



# FOX VALLEY REVIEW

*Curating lifestyle, culture, commentary, and community  
from the river's edge.*

VOLUME II | ISSUE 1

**MAGAZINE**

JANUARY 1, 2026

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Every journey has a beginning and an end inextricably linked in a cycle of learning and renewal. This is a beautiful journey through global New Year traditions, exploring how different cultures mark renewal, remembrance, hope, and the beginning of a fresh chapter.

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# 01 Mission & Vision



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## WHO WE ARE

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## WHAT WE DO

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**FOX VALLEY REVIEW** is a regional digital magazine dedicated to curating and elevating the voices, stories, events, and cultural expressions of the towns and communities along the Fox River. We strive to inform, inspire, and connect residents through thoughtful storytelling, critical reflection, and celebration of the local from neighborhood events to regional art, food, and civic life.

We envision a more connected and culturally vibrant Fox Valley where every town and resident sees themselves reflected in the stories we tell. Through inclusive journalism, creative expression, and civic commentary, Fox Valley Review aims to become the cultural compass of the region, building bridges between communities, generations, and ideas across the river.



As the last echoes of the year fade into memory and the glow of a new one gently rises, I find myself reflecting with deep gratitude and joy on what Fox Valley Review has become. Volume 1 began as a dream, a gathering place for stories, voices, creativity, beauty, and the soul of our community. Over the past year, it became so much more. It became a companion. A conversation. A shared hearth of memory and imagination.

Thank you for reading, sharing, believing, and helping shape this publication into a living, breathing reflection of the Fox Valley spirit. Because of you, we close Volume 1 not simply with satisfaction, but with pride, humi-

lity, and renewed purpose. And now, we turn the page together. Welcome to Volume 2, Issue 1: our January Issue, a celebration of renewal, reflection, humor, courage, belonging, and hope. This edition opens with pieces that honor the rhythms of beginnings and the grace of moving forward. Turning the Page: Traditions of Renewal Around the World invites us into a global tapestry of New Year rituals and cultural celebrations, reminding us that across oceans and histories.

In New Year Intentions Versus Resolutions, we are encouraged to rethink the relentless pressure to "fix" ourselves every January. Instead, this piece invites softer beginnings, intentions rooted in grace, humanity, and emotional honesty. This issue also holds space for stories of healing and profound human connection. Bridging the Distance: A Daughter's Return After 13 Years of Silence is a breathtakingly honest narrative of estrangement, cultural tension, grief, and courageous reconciliation. It is a testament to

“

LET THIS BE  
YOUR WINDOW, YOUR MIRROR,  
YOUR INVITATION!

”

forgiveness as strength, to love as endurance, and to the power of showing up imperfectly, bravely, and truthfully.

Jeff Weisman's The Shopping Cart Debacle reminds us that life is rarely as graceful as we intend it to be and that laughter, relief, and love often live in the unexpected chaos of parenting. We also sit quietly beside Naming the Body: Keeping the Bond, an essay of tenderness, partnership, and honest grief that reminds us that love is

measured not by outcomes, but by presence and compassion.

Pieces like Down by the Dam in Carpentersville invite us into moments of stillness and belonging where childhood, patience, and the hum of nature shape us more deeply than we realize. Together, these stories capture what January really is: not the weight of expectation, but the gift of reflection... not just a reset, but a deepening... not just a beginning, but a continuation

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#### THE BEAN, CHICAGO, IL

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*On a sparkling Christmas Eve in Chicago, joy traveled across borders and landed beneath the glow of the city lights. Visiting family from Canada bundled laughter, love, and togetherness into this unforgettable stop at “The Bean.”*

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#### DECEMBER RELEASE PARTY | GLOBAL BREW



of the beautiful, complicated, resilient journey of being human.

As we begin this new volume, I want to thank you again for your readership, your trust, your enthusiasm, and your heart.

From all of us at Fox Valley Review: Happy New Year. Welcome to Volume 2. Let's keep telling beautiful stories together.

Dr. Baudelaire K. Ulysse  
Editor in Chief



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# *Ditching the Resolutions*

**Crystals on Parched Leaves**

**WRITER: Fox Valley Review**

**PH: Staff**

We begin this new year with a simple invitation: ditch the grand resolutions. Not because change is unworthy or ambition is wrong, but because the culture of “new year, new you” can feel exhausting: loud, performative, and oddly hollow. It demands instant reinvention, flawless discipline, and unwavering optimism.

Life, meanwhile, remains beautifully complicated. People are caring for aging parents, working multiple jobs, holding communities together, grieving losses, juggling responsibilities, and simply trying to breathe. Reinvention isn’t always what we need.

Sometimes, the work is not to become someone else; it is to return to who we’ve always been at our best. So instead of rewriting your life from



***“The work is not to become someone***

***else; it is to return to who***

***we’ve always been at our best.”***

---

***“These were never small things. They were the quiet rituals that tethered you to yourself.”***



scratch, consider dusting off the simple habits that once kept you grounded. The walks you took just to clear your head. The book you read before bed instead of scrolling. The phone call you made instead of texting. The prayer you whispered. The journal you neglected. The art you stopped making because productivity became a louder god. These were never small things. They were the quiet rituals that tethered you to yourself.

This year doesn't demand spectacle. It asks for honesty.

It invites us to tell the truth about where we are weary, where we are hopeful, and where we still long to grow. It invites us to hold both strength and vulnerability in the same hand. To strive, yes, but not at the cost of compassion for ourselves. Because the longer we live, the more we learn that growth rarely arrives with fireworks. It tends to arrive slowly, like winter light: subtle, persistent, illuminating what matters with gentle insistence.

