

FOX VALLEY REVIEW

VOLUME II | ISSUE 7

JULY 1, 2026



FEATURE STORY

The Naperville RIVERWALK

*Where Community,
History & Beauty
Flow Together*

**One Person's Trash
is Another's Treasure**

Stories We Didn't Know We Needed

THE MARINE MOM DIARIES

Part I: Pride, Purpose, and Letting Go

**Heartbroken and Sleepless
in Sleepy Hollow**

A Journey Through Grief and Healing

♥
**Stories of
HOME,
HEART &
COMMUNITY**

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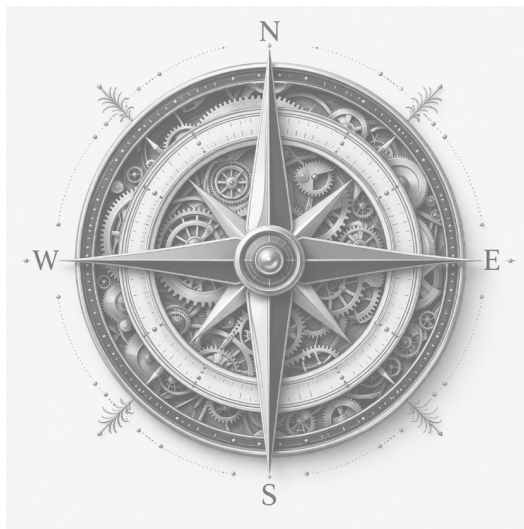
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A stroll along the Riverwalk reveals the beauty, history, and quiet charm that make Naperville one of the most beloved destinations. Strong Enough: A reflective poem on resilience, vulnerability, healing, and discovering the quiet strength to become whole again.

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01 Mission & Vision



WHO WE ARE

WHAT WE DO

WHERE WE AIM TO GO

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.



Another month has come and gone, and once again we found ourselves gathered among friends, this time beneath the historic lights of the Arcada Theatre. Our June Fox Valley Review Release Party was an evening of conversation, laughter, delicious food, heartfelt remarks, and meaningful connections. Whether you joined us for the first time or have faithfully attended every release party, thank you for making our growing community feel so welcoming and genuine. One of the greatest joys of publishing Fox Valley Review has never been simply producing a magazine. It has been watching strangers become friends, contributors encourage one

FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR IN CHIEF DR. BAUDELAIRE K. ULYSSE

another, and readers discover stories that remind them of their own lives. This month's stories invite us to consider what it means to find home in unexpected places.

Take a peaceful walk along the Naperville Riverwalk, where history, nature, and community flow together in one of the Fox Valley's most beloved destinations. Meet Maddie, whose deeply personal story, Heartbroken and Sleepless in Sleepy Hollow, reminds us that even life's most difficult chapters can become stories of resilience and

hope. Join Allison Stefansson as she begins The Marine Mom Diaries, a moving new series exploring the pride, purpose, uncertainty, and enduring love that accompany a family's decision to serve our nation.

This issue also continues Sue Grommes' touching Three Missions Away From Home series, where acts of remembrance transcend generations and national borders, and welcomes Diane Kondratowicz's thoughtful reflection, One Person's Trash Is Another Person's Treasure, a gentle reminder

“

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

”

that even ordinary objects often carry extraordinary stories. Add another treasured memory with the latest installment of Granny's Woven Quilt, enjoy the excitement of Cirque Italia, Part II, and pause to reflect with the poem Strong Enough, an exploration of resilience, vulnerability, and healing.

Every story in these pages, whether joyful or heartbreaking, reminds us that our lives are woven together by shared experiences, quiet acts of kind-

ness, and the courage to keep moving forward.

As we look ahead, August will mark an exciting milestone—the first anniversary of Fox Valley Review. What began as an idea to celebrate the people, places, and stories that define our region has grown into a vibrant community of readers, writers, photographers, artists, business owners, and neighbors. We are deeply grateful to every contributor who entrusted us

A NIGHT OF CELEBRATION

From meaningful conversations, gifts, connections, shared food and drinks, and laughter throughout the room, the evening captured the very essence of the Fox Valley: community-driven, creative, welcoming, and full of life.





JUNE RELEASE PARTY | ARCADA THEATRE | ST CHARLES, IL



with their stories, every advertiser who believed in our mission, every reader who has picked up an issue or shared an article, and every guest who has joined us at a release party. You have helped build something truly special.

Come celebrate this milestone with us at our August Anniversary Release Party, where we'll look back on an incredible first year while looking forward to many more stories still waiting to be told.



“One Person’s Trash is Another Person’s Treasure”

As the Saying Goes . . .

WRITER: Diane

PH: Staff

The icon for Fox Valley Review is, of course, a fox.

Recently, Sue Grommes, one of our longtime faithful readers and regular attendees of our monthly Fox Valley Review Release Parties, kindly gifted me with a decorative statue of a fox that she found at a local thrift store. As she noted, she “just had to buy it,” because it was perfect for me.

