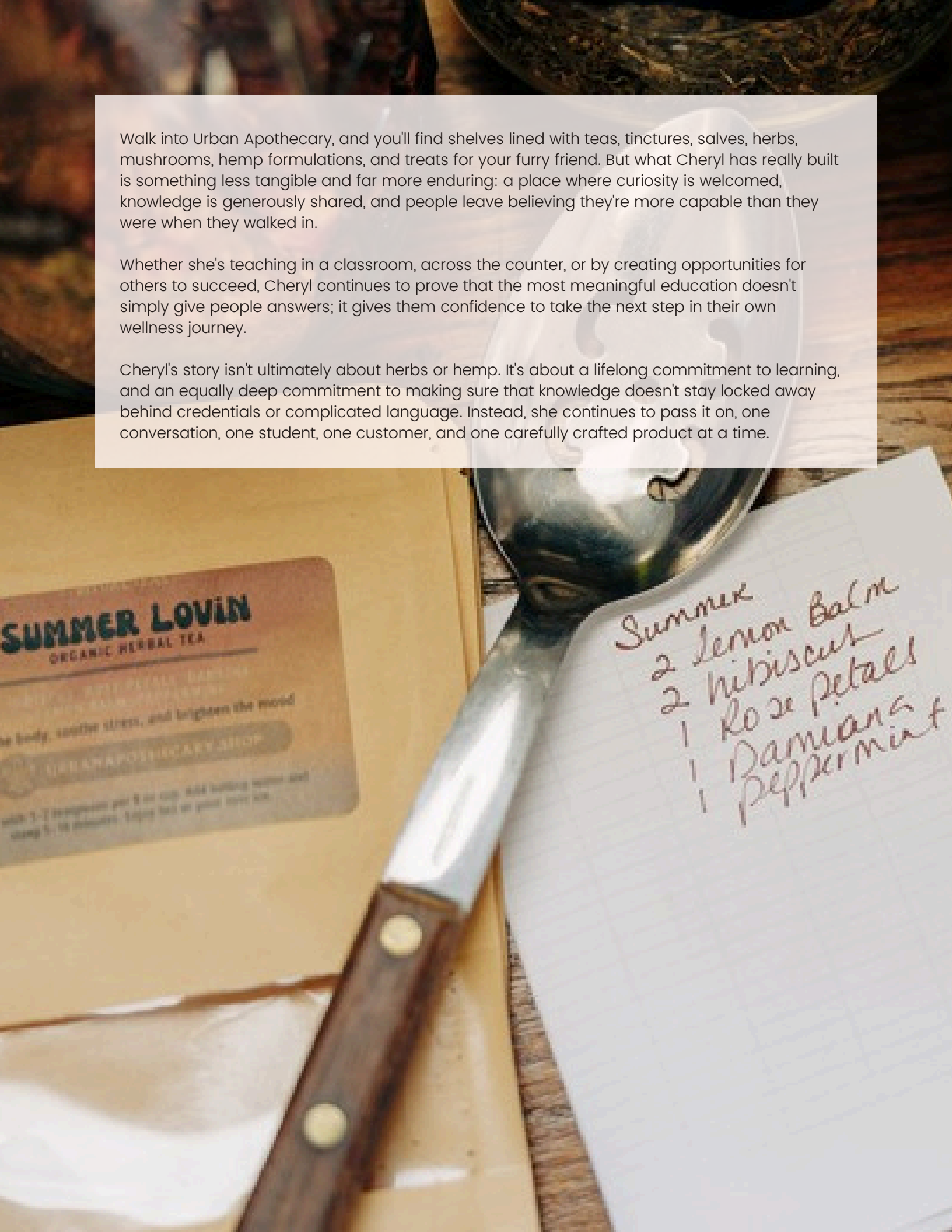
There is no finish line in Cheryl's work. Only the next opportunity to learn.

The next plant to study. The next regulation to understand. The next product to refine. The next conversation with someone who's simply looking for answers. That commitment to learning may be Cheryl's greatest strength. because she believes there's always more to discover.

In a world overflowing with opinions, she has chosen curiosity. In an industry defined by uncertainty, she has chosen consistency. And in a space often clouded by misinformation, she continues to make room for thoughtful conversations rooted in education, compassion, and evidence.



Cheryl, presenting in front of the Batavia City Council regarding the proposed hemp ordinance 2025.



Walk into Urban Apothecary, and you'll find shelves lined with teas, tinctures, salves, herbs, mushrooms, hemp formulations, and treats for your furry friend. But what Cheryl has really built is something less tangible and far more enduring: a place where curiosity is welcomed, knowledge is generously shared, and people leave believing they're more capable than they were when they walked in.

Whether she's teaching in a classroom, across the counter, or by creating opportunities for others to succeed, Cheryl continues to prove that the most meaningful education doesn't simply give people answers; it gives them confidence to take the next step in their own wellness journey.

Cheryl's story isn't ultimately about herbs or hemp. It's about a lifelong commitment to learning, and an equally deep commitment to making sure that knowledge doesn't stay locked away behind credentials or complicated language. Instead, she continues to pass it on, one conversation, one student, one customer, and one carefully crafted product at a time.



Learn more and shop Urban Apothecary and Fat Sam's for Pets products at:

urbanapothecary.shop and
fatsamsforpets.com

Or, head straight to both sites in the QR codes below...

Fat Sam's FOR PETS

Urban Apothecary

MDW Cares

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

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



THE PERIMENOPAUSE POSSE

A place to laugh, vent, learn, and navigate perimenopause together. With quarterly talks from trusted local experts.

MDW Cares Impact Snapshot - Year 1

mdw cares

198 women referred to mental health, women's health, and wellness practitioners in Kane, DuPage, and Cook Counties

5 local women's health speakers

3 peer-to-peer support groups

16 MDW Events with **283** attendees

4 new mental health, women's wellness, & professional providers added to the MDW Community referral list

Over **$2400** raised for women in Kane County

6 MDW magazines published featuring Kane County professionals, mental health providers, and over **150** local small businesses

4 community engagement events


mdw
in the wild

MDW Winter Support Groups & Events



MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

Nervous system talk with Lisa Jarot of Headstrong Wellness in St. Charles.

FREE

COME AS YOU ARE COFFEE: SUPPORT GROUP FOR ALL WOMEN

Every Saturday, 8 AM - 9 AM

Storybook Cafe in Geneva, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP



FREE

MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

2ND & 4TH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH
7:15 PM - 8:30 PM

Batavia Library in Batavia, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP



PERIMENOPAUSE POSSE

1ST & 3RD WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH
6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

House of 423 in Geneva, IL

Cost: $10 (goes to pay our speakers)

FREE

PERIOD PACKING PARTY

January 16th, 2027
8:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Storybook Cafe in Geneva, IL

SIGN UP →

NEW 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.

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

Perimenopause



Dr. Ashley Caravelli, DO, MSCP

St. Charles, IL

Dr. Ashley Caravelli is a board-certified Family Medicine physician and Menopause Society Certified Practitioner with more than 14 years of experience, focused on how hormones, metabolism, and inflammation affect women in midlife. She founded Axis Precision Health in St. Charles to offer physician-led, evidence-based midlife care, and she sees patients in person and by telehealth anywhere in Illinois.

A wife and mom of two girls, she knows how easy it is to put yourself last, and she wants every woman she sees to know she's allowed to be a priority.

accaravelli@gmail.com

axisprecisionhealth.com

@drashleycaravelli

Support for Moms



Lindsey Liddicoatt, LCPC, CADC

Geneva, IL

Lindsey is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in Geneva with 13 years of experience, and she has a special heart for moms who feel overwhelmed by stress and anxiety.

She helps women who are stretched thin find healthy, practical ways to cope with the daily pressures of motherhood, using proven strategies that fit their real lives.

Her sessions are warm and judgment-free, so moms can feel heard and understood and get back to feeling like themselves.

lindsey@hebrighterdays.com

hebrighterdays.com

@lindsey_hebrighterdays

Children, Adolescents, and Adults



Shelby Hartzell, LCSW, SEP

Batavia, IL

Shelby is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who specializes in trauma and stress, with a focus on chronic illness, autoimmune disease, anxiety, and complex trauma. Her own long journey with chronic health concerns, including life as a Type 1 Diabetic, means she knows firsthand what it's like to not feel safe in your own body, and she has a special interest in supporting others with T1D.

She doesn't offer quick fixes or act as a blank slate in sessions; she brings her full, authentic self to create a space where clients feel heard, seen, and understood.

shelby@rootedresiliencewc.com

rootedresiliencewc.com

@evergreen_counseling_llc

MDW Cares Awarded Mental Health Grant from the St. Charles 708 Mental Health Board

We are excited to share that MDW Cares has been awarded a $2,500 grant from the St. Charles 708 Mental Health Board to support our Divorce Recovery & Mental Health Stabilization Program. This funding will help us continue providing education, connection, and mental health support for women navigating one of life's most challenging transitions.

Divorce is often talked about as a legal process, but anyone who has lived through it knows it touches every part of a person's life. It can impact mental health, parenting, finances, housing, relationships, and a person's sense of identity. Through our work at MDW Cares, we've seen firsthand how important it is for women to have access to trusted resources and a supportive community while navigating these changes.

Since launching our divorce-focused programming, we've served dozens of women through workshops, educational events, and peer support opportunities. What began as a single event quickly revealed a larger need. Women weren't just looking for information; they were looking for connection, practical tools, and reassurance that they weren't facing these challenges alone.

This grant will allow MDW Cares to continue building that support system for women in the St. Charles community. Funding will be used to expand educational programming focused on topics such as communication during co-parenting, managing emotional triggers, financial recovery after divorce, parenting transitions, and maintaining mental health during prolonged legal or family changes. It will also support the creation of follow-up resources and ongoing touchpoints that help women stay connected to support long after attending an initial workshop.

While mental health support remains at the heart of this work, we also recognize that emotional well-being is deeply connected to the practical realities women face during divorce. By providing both education and community connection, we hope to help participants feel more informed, more supported, and better equipped to navigate the next chapter of their lives.

We are deeply grateful to the St. Charles 708 Mental Health Board for recognizing the importance of community-based mental health support and for investing in programs that help residents access resources before challenges escalate into crisis.

As a young nonprofit, every investment in our work helps us expand our reach and strengthen the support available to local women and families. We look forward to sharing updates as this program continues to grow and evolve throughout the year.

Thank you to everyone who has attended a workshop, shared a resource, volunteered their time, or encouraged someone to reach out for support. This work belongs to all of us, and we are honored to continue building it together.

If you would like to donate to help further our work, please visit our donation page using the QR code below or at mdwshop.com/donate













WHEN YOUR BODY NO LONGER FEELS LIKE HOME

How Therapist Shelby Hartzell of Rooted Resilience Helps Women Rebuild Trust After Trauma, Loss, and Chronic Illness



There are moments in life that change more than your circumstances. They change your relationship with your own body.

For some women, it's the heartbreak of pregnancy loss or infertility. For others, it's a chronic illness diagnosis that suddenly makes every meal, doctor's appointment, or blood sugar reading part of daily life. Sometimes it's trauma that happened years ago but still shows up as anxiety, exhaustion, hypervigilance, or the feeling that your body is constantly on high alert.

From the outside, people may tell you to "move on," "stay positive," or "manage your stress." But for many women, healing isn't that simple.

According to Shelby Hartzell, founder of Rooted Resilience, that's because trauma isn't only stored in our memories. It's stored in our nervous system.

As both a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, Shelby helps clients understand something that often comes as a relief: many of the ways our bodies respond after overwhelming experiences aren't signs that something is wrong with us. They're signs that our nervous system has been working overtime to protect us.

"When the body experiences more stress than it has the resources to process, it adapts," Shelby explains. "Those protective patterns are incredibly intelligent. The goal isn't to fight them; it's to help the nervous system recognize that safety is possible again."

That perspective shapes every aspect of her work.
Rather than asking clients to simply think differently, Shelby incorporates Somatic Experiencing, a body-centered therapeutic approach developed by Dr. Peter Levine. Together, they gently explore how stress and trauma are experienced physically, creating space for the nervous system to complete responses that may have been interrupted months, or even years, earlier.

The process is slow, intentional, and deeply compassionate.

It's also personal.

Shelby has lived with Type 1 diabetes since she was seven years old. After nearly three decades of managing an autoimmune condition, she understands firsthand the invisible emotional labor that chronic illness demands. The fear. The burnout. The constant calculations. The grief for the life you imagined before your diagnosis.

That lived experience allows her to connect with clients in ways that extend beyond textbooks and clinical training.
She also has a special passion for walking alongside women navigating pregnancy loss, infertility, and reproductive challenges—experiences that can leave people feeling isolated, misunderstood, and disconnected from themselves.

Whether someone is grieving a pregnancy, recovering from medical trauma, living with chronic illness, or carrying the weight of years of unresolved stress, Shelby's goal isn't to "fix" them.

It's to help them reconnect with the wisdom their bodies have held all along.

Clients often discover that healing isn't about erasing difficult experiences. It's about creating enough safety to experience life without constantly living in survival mode.

Over time, they begin to notice subtle but meaningful shifts. They respond instead of reacting. They experience less shame and self-blame. They develop greater confidence in their ability to navigate uncertainty. Most importantly, many begin to feel at home in their own bodies again.

In a culture that often encourages us to push through, numb out, or disconnect from ourselves, Shelby's work offers something radically different. An invitation to slow down and to listen.