So let this be the year of grounded becoming. The year of balanced ambi-

tion. The year we stop punishing ourselves into improvement and instead grow toward the kind of life that feels aligned, humane, and sustainable.

Here in the Fox Valley, we enter this year rooted in something deeper than resolutions. We enter with a sense of community, of shared breath and shared belonging. We enter with gratitude for neighbors who show up, storytellers who remind us who we are, caregivers who hold others through difficult seasons, artists who soften the world, and ordinary people who live extraordinary kindness without ever announcing it.

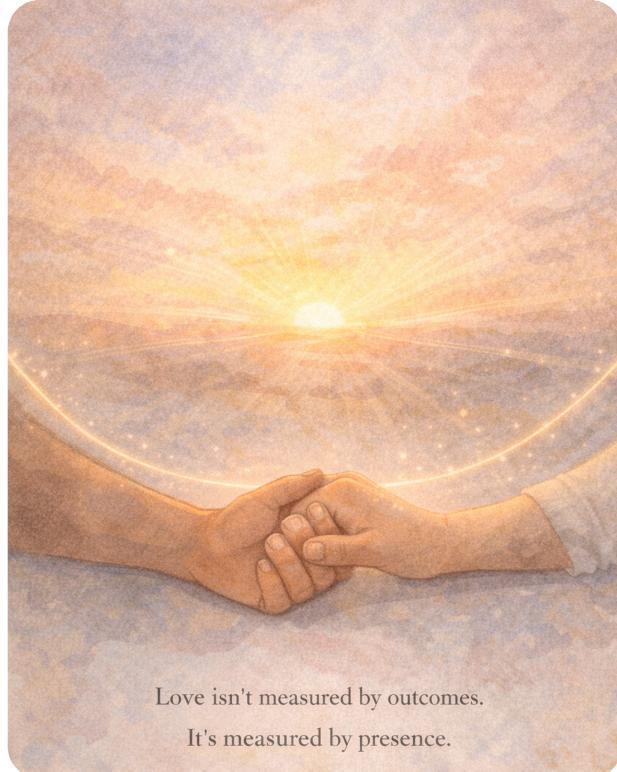
We step into this year not with declarations of perfection, but with quiet courage and deliberate hope. We will try. We will learn. We will stumble. We will rest. And we will rise again, not because the calendar told us to, but because that is what resilience looks like.

Here's to small habits that restore us.  
Here's to grace that sustains us.  
Here's to the slow work of becoming whole together.

***Image by staff: “The year 2025 is gone; on to an exciting & hopeful 2026.”***

**Fox Valley Review**

*“Naming the body, both mine and his, became an act of reclamation.”*



Love isn't measured by outcomes.  
It's measured by presence.

# 03

## *Naming the Body, Keeping the Bond*

*Grieving What Does Not Exist, Part III*

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### **PROCESSING GRIEF**

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**WRITER: Emma**  
**PH: Staff**

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**T**here's a moment in almost every infertility story when the body becomes an accusation. The first whisper of it is subtle; maybe it's me. Then it grows teeth. Self-blame can turn into a private theology, complete with rituals of doubt and

shame. Mine began with the oldest myth in the book: the idea that infertility is a woman's failure. Even before any test results, I felt myself folding into that narrative. The patriarchal logic is so familiar, so baked into culture, religion, medical history, and

“

*Women apologize for bodies they didn't*

*break. Men grieve silently because*

*masculine mythology says they*

*must appear unshaken.*

”

even language, that it takes root without invitation. Women are told they are “meant” to conceive, “designed” to nurture life, “supposed” to build families. So when month after month passed without a positive test, I didn’t question the myth; I questioned myself. My worth, my womanhood, my contribution to a relationship built on shared futures.

I carried that blame quietly until the semen analysis results came in. A medical printout, numbers, counts, morphology percentages, motility classifications, all pointing to a different truth. Not all the weight belonged on me. The science was clear. But the patriarchy in both of us was louder.

He looked at the results and winced, not because of the diagnosis but because he saw how long I had been holding something alone. “This isn’t your fault,” he said,

his voice soft but firm, the kind of tone that builds trust rather than pity. And I remember feeling a strange mix of relief and disorientation. When you’ve rehearsed self-blame for so long, reassurance feels like a foreign language.

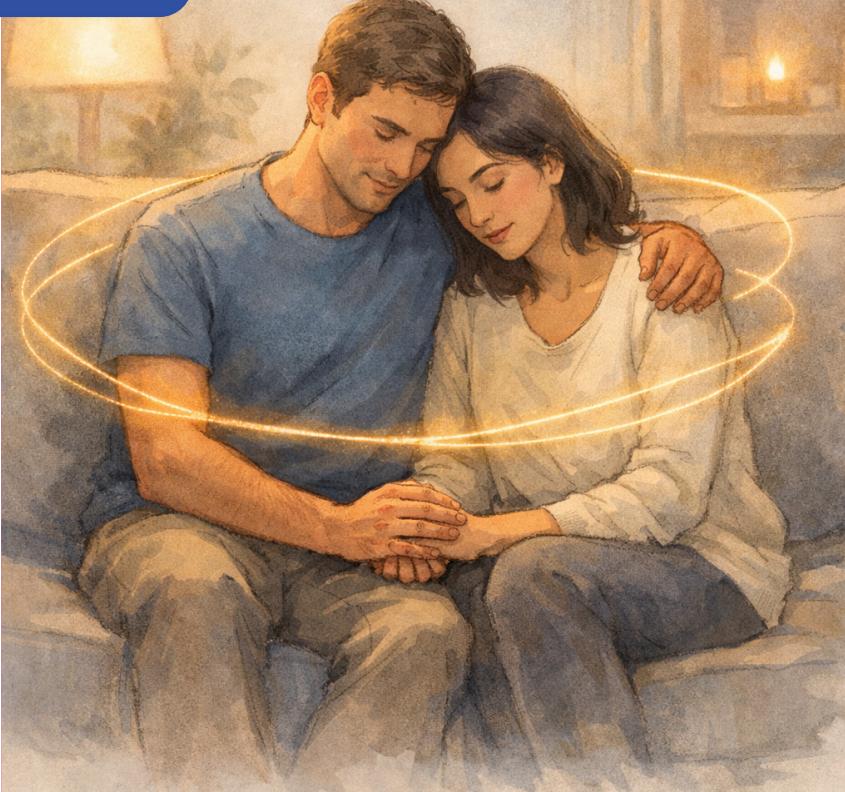
We sat together that night, naming what the tests meant and what they didn’t. Yes, the numbers were low. Yes, conception would be unlikely without intervention. No, it didn’t mean either of us had failed. No, it didn’t rewrite our story into tragedy.