While someone had decided that this decorative fox was no longer of value to keep in their home, they thoughtfully chose to donate it to a thrift store, likely in the hope that someone else might find it useful or meaningful.

While this fox was dispensable to its previous owner, it has become indispensable to us for various purposes at



“One person’s trash

is another person’s treasure.”

“While this fox was dispensable to its previous owner, it has become indispensable to us for various purposes at Fox Valley Review and is now greatly treasured by me.”



Fox Valley Review and is now greatly treasured by me, particularly because of the thoughtful sentiment underlying Sue's lovely gift. It represents our fox icon and, therefore, from time to time, will be featured in our digital magazine publication.

Moving forward, it will likely accompany us as we welcome guests to our monthly release parties. For these reasons, this decorative fox has become a very welcome addition to the Fox Valley Review family, for which I am personally, and genuinely, most grateful to Sue.

Aside from introducing the fox and expressing my gratitude to Sue, I share this story because it reinforces the truth underlying the familiar adage: “One person's trash is another person's treasure.”

It also prompted me to think about the “story” behind this decorative fox, and behind so many similar items that one regularly finds in thrift stores. At one point, someone selected this fox, brought it into their home, and chose a special place for it. It likely rested on a table, mantel, or shelf and held meaning for its owner. Although

it is not a practical or utilitarian object, it likely brought that person a measure of joy through its decorative beauty or symbolic qualities. In many ways, each decorative item sitting on a thrift store shelf probably has a similar history, a story quietly waiting to be imagined.

Many thanks to Sue for her thoughtfulness and generosity in purchasing this fox for me, knowing I “just had to have it” and believing it would bring me joy. I shared with her that the story of this decorative fox now continues within the pages of this publication and through our many Fox Valley Review activities.

So, look for this fox in future issues of Fox Valley Review, at our release parties, and in upcoming Facebook posts as I now have the pleasure of sharing it with our entire Fox Valley community.

At its heart, Fox Valley Review celebrates the stories that make our community unique. For that reason, I offer this short reflection as a reminder that the objects we collect—whether bought new, thrifted, inherited, or simply discovered along the way—often carry stories of their own. And sometimes, those stories become treasured parts of our own lives as they continue into new chapters.

“The story of this decorative fox now continues within the pages of this publication and through our many Fox Valley Review activities.”

Legacy Series

Three Missions from Home: A Fox Valley

Story of War, Loss, and Remembrance



03

Part III: THE VILLAGE THAT REMEMBERED

Extraordinary Event to Honor the Past

HUMAN LOSS AND VALOR

WRITER: Sue & Diane

PH: Sue

War often leaves behind more than wreckage. It leaves memories, obligations, and acts of kindness that survive long after the guns fall silent. In the small French village of Périgny, those acts of humanity endured for

decades.

Suddenly and tragically widowed at just nineteen years old, my mother faced hardships that might have overwhelmed many people.

“

*They were guided**by something deeper:**a recognition of shared humanity.*

”

Within a span of only a few years, she endured the economic struggles of the Great Depression, the loss of her first husband during World War II, and later the death of a three-year-old daughter while she was pregnant with me.

Yet she carried on.

Deeply committed to her Baptist faith, my mother possessed a quiet resilience that shaped the lives of everyone around her. She became a beloved figure in her Aurora community, teaching religious studies to adult women and mentoring generations of young people.

Even fifty years later, former students would stop her to express gratitude for her wisdom, compassion, and gentle guidance.

In 2004, sixty years after the war had ended, an unexpected invitation arrived.

The village of Périgny, France, the place where my mother's first husband's aircraft had been shot down, was planning a three-day memorial commemorating the American airmen who had lost their lives there during World War II.

While preparing for the event, organizers searched for surviving family members and eventually located my mother through the internet.

They wanted her to come.

More than that, they wanted her to speak.

The invitation deeply touched her. At the same time, she wondered whether she could make such a demanding trip. International travel at eighty years old required considerable preparation and energy. She was also asked to prepare remarks for the ceremony, a responsibility she took very seriously.

Wanting to ease her concerns and support her through what would surely be an emotional experience, I offered to accompany her.

After deciding to attend, my mother immediately set to work.

She drafted and redrafted her speech, carefully reviewing every word. Pages appeared across her dining room table. She revised, printed, and revised again. Watching her work, I was struck by her determination.

Six decades had passed since her husband's death, yet she remained committed to honoring both his memory and the extraordinary villagers who had cared for the fallen Americans so many years earlier.

Neither of us knew exactly what awaited us in France.

What we discovered was a community that had never forgotten.



The memorial shrine in Périgny, France, commemorates the American servicemen who lost their lives during World War II.

Throughout the memorial weekend, local organizers hosted banquets and gatherings that brought together villagers, neighboring residents, military representatives, and officials from the United States Embassy.

Everywhere we went, people welcomed us warmly and spoke with reverence about the young American servicemen who had died in their fields and skies.