To understand that healing doesn't begin when everything is perfect; it begins when someone finally feels safe enough to be exactly where they are.

Because sometimes resilience isn't about becoming someone new. It's about finding your way back to yourself.

Shelby Hartzell



PRACTICE: Rooted Resilience

LOCATION: Batavia, IL

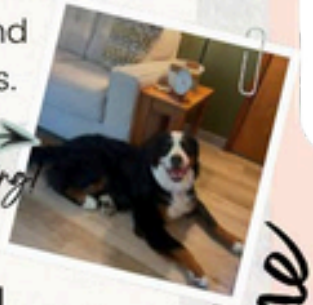


Me at age 7, diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes in the hospital while my family was on vacation.

MY SPECIALTIES

I specialize in somatic therapy for trauma, grief, and chronic illness. I also have a passion for supporting those living with Type 1 diabetes, which is a journey I have personally navigated for nearly 30 years.

I love to help clients reconnect with their nervous system, build resilience, and develop greater trust in themselves.



My Samson
(He's a therapy dog in training! Coming early 2027)

I am also an approved session provider for current Somatic Experiencing students at the Beginning Level.

I WORK WITH...

- children
- adolescents
- adults
- family therapy
- individual therapy

rootedresiliencewc.com

@rootedresiliencewc

All Inquiries



The Essentials Exchange

mdwcares.com

PERIOD POVERTY

The Essentials Exchange is a community initiative led by MDW Cares that helps increase access to menstrual care products for students, incarcerated women, and community members experiencing financial hardship throughout Kane County.

WHAT WE NEED:



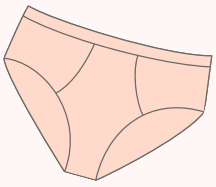
- **Heavy-Flow Pads**
- **Bladder Control Pads**
- **NEW Women's Underwear (All Sizes**
- **Tampons**
- **Feminine Wipes (Unscented)**

DROP OFF SITES:



Geneva - House of 423, 219 W. State Street
Batavia - Batavia Popcorn Depot, 1 N. Water Street
Montgomery - Serene Infusion and Wellness Lounge, 212 Webster Street
St. Charles - Magnolia Soap & Bath, 1 Illinois St. #110

ORDER ON AMAZON:



Order from our supply list and have items shipped to MDW Cares.



Another Door Opens: Dr. Yewande Banire & Lumena Health

One of our most trusted MDW providers just opened a second door to care, and this one takes insurance.

Ask almost any woman in midlife how she found help for her hormones, and you'll hear some version of the same story. The hot flashes that started before anyone said the word "perimenopause." The anxiety that showed up out of nowhere at 43. The PCOS diagnosis that came with a prescription and very little explanation. The years of being told her labs were "normal."

And then, when she finally found someone who listened, the bill.

Yewande Banire, APRN, FNP-C, has spent more than a decade on the other side of that story. As the founder of Serene Infusion & Wellness Lounge, she built a practice known for listening closely and treating women as whole people. But she kept seeing the women who couldn't walk through her door because comprehensive, self-pay care simply wasn't within reach.

So she did something about it. After months of work behind the scenes, Yewande is launching Lumena Health, an insurance-based women's health practice now scheduling patients, with an official launch this November.

"I know I can't care for everyone," she says, "but I can do my part to expand access to quality menopause care."

Care That Meets Women Where They Are

Lumena Health offers telehealth care to women 18 and older anywhere in Illinois. That means no long drive to a specialist and no waiting room. Just a focused visit with a provider who knows women's bodies, from your kitchen table or your car in the school pickup line.

The practice focuses on the concerns that so often fall through the cracks:

- PMS, PMDD, PCOS, and menstrual irregularities
- Perimenopause and menopause
- Thyroid and hormonal concerns
- Contraceptive counseling and management
- Sexual and vaginal health
- Weight and metabolic health

For many women, this list reads less like a menu and more like a timeline of their adult life. Lumena is built to be a steady place to land through every chapter of it.

When Hormones and Mental Health Overlap

Here at MDW, we talk a lot about mental health. What we don't always say out loud is how often the root of a woman's anxiety, irritability, or low mood is tangled up with what's happening hormonally. A woman can do beautiful work in therapy and still feel like she's swimming upstream if her body is in the middle of a storm no one has named.

That's exactly the gap Lumena was designed to fill. Many of the women Yewande sees are also navigating mood changes, anxiety, and other emotional challenges. Her goal is medical care that works hand in hand with the therapists already in a woman's corner, not in place of them.

For the women in our Perimenopause Posse, and for anyone who has ever left a doctor's office feeling unheard, that kind of collaboration is everything.

One Mission, Two Doors

If you already love Serene, take a breath: it isn't going anywhere. Serene Infusion & Wellness Lounge will continue offering its concierge functional medicine membership for women who want comprehensive, in-depth, highly individualized care.

Lumena Health simply opens another door. It offers focused, insurance-based women's healthcare and, as Yewande puts it, "a place to start." Some women will begin at Lumena and stay there. Others may eventually want the deeper dive Serene provides. Either way, no one has to choose between being cared for well and being able to afford it.

"I don't know exactly how this chapter will unfold," Yewande says, "but I believe it's worth trying."



Meet Yewande

Yewande Banire is a board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner and a biochemist, a pairing that shows in the way she practices. She brings more than a decade of experience in women's health, integrative care, and advanced wellness therapies, blending modern diagnostics with ancestral wisdom.

Her areas of expertise include hormonal health, thyroid support, perimenopause and PCOS management, IV therapy, and metabolic wellness. Beyond Serene, she founded Serenara Wellness, which extends her care to women across Nigeria and beyond.

What sets her apart, though, isn't only the credentials. It's her conviction that women deserve a safe space to be heard, understood, and guided with both compassion and precision. She is passionate about educating women so they can take charge of their own health, especially during the pivotal seasons of midlife.

Outside of her practice, Yewande is a proud wife and mother of five. Her work isn't just professional. It's personal, and it's purpose-driven.

How to Get Started
Learn more at umenahealth.org, call 630-402-6627 or email admin@lumenahealth.org



No Stroller Required: How The Stroller Social Helps Local Parents Find Their People

Like so many new moms, Geneva's Alixx Nott was searching for a reason to get out of the house. She kept finding stroller walking groups online, but none were close to home, so she did what all women do when we have a need, we create a solution ourselves. Alixx posted in local mom groups, claimed the Stroller Social username, designed a logo and planned that first walk.

A year later, Stroller Social is an active community with events every month. And along the way, Alixx met fellow Geneva mom Amy Lavenau at one of the group's early walks, and Amy eventually became her cohost.

Women who started out as strangers have become genuine friends who watch each other's kids grow and know who to call when they need to get out of the house.

Despite the name, you don't need a stroller to join. Alixx saw the stroller as a universal symbol of parenthood when she was designing the logo, and the group welcomes moms of all ages, stages, and stories. Some work and some stay home. Some have two kids, and some have six.

Alixx's background in community program development made building something from nothing feel natural, but her mission is simple: make it easier for parents to find their people. Her advice to anyone hesitating is that you don't need to know someone before you show up. You can come alone, come nervous, or come with a little one who cries the whole walk.

"Come anyway," Alixx says. "Everyone starts somewhere, and sometimes taking that one little chance on yourself is how you find community."

Learn more about future events on Facebook and Instagram at @StrollerSocial



Amy Lavenau, Stroller Social cohost, (on right) met founder Alixx Nott at one of the group's early walks.

WOMEN, WEALTH & ENERGY

by Zoe Sherwin
MDW Board Member & Real Estate Agent at
Keller Williams Inspire, Geneva, IL

For generations, women have been the ones holding it all together. We manage the family calendar, keep the household running, and handle most of the to-dos while juggling a million (and one) other things at the same time.

Here's what I've seen come from that expectation: things get done, love gets shared, and women are tired. Not the kind of tired a good night's sleep fixes, but a deeper emotional exhaustion that simply doing all the things can't touch.

And yet we keep showing up. We keep breaking barriers. If that sounds like you, I want you to know two things: you are not alone, and you're closer to change than you think.

The lesson that changed how I see wealth

For almost a decade, I poured myself into helping a company succeed. I helped it reach and surpass its financial goals, all while struggling with what I was paid in return. I went above and beyond anyway, because it felt like the right thing to do.

What I didn't understand then was that my work ethic was never the problem. My belief about what I deserved was. Until I truly believed I deserved something different, I couldn't see the opportunities waiting in other rooms, let alone walk into them.

That was my lesson in self-worth. It also taught me that wealth and energy work the same way: both start on the inside.

Wealth is a mentality

The dictionary defines wealth as an abundance of money or valuable possessions. I'd add one thing to that definition: your mentality.

Wealth isn't only something you can touch, see, or spend. It's a feeling. It's an unconditional belief in yourself that, no matter what, wealth is possible and you are deserving of it. That means wealth lives in more places than your bank account. It's in a shift in perspective. It's in the decision to start learning about money. It's in the friends who hold you accountable, and in the small act of affection from a loved one before they head out the door in the morning.

Three things you can do this week to build your wealth portfolio



#1 - Open a high-yield savings account. Look for an FDIC-insured option. These accounts typically pay many times the interest of a standard savings account, so your money grows through compound interest. Add to it consistently in any amount, weekly or monthly, and then let it grow.

#2 - Say yes to something you've been wanting to do. A coffee date, that shirt you've been eyeing, a walk on the trail with friends. Fill your cup, and remember that taking care of yourself isn't selfish. It's critical.

#3 - Declutter 10% of the space you use most. Pick the area of your home where you spend the most time, then clear at least 10% of it: the junk drawer, the clothes you haven't worn in three years (yes, we all have some). Then make one intentional design choice, like a fresh paint color or a new plant. Neutral colors, houseplants, and open space can help ease stress and calm your nervous system.

Your surroundings shape how you see yourself

The company we keep, the spaces we live in, even the clothes we put on each morning all influence how we see ourselves and how we feel day to day.

So think about a few people who inspire you, the person you aspire to be. How do they handle conflict? What kind of energy surrounds them? What's their relationship with money, with other people, and with their own worth? As that picture comes into focus, your daily goals and habits will too.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, guilty, or simply curious about what clarity could look like, you're already halfway there. The shift begins with "micro" acts of self-love: a little money set aside just for you, five minutes of gratitude before anyone else needs you, a yes to the coffee date you keep putting off.

I grew up carrying society's expectations of who I should be, how I should look and feel, and how I should show up for everyone else first. Today I'm proud to show up authentically and unapologetically myself, through every chapter of growth and every moment of vulnerability along the way.

This journey can begin for anyone, at any age. Just for today, take one step forward.

About the Author

Zoe Sherwin
Realtor with Keller Williams Inspire
Geneva, IL



Zoe is a Kane County-based realtor who supports both buyers and sellers through some of life's biggest transitions with empathy, clarity, and a calm, steady presence.

Known for her ability to balance strategy with heart, Zoe helps clients navigate not just the logistics of a move but the emotional weight that often comes with it. She believes a home is more than a property; it's a place layered with memories, meaning, and possibility, and she approaches every client relationship with that truth at the center.

Need support for buying or selling? Reach out to Zoe at 331-425-1181 or email her zoe.sherwin@kw.com

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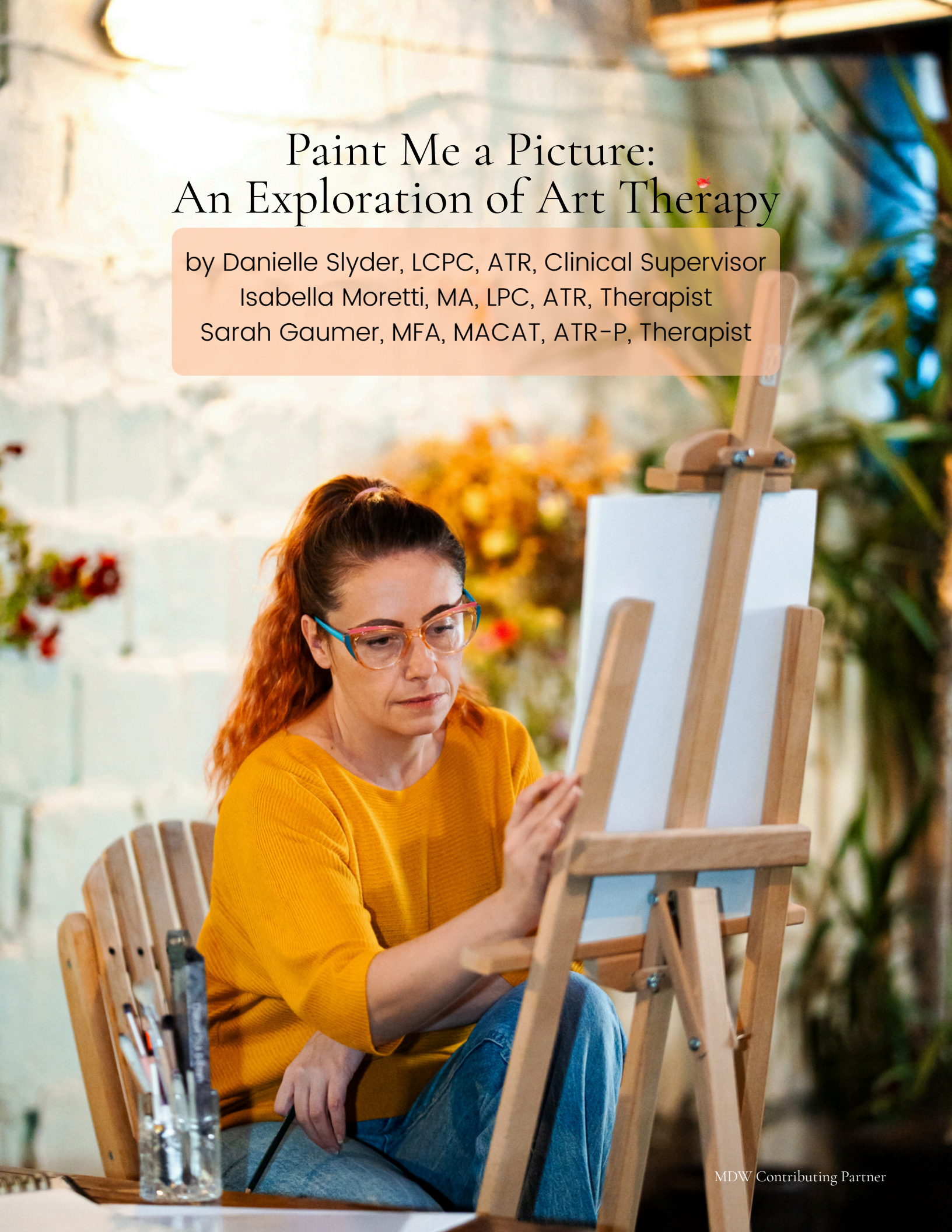
MENTAL HEALTH



Paint Me a Picture: An Exploration of Art Therapy

by Danielle Slyder, LCPC, ATR, Clinical Supervisor
Isabella Moretti, MA, LPC, ATR, Therapist
Sarah Gaumer, MFA, MACAT, ATR-P, Therapist



MDW Contributing Partner

Swirl. Slash. Swap! These are the sounds of a paint brush moving along a canvas in an art therapy session. Each movement has an expression, an intention. To be a client in art therapy you do not have to be a Van Gogh. In order to be successful in art therapy, you just need to be open, vulnerable, and real.