Infertility doesn’t care about gendered scripts, but couples often perform them anyway. Women apologize for bodies they didn’t break. Men grieve silently because masculine mythology says they must appear unshaken. But solidarity lives in the unlearning.

We rewrote our couple script in small but deliberate ways:

- No one was “to blame.”
- No one carried the emotional load alone.
- No one apologized for biology.
- We made decisions together, not from panic or scarcity but from partnership..
- And we honored grief without assigning it a villain.

This didn’t happen in a single conversation. It happened over time, through pauses, tears, humor, late-night tenderness, and intentional honesty. What saved us wasn’t optimism but mutual reassurance; the slow building of a shared truth: We are in this together. We are grieving together. We will decide our next steps together. The other challenge was disclosure, the politics of telling. Friends and family mean well, but their responses can land like stones:  
“Have you tried...?”  
“You should talk to...”  
“My friend got pregnant after...”



We are in this together.

***"A couple sits together on a sofa, shoulders touching, hands intertwined, not dramatic, not despairing, but grounded and calm. No tears; instead, there is warmth, humanity, and presence."***

"Just relax and it will happen."

Support often disguises itself as advice, and advice can feel like pressure. What I needed; what we both needed was space to define our own boundaries.

So we decided early: we disclose on our terms, not on anyone else's timeline. We tell only the people who have earned the right to hear this part of our lives, the ones who listen more than they prescribe, who ask what we need instead of offering unsolicited solutions.

When we finally began telling family and close friends, we practiced the script together:

"We're sharing this because we trust you, not because we want advice. We're navigating the medical part with our doctors. What we need most is emotional support and understanding."

Most people responded with kindness. Some stumbled into platitudes. A few tried to fix what was never theirs to fix. And for those moments, we wrote boundaries into the relationship, not as punishment but as self-preservation.

Naming the body, both mine and his, became an act of reclamation. Not a confession of fault, but a statement of truth. Biology without narrative. Facts without shame.

Keeping the bond required tenderness: learning how to hold grief without letting it harden us, practicing solidarity in the face of scripts designed to divide us, and remembering that infertility is not the measure of our relationship.

Some days are still harder than others. Some conversations still carry weight. But the difference now is this: we no longer face those moments separately. We face them linked, grounded, and honest.

If grief has taught me anything, it's that love isn't measured by outcomes. It's measured by presence, by the willingness to stay soft with each other even when the world wants to assign blame.

And in that softness, the bond holds. Not because our bodies succeeded, but because we refused to let patriarchal myths tell the story for us.

~Emma



*“Two anatomical heart-like shapes, one representing a woman, one representing a man, are surrounded by handwritten words being gently erased: “fault,” “failure,” “broken,” “should,” “man’s role,” “woman’s duty.”*



# GRANNY'S *WOVEN QUILT SERIES*

DOWN BY THE DAM IN CARPENTERSVILLE

“

*THE RIVER'S WHISPERING;*

*LET ME TELL YOU*

*WHAT IT SAID: COME HOME.*

”

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**WRITER: GRANNY**

**PH: STAFF**

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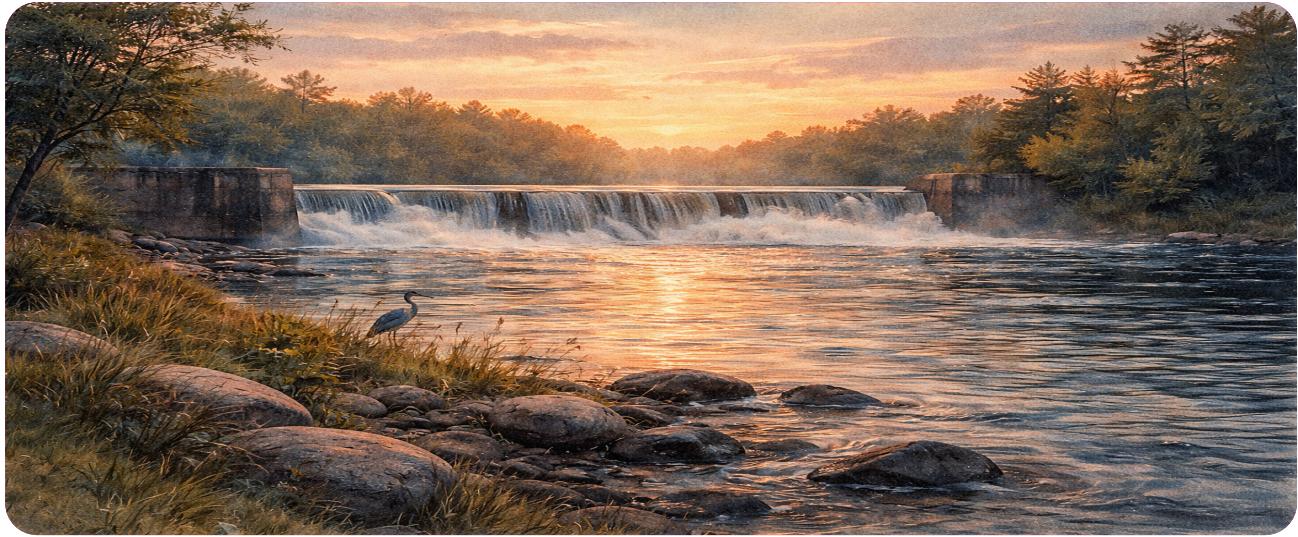
The river always had something to say, if you listened close enough. In Carpentersville, just beyond the bend in the Fox River, the old dam wasn't just a structure of concrete and current; it was our lullaby, our gathering place, our quiet friend.

I remember holding my daddy's hand as we walked the path down to the water's edge. He always had two things in his jacket pocket, a silver flask of coffee and a battered tin of worms. He'd sip the first while baiting the hook with the second. And I'd sit, cross-legged, on a smooth rock, fee-

ling the mist of the dam on my cheeks while I watched the line ripple through the current.

Daddy wasn't much for conversation, but down by that dam, we didn't need words. The rhythm of water crashing, birds calling overhead, and the soft thunk of skipping rocks did all the talking.

That's where I learned patience. Not in a classroom or a sermon, but in those long, still moments beside a man who taught me that silence had a sound.



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Some summer nights, we'd bring along an old transistor radio. We'd listen to the Cubs, or sometimes just the static, watching the sun melt behind the treeline while dragonflies hovered in the dusk.

When I was older, I'd come with friends, or a beau or two, each of them trying to impress me with how many times they could skip a stone. None ever beat my record of nine hops.

Folks today talk about mindfulness, about finding peace in chaos. We had it then. We had it down by the dam. It wasn't just about fishing or skipping stones. It was about learning how to be still in a world that never stopped moving.

So when life feels too loud, too fast, too full; I close my eyes and remember the hush of the river.



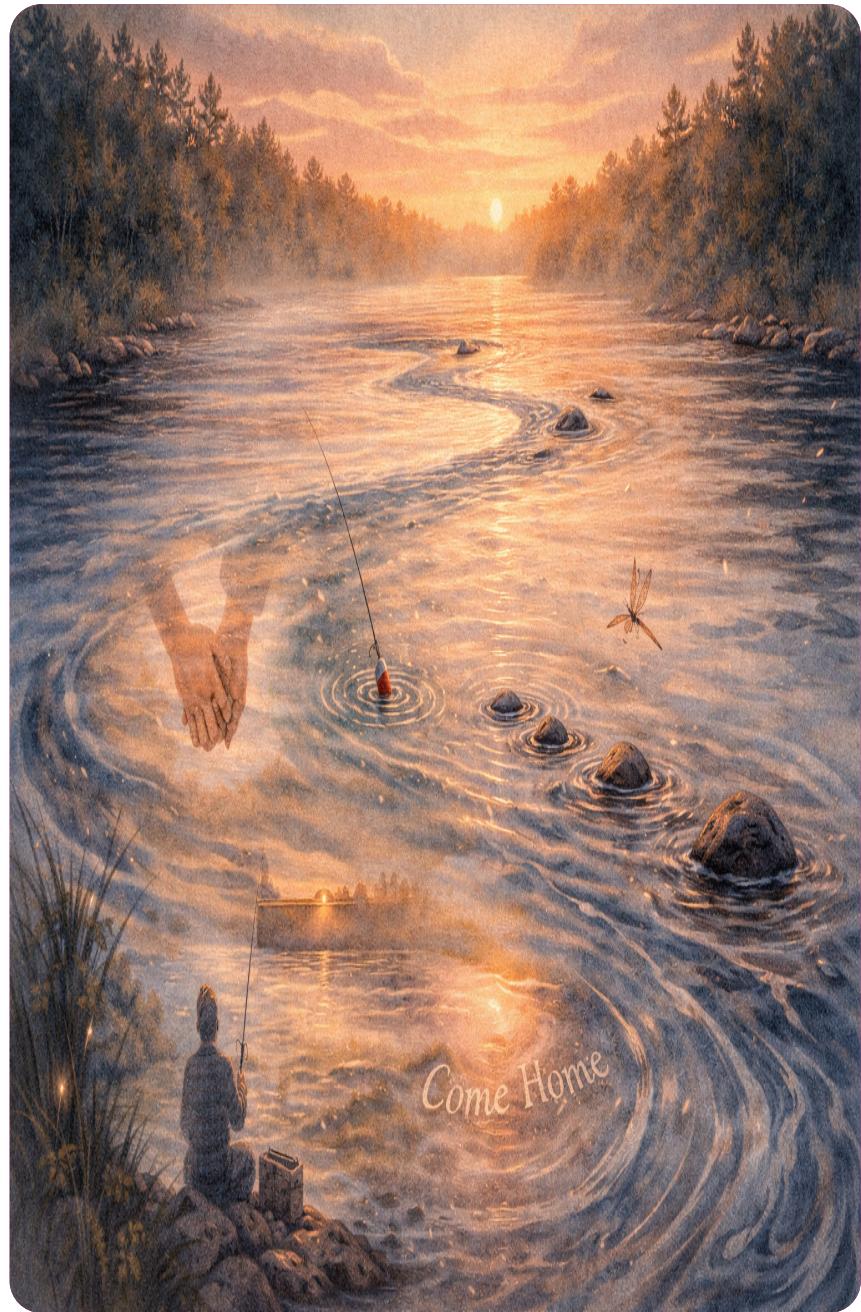
***“Father with daughter nearby him, calm and steady, with an old transistor radio behind him.”***

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I remember my father's quiet strength, the splash of a cast line, and the whisper of water brushing the rocks.