How does art therapy work then?

It provides an alternative way to express thoughts, emotions, wants, and needs. It is not about how well you can draw or paint but is about what you are trying to express. A drawing of abstract jagged, red lines could be an expression of anger or sadness for one person, but for another it could be excitement and passion.

The quote by Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, "Art is in the eye of the beholder", really speaks to this.

Those of us who grew up watching the PBS television program, Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, have already been exposed to art therapy. In the 1960's, Judy Rubin, the Harvard-trained psychologist and art therapist, portrayed the character of "The Art Lady" on Fred Roger's famous children's show.

The Art Lady made appearances to reinforce concepts of sharing, respect, caring for pets, and exploring our feelings with household products used as art materials. This show was an introduction to the ways artmaking can be used as a learning tool and opportunity for self-expression.



In any setting, the process of art therapy can help communicate what words sometimes cannot express. That's why this particular therapy is appealing to many. However, verbal processing can be a part of the therapy too.

Art therapy can be used along with more traditional talk therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and many other types of therapy.

A way to SELF SOOTHE



In art therapy sessions, we have the potential to use all five senses, which allows clients to share experiences that may be difficult to express through words alone (Malchiodi & Jenkins, 2023). For example, if someone endures a traumatic experience, it may be uncomfortable to talk about. In these cases, art therapy can help us access our feelings and begin to process them and heal. This makes art therapy a particularly powerful approach for working through trauma.

Because traumatic experiences are sometimes quietly stored in our minds and bodies, without us being aware of the pain they cause, it can be difficult to describe with words what we think, feel, or remember. Through art therapy, we can safely explore these experiences nonverbally, allowing our emotions, sensations, and memories to emerge in our artwork. Our art can also serve as a window into our deeper internal world. Art therapy provides a way for greater self-awareness, insight, and understanding as we reflect on our lives in the pursuit of improved mental health and healing.

Through art therapy, we can safely explore these experiences nonverbally, allowing our emotions, sensations, and memories to emerge in our artwork.



The use of art therapy is also a wonderful way to regulate, or self soothe our nervous systems, helping us feel more grounded and calmer. Even the simple act of coloring for 30 minutes has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety (Samuel et al., 2022). Art therapists can tailor creative approaches to each client's interests and strengths and even help them develop their own artmaking styles to use outside of therapy as a healthy coping strategy.

References:
Malchiodi, C. A., & Jenkins, M. (2023b). Trauma and expressive arts therapy: Brain, body, and imagination in the healing process.
Samuel, B., Wang, H., Shi, C., Pan, Y., Yu, Y., Zhu, W., & Jing, Z. (2022). The effects of coloring therapy on patients with generalized anxiety disorder. Animal Models and Experimental Medicine, 5(6), 502–512. https://doi.org/10.1002/ame2.12256

TRY IT AT HOME: ART THERAPY EXERCISES TO PAUSE AND RESET

We can use art therapy tools to pause throughout our busy and stressful days and take a moment to check in and center ourselves. Try out these at home art directives and follow-up journal prompts to guide you through an art therapy experience like one you might find in session with an art therapist.

Art Directive 1: A Moment of Pause

Find a space where you can focus, reflect, and maybe even turn on some music. Using colored pencils or pastels on any available blank paper, take a moment to reflect on your hectic day.

What image of your day comes to mind? What colors describe your day? Spend 30 minutes drawing a picture of what your day looked like or felt like.

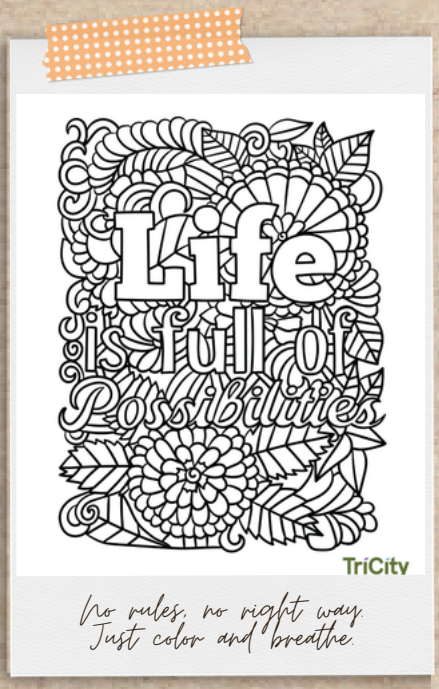


Even the simple act of coloring for 30 minutes has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety.

Follow-up Journal Prompts:

Think about times in your life when you felt truly happy, fulfilled, or proud. These moments, whether personal or professional, can give you clues about what you value most. Ask yourself:

- What was happening during these peak experiences?
- What aspects of those experiences were the most meaningful to me?
- What values were reflected in my actions or feelings during these times?



No rules, no right way. Just color and breathe.

Art Directive 2: TriCity Coloring Page

Give yourself a moment to relax and use crayons to fill in the coloring sheet on the following page. Allow your brain to "take a break" and color any way you like!

Dive in on the next page or download and print here.



TriCity
FAMILY SERVICES



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

The contributors of this beautiful article are all art therapists at TriCity Family Services (TCFS in Geneva and St. Charles, a crucial nonprofit community mental health organization that has served central and southern Kane County since 1967. TCFS provides affordable counseling, support groups, and wellness programs for all ages and income levels. It accepts most insurance plans and offers a sliding fee scale. (Clockwise from top are:)

- Danielle Slyder, LCPC, ATR, Clinical Supervisor: a licensed clinical counselor and registered art therapist who leads the TCFS clinical team
- Isabella Moretti, MA, LPC, ATR, Therapist: a licensed counselor and registered art therapist who helps clients use art-making to build insight and healing
- Sarah Gaumer, MFA, MACAT, ATR-P, Therapist: an artist and art therapist who helps clients express what's hard to put into words

Begin your art therapy journey with one of the TCFS art therapists toda
Call 630.232.1070 or visit tricityfamilyservices.org.

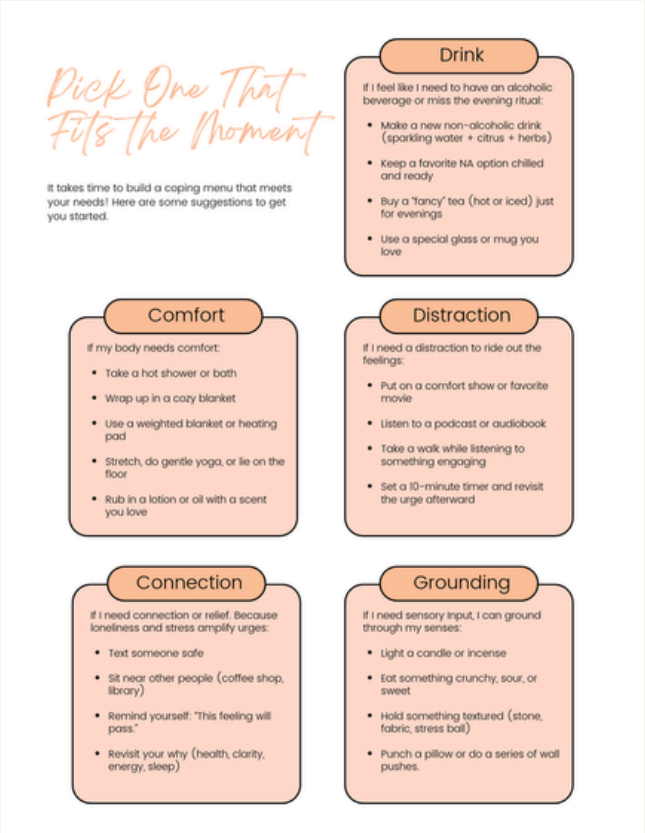
TriCity
FAMILY SERVICES

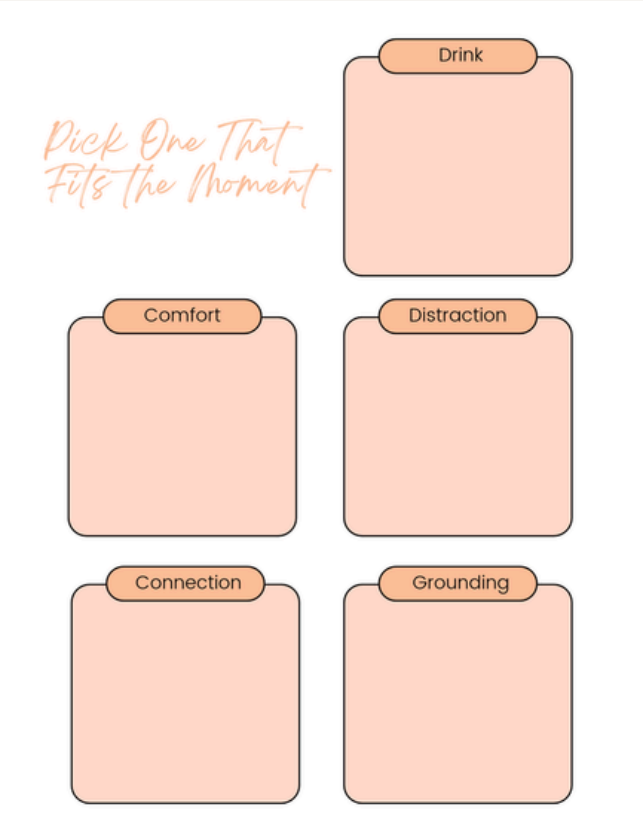
RESOURCE

At our last Perimenopause Posse meeting, we talked about something so many of us run into: when stress hits or the evening wine craving kicks in, the coping skills we know work seem to disappear. Between brain fog, poor sleep, and everything else on our plates, trying to remember what helps in a hard moment is one more thing we don't have room for.

That's where a coping menu comes in. Instead of relying on memory, you keep a short list of options sorted by what you need right now: a replacement for the evening drink ritual, comfort for your body, a distraction to ride out the urge, connection with someone safe, or grounding through your senses. When a hard moment comes, you don't have to think. You look at the menu and pick one that fits.

The first page has ideas to get you started. Use the second page to build your own, and keep it somewhere easy to reach, like your fridge, your nightstand, or a photo on your phone. It takes time to find what works for you, so add to it as you go.





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MENTAL HEALTH CARE WITHOUT BARRIERS: CASA MICHOACÁN



Image via fedecmiusa.org

Mental health care should never be out of reach because of cost or language. That's why we're so grateful to shine a light on Casa Michoacán, an incredible organization serving immigrants and the Spanish-speaking community right here in our area.

Casa Michoacán offers a wide range of social services, including resources, education, therapy, legal services, and case management. And now they're offering free mental health services for children, individuals, families, and groups.

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DuPage County
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West Chicago, IL 60185
(630) 520-3482

Learn more about support from and sign up for free therapy here or call 224-324-9391.

fedecmiusa.org



What People Get Wrong About the Village

by Elizabeth Rago

Lately, I've been hearing a phrase that seems to surface everywhere.

> "Everyone wants a village, but nobody wants to contribute to the village."

I understand why people say it. At first glance, it seems to explain why so many of us feel lonely despite being more connected than ever before. We long for neighbors who check in, friends who bring meals after surgery, grandparents who help with childcare, and communities that notice when we're struggling. Yet when someone asks for volunteers or reaches out for help, it can appear as though everyone has disappeared.

But I don't think that's the whole story.

> I don't believe we've become less compassionate.
> I think we've drained our capacity.

For most of human history, villages weren't built because everyone had time and energy to give. They existed because life itself required people to depend on one another. Childcare wasn't the responsibility of one or two exhausted parents. Meals weren't prepared in isolation. Elders shared wisdom while younger generations carried out physical work. Responsibilities were spread across an entire community, allowing each person to contribute according to their season of life and ability.