The river's whispering; let me tell you what it said. It said, "Come home."

~Granny



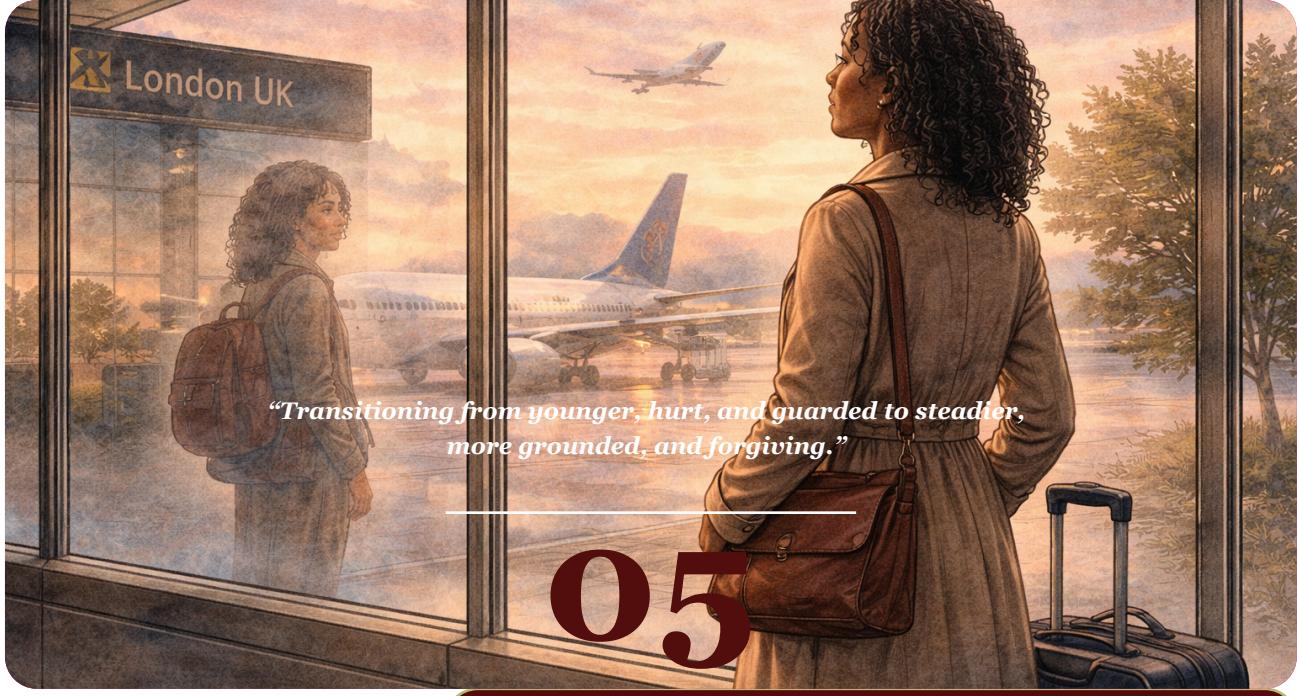
*"The river flowing forward like a ribbon of memory, reflecting in the water hold subtle echoes of dragonflies, skipped stones, a fishing line, a hand holding another."*

*Stay tuned for the next story from Granny's Woven Quilt Series. It's coming up in the February Issue.*



### **“Between Two Worlds” : Cultural Duality**

Navigating the concept of home in four different countries, along with multiple cultural and social identities represent a constant struggle of being, becoming, and belonging. The true self is forged and found in the complexity and the chaos of love.



**WRITER:** Uwalia Kóyo

**PH:** Staff

## *Bridging the Distance: A Daughter's Return After 13 Years of Silence*

In 2023, after thirteen years without hearing my father's voice, I boarded a plane to the United Kingdom: not for adventure, not for career, but for something far more fragile: time. Time with a father I had once emotionally buried. Time with a family I had distanced myself from out of self-preservation. Time that suddenly felt urgent after grief reshaped my world.

My story is one of culture, heartbreak, identity, and healing, the complicated journey of a daughter learning where boundaries end and forgiveness may

*"My roots reach deep into Edo culture in Nigeria, a world where obedience, reputation, and duty often matter more than individual happiness."*



*“What surprised me most was him.*

*Age can soften a person. Loss can humble them.*

*Time reveals truths that pride once hides.”*

quietly begin.

#### **Raised Between Two Worlds**

I grew up between cultures that could not have been more different. In the United States, I learned independence, self-worth, and the value of emotional well-being. But my roots reach deep into Edo culture in Nigeria, a world where obedience, reputation, and duty often matter more than individual happiness.

By twenty-three, those expectations became real. I was introduced to the son of my father’s late friend, a man chosen not for compatibility, but for legacy and loyalty. I was assured he would protect and care for me. I trusted those assurances, and eventually left for Italy to begin married life. He appeared attentive and loving. Yet loneliness shadowed those early years as I navigated a foreign country alone, often traveling to the U.S. and the U.K. to stay grounded. During one of those trips, everything collapsed. Another woman came forward, revea-



### ***The moments when grief serves as a catalyst for clarity and love.***

I chose forgiveness, even if imperfect.  
I chose connection over pride.  
Healing over distance.  
Not because everything had changed,  
but because I now wanted peace  
more than I wanted to be right.

#### **The Return**

In May 2023, I returned intentionally, cautiously, honestly. I now divide my life between the United States and the United Kingdom, caring for my father, showing up for family, cherishing whatever time we have.

What surprised me most was him.

Age can soften a person.

Loss can humble them.

Time reveals truths that pride once hides. Our relationship is not perfect. But it is real. It is honest. And it is healing.

#### **What Loss Has Taught Me**

My brother's death taught me the importance of bridging gaps before they become regrets. Now every conversation, every shared laugh, every quiet moment with my father feels like a blessing I no longer take for granted. Rebuilding hasn't been easy.

But it has been necessary.

Sometimes healing isn't loud or dramatic.

Sometimes it is simply choosing to show up again, even when it hurts,

even when the past feels heavy, even when pride whispers otherwise. Because tomorrow is never promised. And love, however imperfect, flawed, evolving love, is still worth fighting for. ~Uwalia

ling she and my husband had been in an ongoing relationship during our marriage.

#### **Culture vs. Self**

My instinct wasn't rage. It was clarity. I wanted honesty. What I received instead were dismissals from my husband... and painfully, from my father. "Don't worry."

"It's a man's nature."

"Don't let this destroy your home." As though betrayal were a minor inconvenience. As though my dignity were negotiable. I was expected to endure. To protect image. To stay silent.

But I wasn't the woman they assumed I would be. I was shaped by American ideals of emotional safety, self-respect, and mental health. I could not remain in a marriage where I was neither valued nor safe. So I left.

I walked away from the marriage... from the expectations that suffocated

me and eventually, from my father.

#### **A Life Rebuilt and Then, a Shattering Loss**

Returning to the United States, I rebuilt life from the ground up. I became an occupational therapist, then an educator. I worked hard. I thrived. And for a long time, that strength sustained me.

Then burnout came.

And soon after, grief in its most devastating form.

My younger brother passed away. Nothing prepares you for the loss of a sibling. Grief collided with guilt: sharp, heavy, relentless. I replayed every missed conversation, every moment fatigue or distance had kept me away. Therapy helped me understand grief, but clarity brought another truth: Boundaries can protect you. But they can also become walls. If I didn't reconcile with my father and something happened to him, the regret would be unbearable. So, after thirteen years, I chose something I once swore I never would:

# The Shopping Cart Debacle



*“Some moments are so full of magic,  
we forget they’re already memories.”*



***“Heart pounding, I shoved the cart aside, dropped down to her level, and braced myself for blood, tears, screaming parents, horrified witnesses or something.”***

---

Every parent has one or two, or twenty moments from raising their child that they'd rather forget. From sending them on a playdate still wearing pajama bottoms to realizing far too late that you left the house without an extra diaper... we've all been there.

This is one of mine.

And the wild part is, it didn't start like one of those stories. I just needed to make a quick run into the grocery store with my daughter for milk and fruit. No big deal.

There was, however, one condition: because she was six at the time, she insisted that she had to ride in the cart, no matter how many groceries we were grabbing. Honestly, it felt like a fair bargain if it meant she would cooperate. So after walking into Meijer together, we headed over to the cart corral. She was right beside me. I remember that clearly.

Then I grabbed a cart.  
Or at least, I tried to.

It was jammed into the one behind it, and in that split second I made the fatal assumption that my daughter would stay beside me while I worked the cart loose. (No, I cannot explain why I assumed that.) I stepped back slightly, grabbed the handle with both

hands, and prepared to yank. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to me, she slipped underneath my arms and planted herself directly in front of the cart, face perfectly aligned with the handle. Yes. You know exactly where this is going.

I gave the cart one good pull. It snapped free with way more force than I expected... and slammed straight into her face. Hard.

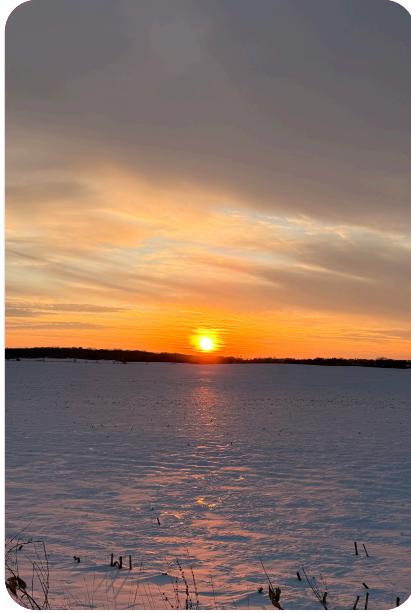
I froze.

It was an accident, of course; in a million years I would never intentionally hurt my child, but that didn't change the fact that I did it. In that instant my brain screamed, I just broke my daughter.