Today's women are often trying to do the work of an entire village by themselves.

Many are balancing careers while managing households, raising children, caring for aging parents, maintaining relationships, coordinating schedules, answering work emails after hours, and somehow finding time to care for themselves. This has been described as the invisible mental load - the constant planning, remembering, anticipating, and organizing that keeps families functioning. Long before our bodies become exhausted, our minds have already been working overtime.



COME AS YOU ARE COFFEE

A weekly, hour-long casual coffee on Saturday mornings at Storybook Cafe in Geneva. Each week, we have a show-and-tell theme that has us laughing, crying, and getting connected.

So when we look at the women around us through that lens, the question begins to change. Instead of asking why people aren't contributing more to their communities, perhaps we should ask whether they have anything left to give.

Because capacity is not the same as compassion.

Most women I know want to help. Yet many spend so much of their lives responding to immediate responsibilities that they rarely have enough emotional margin left to invest deeply in a community.

I think we've misunderstood what a healthy village looks like.

A village isn't made up of people who are all giving at the same time. It is made up of people moving through different seasons, each carrying what they can while trusting someone else will carry them when they cannot.

Let's head into the bubble...

Here's what I've noticed in the MDW Community over the years. Each person is "entering" the village (I call our village the MDW Bubble) with different capacities. They could be ready to help, but they are most likely exhausted and searching for something like relief, support, a light, low-pressure event to gauge whether or not the people in the main community fit their personal vibe.



Here's a good example of how a person enters the MDW Village/Bubble and how their capacity grows to be a contributing member of our community.



The Observer

Near the edge is someone who hasn't fully stepped in yet. She may have heard about the village through a friend or stumbled across it while searching for something. She watches the conversations, listens more than she comments, and asks herself whether this place is safe enough to belong.

Perhaps she's been hurt by another community, or she's simply exhausted. Either way, she isn't ready to participate, and that's okay.

Every village needs space for people to arrive at their own pace. Capturing the feeling of belonging often begins long before participation.

The One Who Arrives Needing Care

Eventually, she takes a few more steps inside. She doesn't arrive carrying a casserole or asking how she can volunteer. Instead, she arrives carrying grief, burnout, caregiving responsibilities, financial stress, loneliness, a new baby, a divorce, or years of trying to hold everything together without enough support.

The village doesn't greet her by asking what she can contribute. It asks what she needs. Someone offers a meal. Another community member remembers her children's names. A person sits beside her without trying to solve every problem.

Receiving care isn't taking from the village; it's one of the reasons the village exists.





The Contributor

Over time, something begins to change. Her circumstances may not be perfect, but she notices she has a little more room to breathe than she did before. The constant feeling of survival begins to lighten, and with that relief comes something unexpected.

She starts looking outward again.

She notices another newcomer sitting quietly by herself and decides to introduce herself, because she understands. She stays a few extra minutes after a gathering to help clean up. She sends a message to someone having a difficult week because she remembers how much those small gestures once meant to her.

She isn't contributing because she feels she owes the village something. She's contributing because being cared for has slowly restored her capacity to care for someone else.

The Active Contributor



As the months and years pass, many women discover they have entered an entirely different season. Now they're organizing meal trains, mentoring younger women, volunteering at events, sharing their professional expertise, or creating opportunities that strengthen the community around them.

From the outside, these women often appear endlessly generous. What people don't always see is that many of them once arrived needing exactly the same care they now offer so freely.

The village invested in them before they ever invested back into it.

The strength of a village has never depended on everyone contributing the same amount. It has depended on everyone contributing according to their capacity, trusting that when life inevitably changes, and it always does, the roles will change too.

The woman who arrived completely depleted may someday become the mentor welcoming others through the door. The volunteer coordinating community events may eventually find herself needing meals after surgery. The wisdom keeper may one day experience a loss that reminds her she still needs the comfort of friends.

No one remains in the same role forever.

We have to remember that this is not a weakness of the village, it's strength. We need to shift the question from "why are people not doing more for their respective villages?" and turn to the reflection of whether we're creating communities where people have enough safety, support, and time to eventually become the kind of villager they long to be.

In my experience, when people are given the opportunity to rest, heal, and breathe again, they rarely ask, "What can I keep for myself?" More often, they begin looking around and asking, "Who can I help?"

The Village Is Still There.
We Just Have to Make Room for It.

As I thought more about why villages feel so difficult to build today, I realized something. The village didn't disappear overnight. Little by little, our attention did.

Every generation has faced hardship, but today's distractions are unlike anything humanity has experienced before. We wake up to phones that immediately ask for our attention. Before breakfast, we've checked the weather, answered work emails, scrolled through headlines, responded to text messages, paid a bill online, and learned about tragedies happening across the world. Throughout the day, we're interrupted by notifications, school apps, social media, calendars, streaming services, podcasts, breaking news, and an endless stream of information that convinces us every issue deserves our immediate concern. Just writing these sentences has me exhausted.

Sure, none of these things is inherently bad. Many of them enrich our lives, connect us with people we love, and expose us to perspectives we may never have encountered otherwise.

The problem is that our attention is finite.

Every commitment, every notification, every volunteer opportunity, every online community, every cause we care about, and every obligation takes a small piece of us. Individually, those pieces seem insignificant. Together, they leave many women feeling emotionally scattered before they've even had a chance to invest in the people living closest to them.

Perhaps this is why so many of us long for a village while simultaneously feeling as though we have nothing left to offer one. We aren't choosing between being selfish and being generous. More often, we're choosing between one hundred good things that all compete for the same limited time and energy.

The village loses, not because we stopped valuing it, but because it rarely shouts as loudly as everything else.

The village doesn't send push notifications. Instead, it waits patiently for us to knock on a neighbor's door, linger after a support group, invite someone over for coffee, or answer the phone when a friend calls. That kind of community asks for something our modern world rarely encourages.

Presence.

Getting Rid of What Drains Us

If we want to rebuild villages, we don't need to add one more thing to our calendars. We need to begin asking a different question altogether.

What can I release so I have more room for the village?

Maybe it means saying no to one more committee that leaves you depleted and yes to dinner with a neighbor you've been meaning to get to know. Or, spending less time consuming other people's lives online and more time becoming part of the lives unfolding around you.

It could mean choosing one organization, one support group, one place of worship, or one local community where you can invest consistently instead of trying to spread yourself across dozens of places.

The irony is that creating more margin not only benefits the people around us, but it heals us, too.



Truly Knowing One Another is Where Villages Begin

As I think about the kind of community I want to build, I find myself caring less about how many people walk through the door and more about whether they leave believing they've found a place they can return to.

Because that's what I think we've been searching for all along. A place where life can unfold alongside people who are willing to celebrate with us when things are going well, sit beside us when they aren't, and trust that our roles will change as the seasons of our lives do.

Some days we'll arrive needing to be cared for, and others we'll be the ones extending a hand to someone else.

And that’s how villages endure and thrive.

About the Author

Elizabeth Rago
MDW Founder &
MDW Cares Executive Director

Elizabeth Rago is the founder of The Modern Domestic Woman and executive director of MDW Cares, a nonprofit in St. Charles, Illinois, that helps women access mental health resources, community support, and educational programming.

Drawing on 20 years of working alongside mental health and women's health providers, she has spent the past 12 years creating low-pressure spaces where women can laugh, be honest and simply be themselves, from moms support groups and Saturday Morning Coffee to Perimenopause Posse meetings.

Elizabeth has a soft spot for the "boring" parts of life. Folding laundry, singing in the car, and washing dishes side by side with a loved one aren't things to rush through. To her, they're chances to connect and to let our bodies rest from the constant pull of distraction.

A writer, speaker, and mother, Elizabeth believes villages aren't built by big events but by ordinary moments repeated often enough to become home. When she isn't setting out chairs, you'll find her filling Pinterest boards with recipe and morning pretty ideas and dreaming up a future physical home for MDW.







The Conversations We Cannot Keep Avoiding

by Laura Lange, Licensed Clinical Social Worker/Therapist, LCSW, CADC, CODP I, EMDR Trained



September was Suicide Prevention Month, but conversations about suicide cannot be confined to a single month. Suicide prevention does not happen only in hospitals or therapy offices. Sometimes, it begins at the kitchen table, in the car after school, or late at night when a spouse, partner, or child finally admits they are not okay.

Women are often the emotional center of the home. They notice changes in tone, sleep, routines, behavior, and connection. So let's talk about what to look for and how to respond when you're deeply concerned for someone in your life.

When "They Seem Fine" Is Not Enough

A spouse, partner, or child may still go to work or school, laugh, make plans, and say they are "fine" while privately struggling. It's important to watch for:

- Withdrawal from family or usual activities
- Hopelessness or statements such as "you would be better off without me"
- Major changes in sleep, mood, or behavior
- Increased alcohol or substance use
- Giving away belongings or saying unusual goodbyes
- Talking about wanting to die or making a plan

References:

National Alliance on Mental Illness. (n.d.). National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). nami.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2026b, May 12). Mental health resources. CDC mental health resources

An Easy Way to Start the Conversation

Start with what you have noticed: "You have not seemed like yourself lately, and I'm worried about you."

Then ask: "Are you thinking about suicide?"

Remember, asking directly does not put the idea into someone's mind. It may make it easier for them to be honest.

Your first instinct may be to reassure them, ease their pain, or convince them not to feel this way.

Instead of "don't think like that," try:

- "I'm really glad you told me."
- "I'm here with you."
- "That sounds incredibly painful."
- "You do not have to handle this alone."
- "Let's get support together."

Listen without judging, minimizing, or rushing to fix everything.

Get Support Together

Offer to take the next step with them:

- "Let's call or text 988 together."
- "I can stay with you while we reach out."
- "We can contact your therapist, doctor, or someone you trust."

If you feel your spouse, partner, or child may act soon, has a plan, has access to lethal means, or cannot stay safe, do not leave them alone. Call emergency services or go to the nearest emergency department.

In the United States, call or text 988 for immediate crisis support.

Sometimes, the most important words are simply: "I'm worried about you."

Resources for support:

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

24/7 CALL,TEXT,CHAT

Call or text 988 for free, confidential, 24/7 support during a mental health or suicide-related crisis.
988lifeline.org

NAMI

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Offers education, support groups, local chapters, and resources for individuals and families.
www.nami.org

FindTreatment.gov

Search for licensed mental health and substance-use treatment providers by location, insurance, and service type.
findtreatment.gov

About the Author:



Navigating the world of therapy can be overwhelming, but Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Laura Lange is here to make it easier.

She works with adolescents and adults on issues like anxiety, trauma, OCD, depression, and more, including couples seeking premarital counseling. Trained in EMDR, Laura collaborates with medical providers and families to ensure comprehensive care.

Learn more about Laura and her practice, Restorative Behavioral Health, at restorativebh.com



GIFTS

Gifts.

I'll admit it right up front: I looooove giving gifts.

The hunt, the wrapping, the little pause right before someone tears into the paper. It's one of my favorite parts of the season, and it always has been.

Over the years, though, our family has been through a lot of different seasons. Some Decembers felt abundant, with the tree practically buried in packages. Other years were leaner, with fewer gifts underneath it. Those leaner years taught me something I'm grateful for. The magic was never in the pile. It was in the thought behind each gift.

So we changed how we give. In our house, each person gets something they want, something they need, something to wear, and something to read. It's a simple rule, and it cuts down on the overbuying, the clutter, and the "what do we do with all this stuff" feeling in January. It also makes each gift count. When you only get to choose a few, you choose with care.

You'll notice that a good part of this magazine is saying "buy this" along with the stories of amazing women and practical advice about living. But I want you to know that I picked every item in these pages with the intention of highlighting quality pieces from makers and businesses I believe in, and they're meant to be used, worn, loved, and kept.



So my wish for you this season is: Give less, give better, and give from the heart.



With love,
Elizabeth

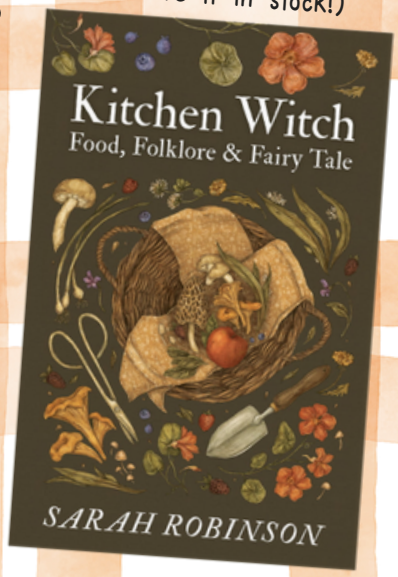
SHOP HERE

Small Sentiments from the MDW Shop

A cotton velvet embroidered pouch



Kitchen Witch book
(this sells out every time we have it in stock!)



Hand and cuticle salve in lavender



Shower Affirmation Cards



Crescent Moon Charm Bookmark



ESSENTIAL

"I met Rosena Chan at a House of 423 pop-up and fell in love with her handcrafted essential oils, especially Mindfire, a blend of rosemary, peppermint, lemon, frankincense, and vetiver in fractionated coconut oil. I'm obsessed with vetiver, and this roller is always in my bag." - Elizabeth



What's vetiver?

Vetiver is an essential oil distilled from the roots of a tall grass native to India.

It smells deep, earthy, and smoky with a soft sweetness underneath. Often called "the oil of tranquility," vetiver has a calm, grounding effect.