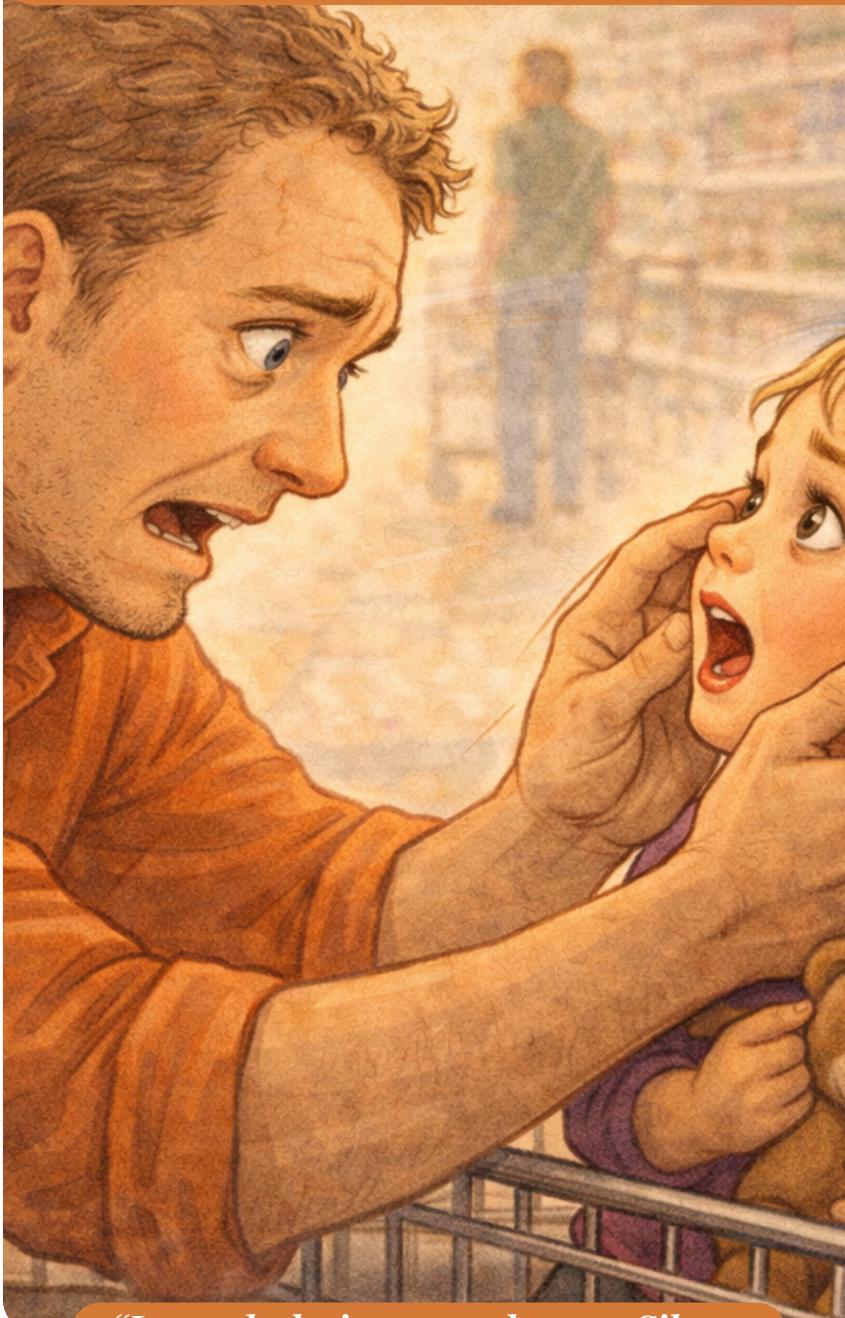
Heart pounding, I shoved the cart aside, dropped down to her level, and braced myself for blood, tears, screaming parents, horrified witnesses or something. Anything. Instead, she just stared at me. Silent. Shocked. Not crying.

“Oh my God,” I blurted, panicked. “Are you alright?”

Still nothing. Just wide eyes.  
“I’m so sorry,” I said, already imagining the emergency room paperwork.  
“I didn’t see you. You slipped under



*Christmas decorations sparkle in windows and storefronts, whispering stories of home and hope. Downtown St. Charles shimmers with small-town magic; downtown Chicago rises radiant and grand, its skyline wrapped in light like a city dreaming in gold.*



***“Instead, she just stared at me. Silent.***

***Shocked.***

***Not crying.”***

my arms. I'm so sorry."

Then she opened her mouth.

One of her front baby teeth, the left incisor, was jutting forward like a tiny diving board. Just sticking straight out. I couldn't believe it.

"I don't know, Dad," she said, voice thick with a lisp. "My tooth feels funny."

And then, without ceremony, she reached up... grabbed it... and pushed it back into place. Just like that. Click.

Reset.

It was surreal.

"Do we need to go to the hospital?" I asked, my panic still in full sprint while shoppers passed by giving me looks that said, Who let this man parent? She opened and closed her mouth a few times. "No, Dad. I'm okay." "Are you sure?" I asked, stunned. She nodded. Calm. Matter-of-fact. Then she lifted her arms, as if to say, Cart seat, please.

So I picked her up, settled her in, and we went shopping; me still shaken and desperately wanting to forget the whole experience, and her completely unfazed... like this sort of thing happens every day.

Because parenthood doesn't always feel heroic. Sometimes it feels like accidentally slamming a shopping cart into your child's face, apologizing profusely, and being rescued by their resilience.

And yes, believe it or not; she really was just fine.

~Jeff

WRITER: Miriam

PH: Staff

# New Year “Intentions” Versus “Resolutions”

*This simple linguistic shift, from “resolution” to “intention,” feels kinder, more honest, and certainly more humane.*



2026

07

**J**anuary always brings with it the promise of beginnings, an invitation to pause, revisit one's life, and consider changes that might nurture growth, healing, or renewal, whether big or small.

Although there are certainly many areas in which I could work toward personal improvement, I must admit that I rarely set formal New Year's resolutions. This may seem strange, especially since I am a person who loves lists. I make to-do lists, grocery lists, repair lists, work lists, lists for just about everything. Yet the idea of establishing a firm "resolution" has never truly appealed to me. Perhaps it's because every year we hear stories about how quickly resolutions fail: abandoned, forgotten, or surrendered before winter even loosens its grip. Still, I do love the idea of a new beginning: the chance to reflect, reset, and gently realign my life. The possibility of positive change has always energized me.

Recently, something deepened my thinking on this. I participate in a virtual monthly grief support yoga class. As we approached the holidays and New Year, our instructor, Nicole, speaking tenderly to caregivers who had recently lost loved ones, offered a thought that has stayed with me. Instead of "resolutions," she prefers the word intentions. She explained that intentions acknowledge something important: life rarely unfolds according to plan. Circumstances shift. Realities change. Logistics intervene. Plans get interrupted sometimes for heartbreaking reasons.

That distinction resonated deeply with me.

We may envision what the coming year will look like, yet life often deli-



***"I do love the idea of a new beginning:***

***the chance to reflect, reset,***

***and gently realign my life."***



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***Reframing New Year's resolutions to intentions: care for your body, be kind to yourself, make room for joy, grow gently, and honor your life.***



vers a mixture of beauty and difficulty we could never have predicted. As a former caregiver, I lived this truth. Despite my organized and task-oriented nature, caregiving was anything but linear. My days felt chaotic, filled with responsibilities I had never trained for and challenges I wasn't always sure how to meet. There were periods where I truly felt that I was barely getting by.

This simple linguistic shift, from "resolution" to "intention," feels kinder, more honest, and certainly more humane. It reflects the truth that certain aspects of life will always remain beyond our control. More importantly, it introduces the element of grace, something I do not always extend to myself when plans unravel or things go awry. Focusing on intention does not diminish commitment; rather, it reframes it. I can still deeply commit to what I intend, work diligently toward it, and honor the journey, regardless of whether the outcome unfolds perfectly or not.

For that wisdom, I am deeply grateful to my yoga instructor. Her insight reminded me that language shapes perspective and perspective shapes how gently we hold ourselves through life's uncertainty.

So if you, like me, sometimes feel hesitant about New Year's resolutions, perhaps this distinction is worth considering. Maybe this year, instead of demanding perfection from ourselves, we might approach life with thoughtful intentions, compassion, resilience, and openness to whatever may come. Should you be so inclined, I wish you a year filled with meaningful intentions and kindness toward yourself as you live them.

~Miriam

# Turning the Page: Traditions of Renewal Around the World

*January has always felt like a doorway.*

*It is the hush after the holidays and the quiet breath before routines resume. It is the subtle stillness of Midwest winter, the Fox River slowed beneath sheets of ice, lights lingering on porches a little longer, neighbors moving a bit more gently through the cold.*

*And yet, beneath the frost, this time of year carries something profoundly alive: the human instinct to begin again.*

**WRITER: Staff**  
**PH: Staff**

Across the world, January 1 isn't simply the date printed at the top of a fresh calendar. It is a deeply cultural moment, layered with centuries of ritual, symbolism, hope, and shared humanity.

In homes across much of the Western world, New Year's Day arrives with fireworks cracking open the night sky, as if loud light itself might chase away the year's lingering shadows. Champagne glasses rise. Toasts are made. Resolutions unfold those personal promises to do and be better, echoing traditions that stretch back



## Collage of New Year tables from around the world.

to the ancient Romans who, at the dawn of each year, pledged moral renewal to the god Janus, the guardian of thresholds.

In Japan, January 1 is one of the most sacred days of the year. Families greet it with cleanliness, gratitude, and reverence. Homes are adorned with pine, bamboo, and sacred rope to welcome good fortune. People make their first visit of the year to shrines, bow in prayer, and share beautifully prepared foods that each carry meaning: longevity, health, happiness, peace. Their New Year is not loud. It is intentional. It is about beginning with clarity.

Across Greece, the day belongs to Saint Basil and to cake. But this is no ordinary dessert.



## Open book of traditions with pages unfurling.



Inside the vasilopita, a coin is baked in, and the cutting of the cake becomes a ceremonial wish: whoever finds the coin is believed to be blessed in the coming year. It is a ritual of luck, yes, but also of togetherness because you can't cut the cake without a table full of people to share it.

Across the Spanish-speaking world, midnight turns into rhythm and laughter. As the clock strikes twelve, people eat twelve grapes, one for each month to come, a sweet, simple hope ritual swallowed in synchronicity with the bells. In Brazil, many rush joyfully into the waves of the Atlantic, jumping seven times for luck, tossing flowers to the sea as an offering of gratitude and trust.

In the African American and Caribbean tradition, the year turns with deep spiritual memory and resilience. Watch Night services honor a history rooted in liberation and faith. Families gather around tables rich with meaning: black-eyed peas for luck, collard greens for prosperity, cornbread for abundance. And across Haitian homes around the world, pots of fragrant pumpkin soup simmer, Soup Joumou, prepared every January 1st to celebrate Haiti's hard-won independence from France, a dish once denied to the enslaved and now embraced as a symbol of freedom, pride, and unity. In these homes, food is never just food. It is inheritance. It is survival. It is love carried forward.

And in households in the Philippines, round shapes fill the table with grapes, oranges, candies, coins; anything circular that symbolizes continuity, blessing, and abundance. Noise is welcomed. Joy is encouraged. Laughter is protective.

Even in places where January 1 is not the true spiritual new year, it often becomes a civic pause, a moment to breathe, reflect, and honor the human desire to reset, realign, and remember what matters.

Different languages. Different foods. Different prayers. Different climates. But always the same heartbeat. The wish for blessing. The hope for better days. The determination to build a kinder year than the one we left behind.

Here in the Fox Valley, that spirit feels familiar. Our communities, St. Charles, Geneva, Batavia, Aurora, North Aurora, Elgin, Oswego, and beyond, carry that same sense of belonging and optimism. We gather in laughter and warmth despite the cold.

We check on neighbors. We look ahead, even when the season is still deep with winter.

January invites us to do more than simply flip a page on the calendar. It invites us to honor traditions our own and those of the global neighbors we've never met yet somehow understand. It invites us to acknowledge griefs, healings, lessons, and blessings. It invites us to step forward not with perfection, but with intention.

The world does not reset on January 1.

But the human spirit often does. And that, perhaps, is its own kind of miracle.

May this year bring our Fox Valley communities peace, creativity, generosity, and grace. May we celebrate one another with greater imagination. May we hold hope as both anchor and fuel.

Happy New Year from everywhere, to right here at home.

~Fox Valley Review

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