Read more about Rosena on pages 97-98.

Where to shop Drops of Healing:

- Saturday, Nov. 21 · Pollyanna, Roselle · 12 - 5 PM
- Saturday, Nov. 28 · Hairpin Arts Center, Chicago · 12 - 4 PM
- Saturday, Dec. 5 & Sunday, Dec. 6, Christmas on Randolph, 113 N Elizabeth Street, Chicago

Drops of Healing website launching in December.

The Perfect

HOSTESS

Gift









Find these items and more cute giftables at The Pep Line in St. Charles.
Don't live locally? Take a peek at their website at thepepline.com

For the girl who always has a beverage in hand

Toasted Marshmallow Surrup



Cranberry Spice Cocktail Mixer



Wood coffee scoop & bag clip





Tutti Frutti Cups

relish

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS

Relish is a kitchen shop for people who cook and people who eat. Founder Kiersten Frase. is a former librarian who spent the last decade ghostwriting for some of the biggest names in food blogging.

Kiersten segued her culinary wisdom into the lovely little shop you can see in person on the Batavia Boardwalk Shops. With a focus on small makers, Relish offers cooking and baking tools, serveware, and a variety of speciality foods that are perfect for gifting.

Shop online or visit in person at the Batavia Boardwalk Shops in Batavia, IL.

WHIMSICAL ART

Grandma's casserole dish has entered its spa era. Whimsy is a must in my home, and this vintage CorningWare mac and cheese print had me squealing with delight when I saw it at Relish in the Batavia Boardwalk Shops.



Corningware Vintage Mac N' Cheese Wall Print

RELISH

CAKE POPS

It's safe to say that every sweet treat custom-created by Jessica Trevino at Sweet Little Things is exactly what you need for every holiday gathering. We recommend these Cosmic Christmas Tree Cake Pops, inspired by everyone's favorite Cosmic Brownies. Choose from chocolate or vanilla cake, dipped in a festive chocolate coating and finished with colorful holiday sprinkles.





Jessica Trevino is a single mom and Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist who creates inclusive experiences for people with disabilities at Rising Lights Project in St. Charles. After seven years of baking custom cake pops, rice treats, and so much more, Jessica's hope is that each order she creates is a reminder that the little things matter most.

"Life can be busy and messy, but laughter, loved ones, and a sweet treat make it worth it."
-Jessica Trevino

Cosmic Christmas Tree Cake Pops

Sweet Little Things

The Wellness Gal

FOR THE GAL WITH A GUA SHA IN ONE HAND
AND A CUP OF THC TEA IN THE OTHER

Love Spell Herbal Tea



Infused Honey Bear





Stress Support Organic Tincture



Pain Relief Stick

Urban Apothecary

urbanapothecary.shop

COFFEE

You can't go wrong with a beautifully roasted pound of coffee for a holiday or hostess gift. The girls of Good Grind Roastery are a local duo whom you've probably seen at the Batavia Farmers' Market serving up to-go cups of their brew no matter the weather! Our favorite is the Guatemala Huehuetenango blend which has a lovely sweetness of graham, mellow praline, and lemongrass.



Good Grind Roastery is owned by Holly and Alyssa, two friends who got tired of working for someone else and decided to build something of their own.

Guatemala Huehuetenango Blend

Good Grind Roastery

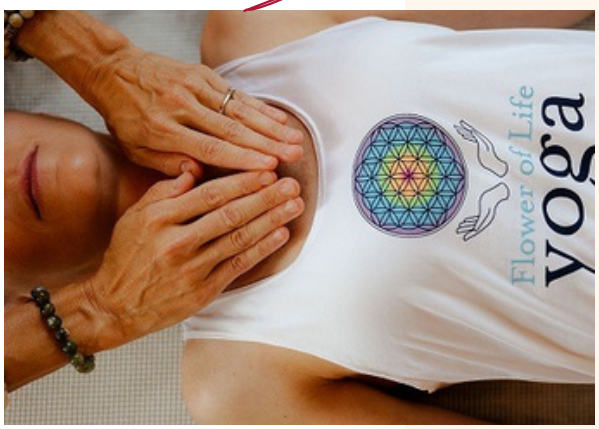
A gift just for you.

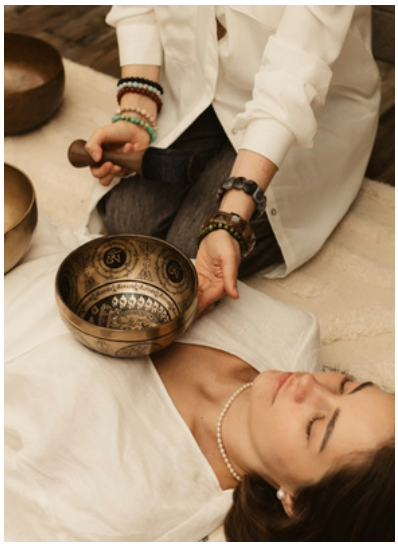
YOU'VE BEEN WANTING TO REBUILD YOUR HEALTH
& TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.
SO, LET'S DO IT.

Yoga Classes



Reiki





Vibrational Sound Therapy



Massage

Flower of Life yoga & Wellness Center

floweroflifeyogacenter.com

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS

CLUTCH

We're a little obsessed with this handmade bow clutch from Renew, a Glen Ellyn nonprofit that gives refugee women in the Chicago area dignified work, artisan training, and community. Our favorite is the Deep Turquoise, but it also comes in Shimmer Brown and Soft Pink, so honestly, why not get all three? The oversized bow and classic shape dress up any outfit, and every stitch carries a story of courage and new beginnings.



Shimmer Brown

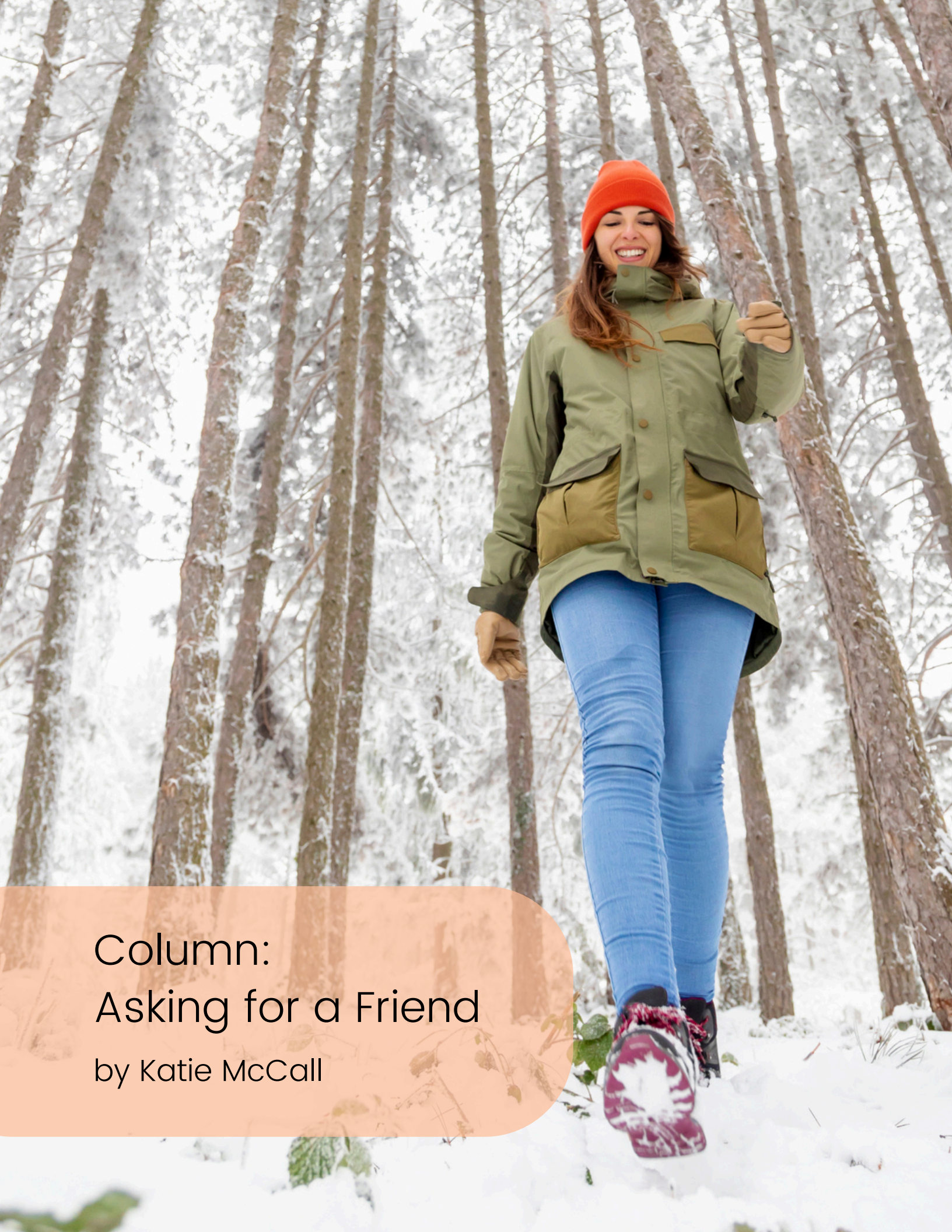


Soft pink

Bow Clutch

RENEW


SLOW LIVING



Column:
Asking for a Friend

by Katie McCall

Question:



Hi, A.T.! The holiday season is naturally a time of busyness, and let's face it – stress. We often find ourselves scrambling from store to store, spending over budget, packing the calendar full, attending (obligatory) parties, overeating, tackling a perpetual checklist, all while trying to take care of our families, and somehow – create that holiday magic.

Whew. I'm tired just writing that.

Unfortunately, in attempting to do it all, we end up experiencing less, and amid the chaos, we lose that very magic we've worked so hard to achieve. And for most, any shred of self-care goes by the wayside, leaving us with a sense of detachment, robotically going through the motions, watching the true beauty of the season melt away before our eyes.

So rather than trying to make the magic by adding more, this is the year we do less. Slowing down to achieve a holiday season that we can actually live in and experience – rather than react to – is our goal.

Here are three tips to serve as guideposts when the season begins to spiral:

- Carve Out Time For You (Yes, you!)
- Set Healthy Boundaries
- Simplify Expectations

Carve Out Time For You

When endless obligations and to-dos pile on top of one another, our routine tends to take a backseat, and suddenly the day is running us. Don't forget to keep a healthy rhythm, or at the very least, sprinkle in a few things that give back to YOU.

Start by setting aside at least 30 minutes (an hour would be amazing) a day. This could be your daily movement, a cup of tea before the household wakes up, a warm bath at night, reading a chapter from your favorite book, or perhaps it's leaving the house to meet up with a friend for coffee. If you fill your cup, you'll be able to fill others, too.



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

And don't forget to follow her on IG @katielmccall

Set Healthy Boundaries

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: It's okay to say no. We do not have the capacity (physically, mentally, emotionally) to do it all, yet we overpack the social calendar, immersing ourselves in spaces of constant stimulation that leave us drained. Our bodies and minds were not built to handle this much input, as winter is innately a time of rest, hibernation, and self-repair.

And remember that boundaries not only refer to the physical, but also the mental and emotional. Is there a friend or family member who triggers you? Is there a certain place or environment that sets you off? Listen to your gut. If you are not genuinely excited to go somewhere – don't. Bypassing a known stressful situation immediately opens up space for something more enjoyable and good for the soul.

Simplify Expectations

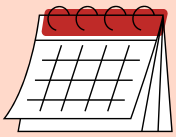
We often feel obligated to create a list of activities based on what society says we SHOULD do to celebrate the season versus what we really WANT to do. Start by sitting down with your crew and ask everyone to contribute their favorite ideas.

What you'll often find is that rarely does anyone value the fancy dinner in the city or the big, extravagant party at your co-worker's house. The sweet, simple memories – decorating gingerbread houses, baking cookies, pizza movie nights at home, driving around to see the lights with homemade hot cocoa – therein lies the true magic.

Other Ways to Achieve a Slow Holiday Season



Get outside. Put on your winter gear and go for a brisk walk. Breathe in the cold air, trudge through the snow, bring a pair of pruners and trim some fresh pine boughs for a vase on your table. Nature is the best medicine for resetting the nervous system.



Look at the calendar of scheduled events and eliminate one thing – right now.

You'll thank me later.



Write a letter (yes, an actual card) to a dear friend or family member. Maybe you haven't spoken in a while, or someone needs a pick-me-up. There's something extra thoughtful and nostalgic about snail mail.



Do something with your hands. Bake, knit, try out a watercolor set, make a DIY dried citrus garland or try our Homemade Pretzel Bark (page 71) for a heartfelt hostess gift.

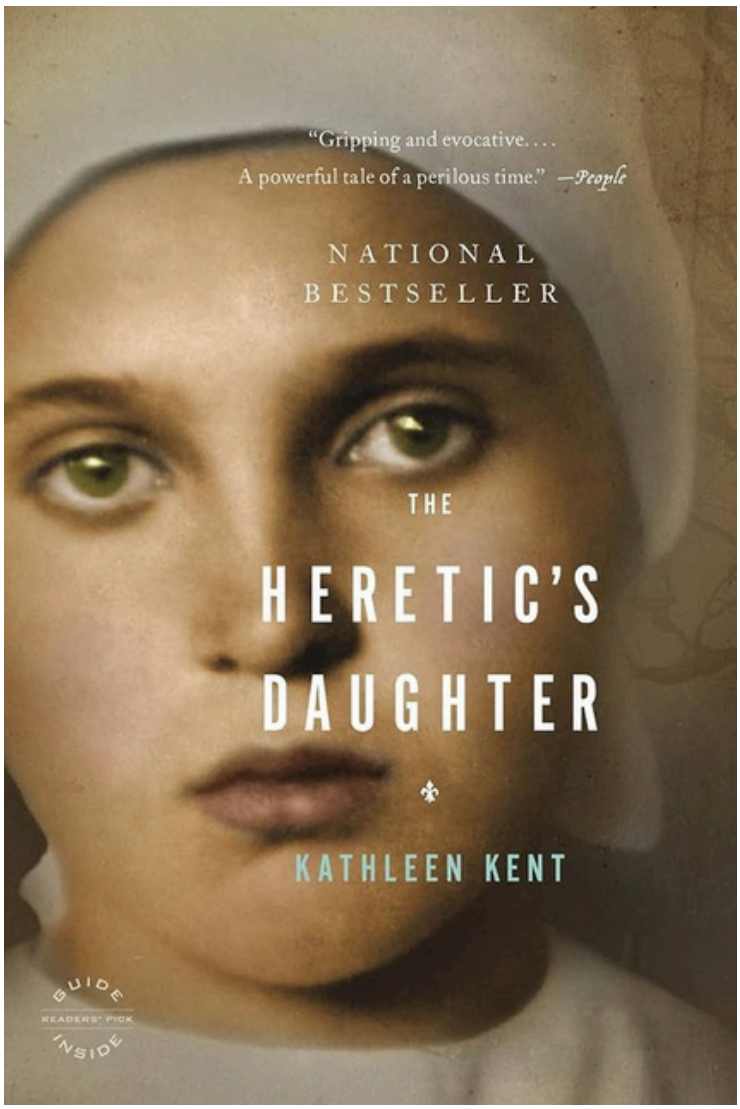


Create a new core memory with a loved one. This year, my husband and I are going to surprise our kiddos on a weekend (just before bedtime, jammies on) with a night out to see a Christmas movie at the theater. I can't wait to see the look on their faces!

JANUARY BOOK CLUB

MDW Book Club The Heretic's Daughter

by Kathleen Kent



In 1752, an elderly Sarah Carrier Chapman writes her granddaughter a letter revealing the secret she has kept for sixty years: how she survived the Salem Witch Trials when her mother did not.

Sarah's story begins more than a year before the trials, when her family settles in a New England community already uneasy with superstition and fear. Her mother, Martha, is strong-willed and sharp-tongued, and the two often clash. As fear and suspicion turn neighbor against neighbor, more than two hundred people are imprisoned, including Martha.

To protect her children, Martha asks Sarah to tell a lie that will condemn her mother but save Sarah's own life. Facing the gallows, Martha refuses to confess to a crime she didn't commit. It's a gripping, heartbreaking story of family, love, and one woman's fierce refusal to bend, told by the daughter who lived to remember her.

About the Author

Martha Carrier was Kathleen Kent's ninth great-grandmother. Kent's debut novel became an instant New York Times bestseller and has been published in 17 countries. She has since written six more novels, including an Edgar-nominated crime trilogy, and was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters in 2020.

Grab a copy and join us to talk about it!

Sign up

Date: January 10th , 2027, at 11:15 AM
Place: Harvey's Tales in Geneva

Cost: $20 (Cost covers coffee, and the remainder will be donated to MDW Cares, our sister non-profit organization.)

Pod*cast.*

Bringing Magik Back into the Body



MDW community member Roxanne Gordon, known to her podcast listeners as Roxanne Serenity, is a Kane County Reiki Master Teacher, trauma-informed breathwork facilitator, and somatic life coach who also teaches at Flower of Life Yoga in St. Charles. On her podcast, Embody Your Magik, she moves beyond spells, rituals, and manifestation practices built on control and returns magic to where it has always lived: the body.

Roxanne's understanding of the body runs deep. She holds a B.S. in Kinesiology and worked as a personal trainer and nutrition coach before her own burnout and emotional disconnection, and seeing the same patterns in her clients, led her to shadow work, somatic practices, breathwork and energy healing. Today she blends science-backed somatic principles with intuitive guidance and energy work.

On the podcast, she explores where embodiment, intuition, shadow work and magic meet. Roxanne believes manifestation tools can be valuable, but something essential is lost when they disconnect us from our emotions. Intuition often speaks through sensation: a tight chest, a heavy stomach, an unexpected sense of expansion. Lose touch with the body, and we lose touch with our needs, boundaries and inner truth.

Through candid conversations and practical guidance, she helps listeners quiet self-criticism, understand their patterns and tell anxious thoughts apart from true intuition. The aim isn't constant calm but the capacity to stay present, listen and respond with intention.

Embody Your Magik is for anyone who has tried the mindset shifts and rituals but still senses something missing. Sometimes transformation begins simply by slowing down long enough to feel what has been within us all along.

Listen to Roxanne Serenity on your favorite podcast platform
Guiding women back to their body & inner wisdom
IG: @roxanneserenity | www.roxanneserenity.com

THE ART OF WINTERING



A THREE-PART GATHERING SERIES FROM MDW · JANUARY – MARCH 2027

Long before it was a wellness idea, "wintering" was a term derived from nature. It described how animals and plants get through the cold months by slowing down, saving energy, and living off what they stored up. In her 2020 bestseller Wintering, Katherine May applied the idea to people. Like the natural world, we need seasons of rest and retreat to recharge before our next stretch of growth.

This winter, MDW is putting that idea into practice. The Art of Wintering is a three-month series about making the cold-weather season one to enjoy, not just endure.



January
Welcome to Wintering

We'll start the afternoon by digging into the idea of wintering: where it comes from, and why the cold months can be a season to recharge instead of one to dread.

Then, Sara Curtin of Flower of Life Yoga & Wellness, will lead a guided meditation to help us slow down and help us embrace the wintering season. And finally, we'll gather around tables to work on a Dream Collage to take home.

Mark your calendar, grab a friend, and get ready to see winter differently.

Details and registration for January 3rd in the QR code or at mdwshop.com/events



Out on a Whim

ARCADY RIDGE RANCH
DUBOIS, WYOMING

by Mallory Sunday

Deciding when to share an upcoming trip with little kids is tricky. You are looking forward to this adventure, but how soon before the trip do you open the door to the onslaught of thoughtful questions?

"Are mountains tall like trees are tall? Are the buffaloes nice? Can I bring my bed? Are we leaving tomorrow?"

It's adorable, but repetitive. The question I heard most was, "When am I going to ride horses?" My daughter, Natalie, had watched every horse program on Netflix, but nothing prepared us for Arcady Ridge Ranch in Dubois, Wyoming.

From our starting point in Illinois, we drove in RVs through Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. With side quests to the Badlands, Mount Rushmore, Yellowstone, the Tetons, and Jackson Hole, I knew it would be hard to squeeze in a kids' horseback riding adventure, but we were determined. Now, in hindsight, it stands out as one of the best parts of our trip.

When I first reached out to ranch owner Traci McClintic, I pictured a corral with a circle of kids riding. Not quite the metal merry-go-round contraption that you see at county fairs, but not far off. The truth was something much cooler. My first reality check hit when we turned onto Uphill Road. In the Midwest, you can call something "uphill," but it's really more of a berm. Wyoming, however, doesn't mess around. We climbed a beautiful foothill with steep roads and postcard-worthy views of the mountains.

When we pulled onto the property, Erin Doherty, one of our trail guides, was there to greet us. You know when you meet someone, and you just know that they love kids? Everything about Erin's approach with Natalie and my nephew, Briggs, showed that she was invested.

In this instance, my mind's eye was wrong again. I was expecting ten or so kids. Instead, Natalie and Briggs were the only two riders. It was great to have such individualized support.



Erin talked to Natalie and Briggs about horse care and safety. The kids warmed up to her immediately, but just in case she needed backup, she surprised them with the cutest possible secret weapon: a baby bunny. She gave them each turns holding and petting the bunny, and she talked about how, just like this little bunny, horses could sense our energy. If the kids were calm and gentle, the horses would be too. It was a parenting masterclass. Arcady Ridge Ranch had designed every part of this excursion around the kids.

"Both of our kids grew up riding from a very young age," shares Traci, "and while they participated in the two-hour rides, it was still specific to their patience, mindset, personalities, how much sleep they had the night before, etc. Most little kiddos don't have the stamina for a longer ride. BUT they can love on animals all day long."

As parents, "I think we often put it upon ourselves to try to create the best time/experience for our families and it's always a juggle to meet each person's needs," Traci reflects. "How do we have a meaningful experience and build memories as a family and ensure that they are included and that my child is being met at their level?" Yes. This exactly.

Erin was just fitting the kids with helmets when we heard a whinny nearby. Leah Hargrave, our second trail guide, arrived with Benny and Butterscotch. As parents, when something cool happens, we don't look at the thing itself. We look at our kids' faces to see the adorable reaction. Judging by their faces, the only arrival that could have topped Leah with the horses was Bluey herself.

Both guides were perfect at balancing safety with the excitement of introductions. They showed Natalie and Briggs how to hold their hands flat to feed grass to Benny and Butterscotch. When it came time to saddle up, both kids were so comfortable that there was zero fear. Cue the unexpected proud mom tears. Traci appreciates how this experience builds kids' confidence and respect for horses. It comes down to "trust and love, cause and effect. You get out of it what you put into it. Affection without expectation."

We got our cameras ready as Erin and Leah led the kids around the property. We went through some woods, an open plain, and up and down some hills, and every part of it was breathtaking. Both Natalie and Briggs were getting a kick out of yelling "yeehaw!" and "giddy up!" from the saddle, but Benny and Butterscotch remained gentle and easy-going.

What impressed me most was the engagement level of our guides. Leah and Erin talked to Natalie and Briggs throughout the trail ride, asking them about dogs at home and what they like to do in school. This wasn't just an activity to check off in their to-do list. You could tell both ladies were there helping us because they cared about the kids and wanted to make this special.

We looped around the property and could see the end of the ride coming up. Immediately, both Briggs and Natalie asked, "When can we come back?" and "Can we take Butterscotch and Benny to the camper? Can Leah and Erin come back for s'mores?" Honestly, at that point, I was wishing the same thing. It was incredible to see how strong of a bond they had created for us in just one afternoon.





> What impressed me most was the engagement level of our guides. Leah and Erin talked to Natalie and Briggs throughout the trail ride, asking them about dogs at home and what they like to do in school. This wasn't just an activity to check off in their to-do list. You could tell both ladies were there helping us because they cared about the kids and wanted to make this special.



"Being able to love and care for horses is a gift that not everyone experiences growing up," Traci shared. "Animal-human connection is incredibly special. Some parents are just as new to horses as their children." No matter how new you are to horses, these ladies know how to take care of you and your kids.

When they were safely back on the ground, Briggs and Natalie immediately gave hugs to both horses, Leah and Erin. They didn't want to leave. I found myself saying, "The next time we plan a trip out this way, we will absolutely be back." And I meant it. Arcady Ridge Ranch is worth the trip.

"Running an operation like this doesn't always make sense in terms of the dollars in, dollars out. Sometimes we do things just for the sake of joy," shares Traci. "Whether it is Buckaroo Hour or a half-day ride in the mountains, that participation is what makes this way of life and this type of offering possible."

We were overjoyed to share those trails with you, Traci, Erin, and Leah. Give Butterscotch and Benny a scruff and some love from us!

Top Tips for a great trip:

- *Wear sturdy shoes for walking with the horses.*
- *Bring water and a light snack. If you're hungry afterward, the Cowboy Cafe is famous for great sandwiches and pies.*
- *Expect summer temperatures from the upper 70s during the day to the 40s at night. Jeans, a T-shirt, and a light jacket work well.*
- *Helmets are provided!*
- *Apply sunscreen and bug spray before you head to the ranch. The kids are so excited once you get there, and it's one more thing out of the way so they can focus on the safety message.*
- *The safety message is a great time for parents to grab essentials like water, snacks, camera, and a cash tip.*
- *Buckaroo Hour is just one of many offerings at Arcady Ridge Ranch! Check out their website for lodging, hunting, fishing, longer trail rides, and more.*

Learn more & Plan your visit:

AR

ARCADY RIDGE RANCH

DUBOIS WYOMING

• EST 2021 •

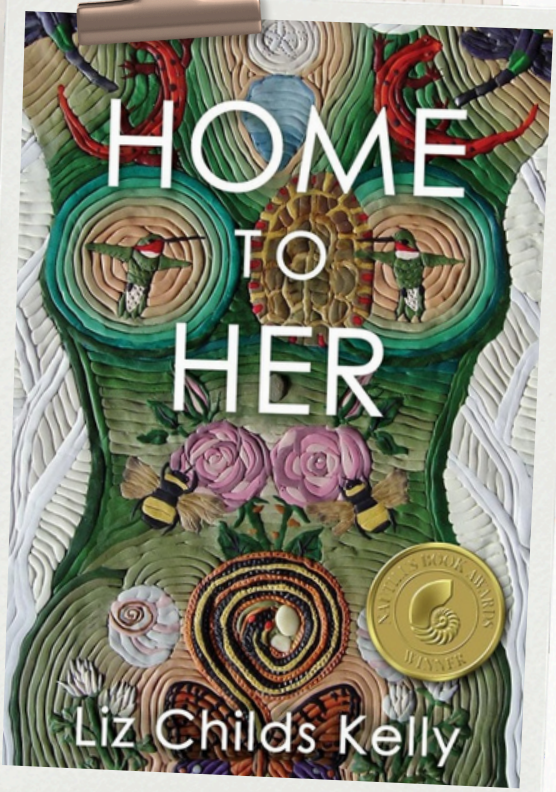
arcadyridgeranch.com

About the Author:



Mallory Sunday is a writer and mom who finds inspiration in family adventures, travel, and the moments that connect us.

Book Review



Home to Her: Walking the Transformative Path of the Sacred Feminine

★★★★★

Home to Her is part history, part personal pilgrimage, and part invitation to rediscover the Sacred Feminine, the ancient Divine force that cultures around the world once honored and that much of the West has long since buried.

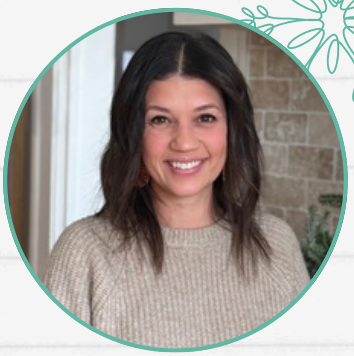
Liz Childs Kelly gathers stories and evidence from across the globe, explaining what this wisdom represents and how it differs from the spiritual traditions many of us grew up with. Her writing is warm, honest, and deeply inclusive, and she weaves her own awakening into the larger story in a way that makes the reader feel accompanied rather than lectured.

Like the Pacific Island wayfinders she describes, Kelly offers reflections and practical exercises to help readers reconnect with Her as a real, guiding presence in everyday life. It's a timely, hopeful read for anyone longing to reclaim their intuition, their sovereignty, and a more just vision for the future.

the mdw market

GET THE BOOK ON THE MDW MARKET

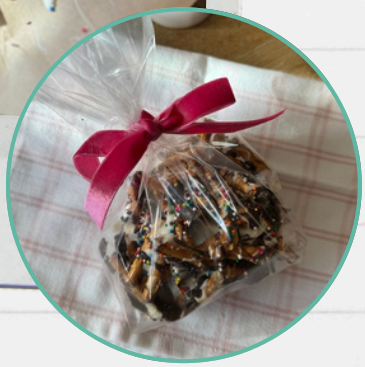
Peppermint Pretzel Bark



from Katie McCall



An easy homemade gift to make with kiddos!



Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups pretzel twists or sticks, broken into bite-sized pieces
- 1/3 cup Ghirardelli Dark Chocolate Melts
- 1/3 cup Ghirardelli White Chocolate Melts
- Peppermint Extract
- Nonpareils sprinkles

Instructions:

- Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside. Melt the chocolates in separate bowls according to package instructions. Once melted, add 1-2 drops of peppermint extract and stir well. Be careful not to add too much; peppermint is strong, and a little goes a long way!
- Start by pouring half of the dark chocolate on parchment, then add half of the white chocolate - creating a base of chocolate. Next, add the broken pretzel pieces, pressing them gently into the melted chocolate.
- Take the remaining dark and white chocolates and drizzle them over the top of the pretzels. Immediately sprinkle the nonpareils over the top before the chocolate sets.
- Place in the refrigerator for 10 to 15 minutes. Once set, use your fingers to gently break the bark into pieces and package in a cellophane bag or festive holiday box with a ribbon. This makes a wonderful (and cost-saving) gift for a hostess, teacher, coach, or fun add-on to any gift this season. Enjoy!

Can be stored at room temperature or in the refrigerator/freezer for a cool treat.


STYLE

KNIT VEST

Meet the layer that does all the work while looking effortless. This soft, medium-weight knit has a classic crew neck and ribbed trim that keep it polished. The side ties are the fun part: cinch them for shape or leave them loose and easy, depending on the day you're having. Comes in two rich, cozy shades: burgundy red (think mulled wine and candlelight) and olive green (think forest walks and fresh herbs).



Side-tie knit vest

THE PEP LINE

FINDING THE RIGHT PAIR OF GLASSES

WITH PAM RANCOUR
OF BLINKA OPTICAL



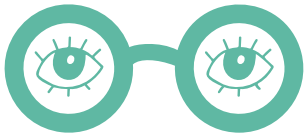
Finding the right pair of glasses isn't about following a set of rules. It's more personal than that.

Have you ever had that moment when you try on a frame and something feels off? You can't explain it. The color might be beautiful. The shape might be exactly what you thought you wanted. But when you look in the mirror, it doesn't quite come together. I see people struggle with this everyday and it's not because they picked a bad frame. It's because no one ever showed them what to actually look for. Finding the right frame isn't about following rules. It's about balance.

Most of us have heard the advice about face shapes and the best frames for them. While these guidelines can be a helpful starting point, it's not where I begin. When I'm helping someone, I'm looking at how the frame works with her features as a whole. Her eyes, her cheekbones, her brows. How everything lines up and flows together. That's where it starts to click.

1 All Eyes on Balance

The first thing I look at is where the eyes sit inside the frame. Ideally, your eyes should feel centered from left to right within each lens. When they're centered, the frame feels balanced without you even realizing why.



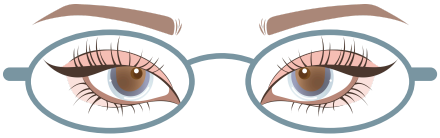
2 The Cheekbone Rule

Then I look at size, but not in the way most people think. It's all about how the frames sit on your face, so I use your cheekbones as a guide. A well-balanced frame will line up close to the outer edge of your cheekbone without extending too far past your face. Too narrow can feel a little pinched; too wide can start to overwhelm your features. We're simply looking for that point where everything feels in proportion



3 Brow Etiquette

The top line of the frame is another detail that makes a bigger difference than you would expect. Your eyebrows should never sit underneath the top edge of the frame. When they do, it disrupts the natural flow of your face. Instead, your brows should either sit just above the frame or move naturally along with it. When that alignment is right, everything looks cleaner and more intentional.



4 Face Shape is More of a Guideline, Not a Rule

Face shape still plays a role, but more as a guide than a rulebook. Instead of trying to match yourself to a category, think about what brings balance to your features. If your face is softer, you might want a bit more structure. If your features are stronger, something with softer lines can feel more effortless. It's less about getting it "right" and more about how it all comes together on you.



5 Statement or Signature?

Color is where it becomes personal. Of course, your hair color and eye color can influence what looks especially striking, but the best color is always the one that makes you feel like yourself. Some women love a frame that stands out and becomes part of their look. Others prefer something quieter that blends in seamlessly. Both are right.



When you find the right pair, you'll know. Nothing feels distracting. You're not fussing with them or second-guessing what you're seeing. Your features feel in balance, and simply look like yourself, just a little more pulled together.

And that's really the goal. Not to change how you look, but to find something that brings everything into alignment in a way that feels natural, effortless, and entirely your own.

Pam



blinka
blinkaoptical.com
221 West State Street
Geneva, IL

House of 423 Holiday Show

Supporting Rising Lights Project

















Photos by lindsayraephotography.com

CAPE

Rosena turned heads on the runway at House of 423's holiday fashion show benefiting the Rising Lights Project in this Chiffon Cape Top, a statement piece with architectural movement, flattering shirred detailing, and a fluid drape that caught every step. An elastic waist adds shape and comfort, and the cape layers easily over basics or works as the centerpiece of a holiday look, paired here with cuffed denim for an easy high-low finish.



Chiffon Cape Top

House of 423

Photos by
lindsayraephotography.com

HOUSE OF 423

Visit House of 423 at
219 W State Street in Geneva
or online at houseof423.com

Knit Ruffled Collar Midi Dress



Faux Fur Hooded Coat

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS



Cotton Striped Bow Blouse





Bright Bird Bandana

Satin Ruched Midi Dress



Raisin Plaid Mini Dress



Floral Beaded Clutch





Poppie, our shop dog.

AVAILABLE IN 2 COLORS

POWER CLUTCH



FAIR WARNING: YOU MAY WANT ONE IN EACH COLOR.



Consider this your holiday-party secret weapon. The Pep Line's slim vegan leather clutch is embossed with a subtle snake-effect texture that catches the light just right, and it comes in two jewel-box shades made for the season: a warm, golden mustard and a rich, deep emerald. Carry it by its sculptural arch handle for an elegant, polished moment, or clip on the removable chain strap and go hands-free. Gleaming metal hardware gives it just the right amount of shine, and the sleek silhouette pairs as beautifully with a velvet gown as it does with tailored trousers and your favorite blazer.

THE PEP LINE

Shop at 201 Cedar Avenue in St. Charles, or thepepline.com

Also available in emerald.



SHE'S ALREADY THERE:
MEET JODI DOYLE OF UPLEVEL REDESIGN



Five years ago, Jodi Doyle stood in front of her closet the way so many of us do: racks full, nothing to wear, and a feeling that the woman in the mirror wasn't quite her.

At 40, Jodi discovered that hiring a personal stylist was within reach. She was all in.

She expected help with her clothes, but what Jodi got was something else entirely. "Everything shifted," Jodi remembers. "Not just my wardrobe. My presence. My confidence. And how I took up space in the world."

The change was so visible that people noticed. That newfound confidence led Jodi to start a business helping people create beautiful spaces sustainably, reimagining what they already had. But the compliments kept coming. Compliments turned into conversations, and conversations turned into a question she couldn't ignore: *Can you help me get dressed?*

In October 2023, she finally said yes. Her first client walked out of that closet with the clarity she'd been chasing for years. Jodi walked out knowing she'd found her calling. Soon after, she pivoted her entire business, and Uplevel Redesign became what it is today: an education-rich styling practice for women who are ready to be seen - helping them close the gap between who they are and what they wear.

Jodi doesn't just talk about intentional style; she lives it. She has gone more than 850 days without buying anything brand-new and 4 years without purchasing new fashion online. Every outfit you see her in is consignment, thrifted, resale, vintage, or something she has owned for years.

Her clients feel the difference the moment she walks in. With 30 years of thrifting behind her, Jodi sees possibilities where most of us see clutter: the jacket that's been saved for a special occasion, the boots nobody knew how to style, the skirt that could work five new ways. To her, the struggle to get dressed is a clarity problem, not a shopping problem. When a woman finally knows what she wants to wear and how to dress the body she's in, the sustainability part takes care of itself. She buys less, wastes less, and wears more of what she already loves.

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS







Jodi's North Star is her belief that personal style is a skill women can learn through practice, play, and repetition. "I'm your stylist for right now," she says. She builds the foundation, shows women what's already working, helps them let go of what isn't, and teaches them how to build outfits they can keep recreating and remixing on their own. Some start with a one-day Wardrobe Wake Up. Others go all in with The Takeover: three days, their closet, their next level.

"Getting dressed as the woman you're becoming is how you actually become her," Jodi says. "It's not vanity. It's practice."

Here in the Fox Valley, many of us know Jodi as a friend, a neighbor, and a familiar face at our Saturday morning coffee at Storybook Cafe. But she isn't just a local stylist. Her work has taken her into closets across Chicagoland to Minneapolis-St. Paul, to the San Francisco Bay Area, and her voice is shaping the sustainable style conversation far beyond our corner of Illinois.

This spring, Jodi spoke to the Women's Council of Realtors about how intentional style can help women feel more confident. She then took the stage at Sustainable Fashion Week Chicago's symposium to share what she'd learned after 645 days of not buying anything new, alongside the designers, advocates, and change-makers working toward a fairer fashion industry. In July, she joined Sarene Alsharif of Tad More Tailoring & Alterations at Greener Grove in Downers Grove, inspiring a room full of eco-minded neighbors to buy less, waste less, and wear more. She returned to Sustainable Fashion Week Chicago in the fall to moderate its speaker panels. And on podcasts like Women of Aurora, she has opened up about burnout, self-worth, and why confidence starts in your closet. Wherever she goes, her message travels with her: the most sustainable wardrobe is the one you actually love wearing.

Which brings it all back to that woman standing in front of her closet. Maybe she's you. Jodi would tell you not to wait for someday, not for the weight loss or the extra money or the perfect timing. Start now, as who you already are, with what you already have.

"She's already there," Jodi says. "Let's find her."



NECKLACE

This Queen Anne's Lace Necklace features a real pressed bloom set in resin and made to order in your choice of gold-filled, sterling silver, or copper. Tori Eisenberg of Nature's HandyWork makes resin and fine silver jewelry using real wildflowers she gathers along the Fox River bluffs and roads in Northern Illinois, so each piece lets you wear a little bit of the wild.



Queen Anne's Lace Necklace

Nature's HandyWork

CLOGS



Celine Clog in Russet

PROJECT CLOUD


BEAUTY

BRR-ILLIANTLY SMOOTH: WINTER SKINCARE TIPS FROM PLUSH

by Jessica at Plush in Geneva



Your summer skin is a year-round commitment.
Here are a few tips for caring for your skin heading into winter waxing season.

EXFOLIATE

Cold weather, hot tubs and indoor heating all contribute to the extra-dry skin we see in winter. Try an exfoliating glove, dry brush or gentle scrub with exfoliating beads 2–3 times a week to remove buildup and reduce the chance of ingrown hairs. Just don't overdo it! Wait 48 hours after any wax appointment before adding exfoliation back into your routine. Product we love: Fur Silk Scrub.





MOISTURIZE

Make moisturizing part of your daily routine, ideally right after your shower when your skin can better retain moisture. Invest in a good fragrance-free moisturizer. Our favorite: Fur Oil.



PAUSE RETINOIDS AND ACNE MEDS

Avoid retinols and topical acne medications for 7 days before AND after your wax. Retinol, Differin Gel, tretinoin, and many other topical creams make your skin drier and more sensitive. Even if you don't apply them to your brows, product migrates as you sleep and touch your face, and retinoids thin the skin across the whole area.

Taking an oral acne medication like Accutane (isotretinoin)? Waxing isn't safe during treatment or for at least 6 months to 1 year after your last dose, because skin can lift or tear. At 6 months, you can do a patch test and see if your skin will tolerate a wax. Please let your provider know about any medications you're using, topical or oral.



GIVE YOUR SKIN A BREATHER AFTER YOUR WAX

Skip hot tubs, saunas, and very hot showers and baths for 24–48 hours after your appointment. Freshly waxed skin is sensitive, and heat can lead to irritation and breakouts.

STAY ON SCHEDULE

Don't let winter be your excuse to neglect your smooth skin! The colder months are a great time to establish a consistent waxing routine. Staying on a 4–6 week schedule lets us work with your natural hair growth cycle, and over time you'll notice hair growing in finer and more sparse. By the time summer rolls around, you'll already have a routine in place!

COME SEE US!

Start growing out that hair (about ¼ inch, or roughly 2–3 weeks of growth, is perfect), schedule your next appointment on our user-friendly booking app, and come meet the lovely ladies of Plush Waxing & Beauty!

Plush Waxing and beauty

MEET THE TEAM

JESSICA



CELESTE



AVA



Two Friends, One Bold Bag Brand: Meet Thread Original



Copies are boring. Originals turn heads. That's the idea behind Thread Original, the creative merch and private label studio founded by local friends Amy O'Brien and Kim Bowers. They sell their own makeup and everyday bags, including light-up styles, and they partner with brands on custom collections, event swag, loyalty gifts, and memorable unboxing moments.

The two have decades of creative experience. Amy is a Chicago native who studied design, photography, and advertising at Brooks Institute. She started as a photo stylist in Los Angeles and New York City and went on to become a photo art director on commercial shoots. Kim earned her BFA in photography from Columbia College Chicago.

Then spent 17 years in leadership roles at Urban Decay Cosmetics, where she learned what it takes to build an edgy, unforgettable brand.

Kim and Amy also care about their community, specifically women. Through their ongoing initiative, "Thread Has Your Back," their website offers quick links to crisis lines, including 988, plus domestic violence and sexual assault support, and rideshare options for getting home safely. They also give away free QR stickers that link to these resources, so schools, workplaces, bars, and community spaces can post help where people need it.

Asking for help is okay, and they make it easier.

Want to see the bags for yourself?

Shop Thread Original online, or stop by House of 423 in Geneva to find your next statement piece.



threadoriginal.shop


Get Lit
✓ Built-in rechargeable LED lights
✓ 10–12+ hours of light
✓ USB-C rechargeable
✓ Two removable mesh organizer pouches
✓ Wipe-clean insulated interior
✓ Premium vegan leather exterior
Aurora Large Light-Up Makeup Bag
THREAD
ORIGINAL

THE GIFT OF GOOD SKIN

For Chanla Chau, great skin starts with nature. This local esthetician-turned-beauty-industry powerhouse, whose work has been featured in Vogue and Glamour, spent years at a major cosmetics retailer watching customers search for natural skincare that big-store brands weren't delivering.



After stepping away to stay home with her two children, she missed helping people with their skin and wanted something that was just hers. After countless hours of research, classes, and consults with cosmetic chemists, her line was born.

Every plant-based formula is made by hand in micro-batches for freshness and potency. Ingredients are weighed for precision, hand-sifted for silky texture, and sourced with a preference for organic, fair-trade, and cruelty-free suppliers.

There are no fillers, just award-winning formulas in which every ingredient serves a purpose: nourishing skin, supporting its barrier, and delivering visible results. This holiday season, give the gift of self-care that feels as indulgent as it is effective.



SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS

Shop at
chanlachaucosmetics.com

Photographer
Lindsay Rae Photography

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Building Your Holistic Living Toolkit

Why lasting wellness starts with a small step, not one perfect solution.

By Cheryl Cryer

One of the questions I hear most often is, "Where do I start?"

It's an understandable question. When you're dealing with stress, poor sleep, chronic pain, digestive issues, or feeling unlike yourself, it's natural to hope there's one answer that will make everything feel better. I wish wellness worked that way. Instead, I've come to believe that good health looks a lot more like building a toolkit.

Think about the projects around your home. You wouldn't expect a single screwdriver to build a deck, repair a leaky faucet, and hang family photos. Each job requires different tools, and over time, you collect what you need so you're prepared when something comes up.

Our health works much the same way.

The healthiest people I know haven't found one miracle solution. They've gradually built a collection of habits, relationships, and resources they can rely on throughout different seasons of life. The goal isn't to own every tool. It's to know which ones help you feel your best.







From the garden to the countertop: At Urban Apothecary, Cheryl creates many of her teas by hand, starting with ingredients sourced from trusted farms and choosing organic options when available.

I Don't Want to See You Forever

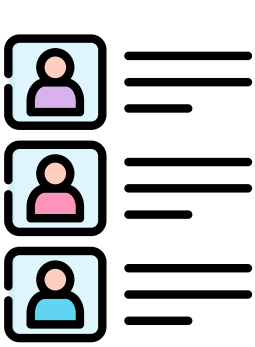
That's also why I tell people something they don't expect to hear. I don't want to see you forever. Of course, I love seeing familiar faces walk through the doors of Urban Apothecary. But my hope is that every conversation leaves you feeling a little more informed and a little more confident than when you arrived.

I don't want anyone to feel dependent on one practitioner, one product, or one philosophy.
I want people to understand their own bodies well enough to recognize what they need and where to turn when they need support.

The Power of a Good Referral

That's also why I keep a trusted network of referrals. There are times when someone would benefit more from a mental health professional, a bodywork practitioner, a neuropathy specialist, or another healthcare provider than from anything I can offer. Referring someone to the right person isn't sending them away.

It's helping them build a stronger toolkit.



"Referring someone to the right person isn't sending them away. It's helping them build a stronger toolkit."

Cheryl

Start With Sleep

When people ask me where to begin, my answer is almost always the same. Start with sleep.

Not because sleep fixes everything, but because it influences so many other pieces of our health. When we're consistently getting restorative sleep, we're often better equipped to manage stress, recover from physical discomfort, think more clearly, and respond to life's challenges. It creates a stronger foundation for everything else we choose to build.





Baby Steps: Choose One Tool



Once sleep begins to improve, it's easier to explore the next piece of the puzzle. Maybe that's addressing chronic stress or finding new ways to manage pain. Perhaps it's moving your body more consistently or working with another professional who can offer specialized support. The important part isn't choosing the perfect first step. It's choosing one.

Wellness isn't built overnight, and it isn't built by one person alone. It's built one conversation, one habit, one trusted relationship, and one thoughtful decision at a time. Your toolkit will never look exactly like mine, and it shouldn't because the best wellness plan is the one that's built around your body, your life, and your goals. And every good toolkit starts with the first tool.

building your holistic living toolkit

01 Start with Sleep & H20



Restorative sleep and good hydration support nearly every other part of your health. When you're rested and hydrated, you're better able to handle stress, recover and think clearly. Start here, and the rest gets easier to build.

02 Mind: Slow Down to Tune In



Wellness starts with being present: slowing down, looking inward, and noticing what you need. Practices like meditation help quiet the noise, and mental health support is there when you need more than you can carry alone.

03 Body: Fuel, Move, Restore



Daily movement and clean food choices give your body what it needs to feel its best. When extra care is needed, herbal and medicinal support, lymphatic massage and other bodywork can help your body restore and heal.

04 Lifestyle: Protect Your Peace



How you live each day shapes how you feel. Open communication and healthy boundaries protect your social battery and make room for what matters. Time outdoors, hobbies and simple joys help you recharge.

05 Community: Seek Support & Joyful Belonging

Wellness isn't built alone. Trusted healthcare providers, friends, family and referral networks like MDW help you find the right support at the right time. A healthy community also shows up for those who are often left out, because caring for others strengthens us all.



Need help teasing out your toolkit?

Cheryl at Urban Apothecary can help you get started.

Stop in at Urban Apothecary or make your own private appointment by calling (312) 625-8299

LEARN MORE urbanapothecary.shop



Something Just Doesn't Feel Right Anymore

by Dr. Ashley Caravelli
Axis Precision Health
St. Charles, IL

Something just didn't feel right anymore.

It started with little things that seemed almost too strange to mention. I suddenly had a couple more chin hairs than I'd ever noticed before, and as a Lebanese-Italian woman, I've never been a stranger to mustache or chin hairs. Then there was the itchy ear, which I honestly didn't know could even be a symptom of perimenopause until it showed up on my Instagram feed. (And no, despite what social media might suggest, please don't put Flonase in your ear. We'll come back to that another time.)

The surprising part wasn't that I was experiencing these symptoms. The surprising part was that I didn't recognize them.

I'm a family medicine physician, and I wasn't taught any of this.

That realization led me to start asking questions. I talked with colleagues, peers, and other physicians, expecting someone to confidently explain what I was experiencing. Instead, I found that many of them felt just as uncertain as I did. Not because they didn't care, but because perimenopause and menopause simply weren't emphasized during our training.

An entire generation of physicians was shaped by the release of the Women's Health Initiative study, which concluded that hormone therapy increased the risk of cancer. The message many of us took away was straightforward: if you prescribe hormone therapy at all, use the lowest possible dose for the shortest amount of time. That guidance influenced how countless physicians practiced medicine for years.

Today, we're in a very different place.

Research has continued to evolve, but so has the amount of information coming at us every day. Women are hearing conversations about hormones, supplements, peptides, GLP-1 medications, and menopause everywhere they turn, yet much of it feels contradictory. Even as a physician who follows other physicians, I sometimes find myself wondering what the truth actually is.

Menopause has become part of that confusion.

I've had conversations with my own mom, who understandably said, "I went through it, and I was fine." My husband wondered why this has suddenly become such a big conversation when women have experienced menopause for generations. I understand that perspective, but I also sit across from women every day who tell me something doesn't feel right. Eventually, I found myself asking many of the same questions.

That's when I realized I needed to learn what I had never been taught.

I immersed myself in the research, read the latest evidence, and studied menopause medicine in a way I never had before. In about six weeks, I read an entire medical textbook cover to cover, something I honestly don't think I even did in medical school. This wasn't about following the latest trend. It was about becoming better equipped to care for the women sitting across from me.

My goal is simple: to give my patients and women in our community evidence-based information without fear or hype. I want to talk about the science, the symptoms, the treatment options, and the questions you may not even know to ask. Most of all, I hope to become a place where you feel informed, understood, and empowered to advocate for your own health.

If something feels off, you're not imagining it. If you think you could feel better, you're probably right.

And I'm so glad we're on this journey together!



About Dr. Ashley

Dr. Ashley Caravelli, MSCP, is a board-certified Family Medicine physician with more than 14 years of clinical experience specializing in perimenopause, menopause, and midlife women's health.

A St. Charles native, she founded Axis Precision Health to provide the kind of care many women struggle to find: longer appointments, evidence-based treatment, thorough evaluation, and a physician who takes the time to listen.

Her telehealth practice serves women throughout Illinois, helping women navigate hormonal changes while improving both symptoms and long-term health.

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@drashleycaravelli

axisprecisionhealth.com

Axis Precision Health
St. Charles, IL



Daytime Stress Support Gummies

Urban Apothecary's Daytime Stress Support Gummies combine 15mg of full-spectrum CBD and 15mg of CBG in each gummy, a 1:1 blend meant to help you feel calm and grounded during busy days.

They're naturally orange-flavored and made with organic, vegan, gluten-free ingredients, with no artificial dyes, flavors or preservatives. Each pouch holds 30 gummies and fits easily into workdays, errands and creative routines.

Shop here



Photography by Vanessa Ronowski Photography.

ROOTED IN HEALING



Photography by Vanessa Ronowski Photography

@drops_of_healingllc

Website launching December 7th

Meet Rosena, the heart behind Drops of Healing

A first-generation Cambodian American and single mom, Rosena Chan learned the power of plants from her first teachers: her grandmother and mother, who grew herbs to gently support their family's everyday well-being. That early lesson became a lifelong path.

After more than 15 years of learning and exploring nature-based healing, and drawing on her own healing journey, Rosena founded Drops of Healing. She creates small-batch products as gentle, nature-rooted tools for anyone feeling overwhelmed, overstimulated, or disconnected from themselves.

Her philosophy is refreshingly simple: healing doesn't require a complete life overhaul. Sometimes it begins with one small ritual that helps you slow down, breathe, and return to yourself. Rosena believes we each already carry deep wisdom within, and she sees her role as sharing tools that support people as they reconnect with it.

Warm and rooted in family tradition, she brings a calm, welcoming presence to everything she makes.

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS

Where Drops of Healing is popping up next...

- Saturday, Nov 21 · Pollyanna, Roselle · 12 - 5 PM
- Saturday, Nov 28 · Hairpin Arts Center, Chicago · 12 - 4 PM
- More markets coming soon. Follow @drops_of_healingllc on Instagram for updates!

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 magazine (you're reading it!).

For more information, visit mdwcares.com or follow MDW on your favorite social platform @themoderndomesticwoman

Have a question or need a referral? Email us at themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com



mdw
media

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