For them, these men were not simply names in history books. They were remembered.

The organizers also arranged a visit to Normandy, where the scale of sacrifice became even more tangible. There, amid the solemn reminders of war, we participated in a tribute that remains one of my most cherished memories. Alongside military personnel and village leaders, we were presented with an American flag and given the honor of helping fold it before bringing it home.

The gesture was simple, but its meaning was profound.

Sixty years earlier, young Americans had crossed an ocean to fight in a foreign land. Most of the people who recovered their remains, tended temporary graves, and preserved their memory had never met them. They shared no family ties, spoke different languages, and lived worlds apart.

Yet they chose to care.

They chose to remember.

And decades later, they chose once again to honor those strangers as though they were their own.

What began as a wartime tragedy had become something larger, a lasting testament to human compassion, gratitude, and remembrance. In Périgny, the passage of time had not erased the sacrifice of those young airmen.

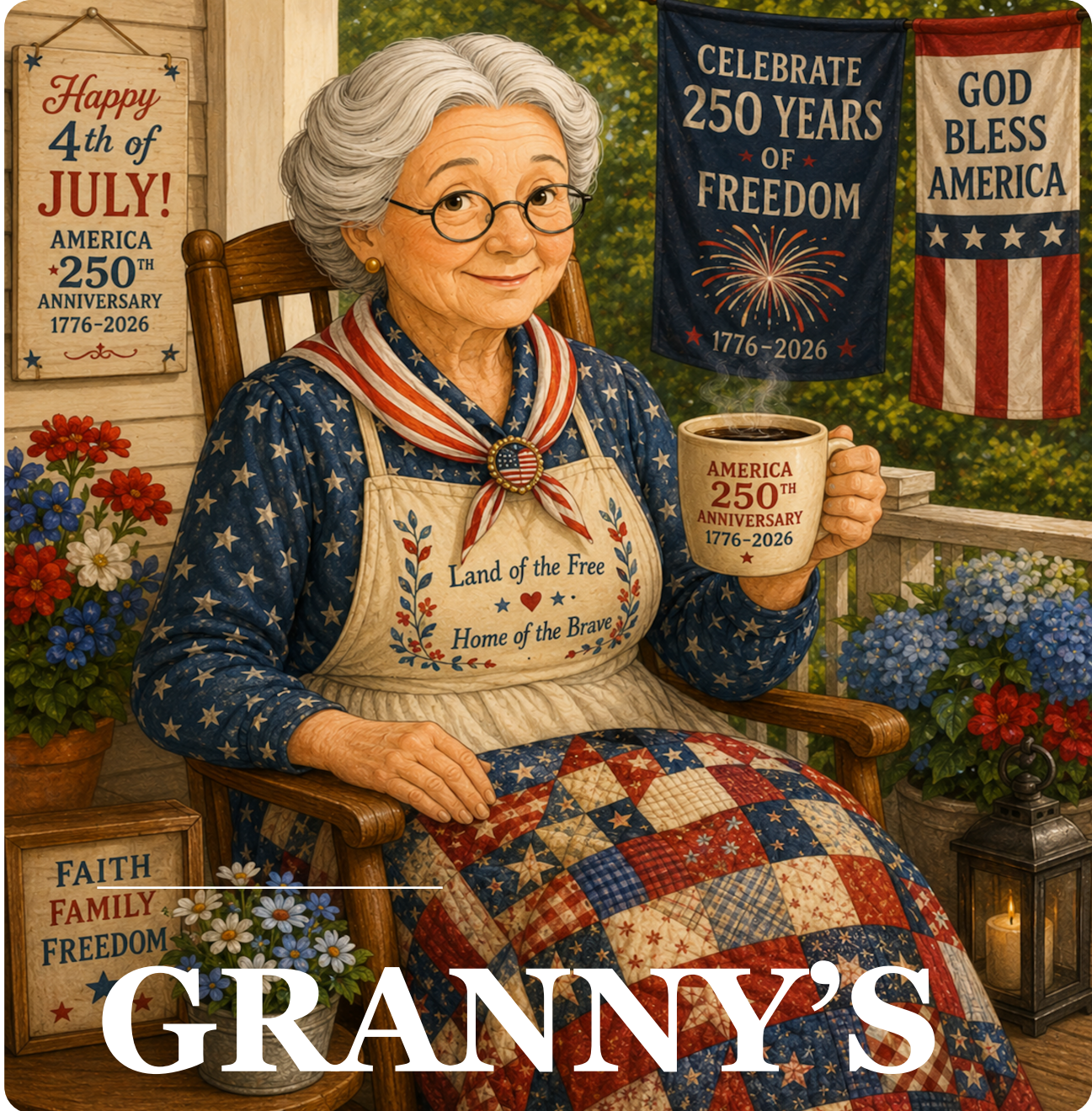
The village remembered.

And soon, we would witness just how extraordinary that remembrance could be.

~Sue Grommes (reported by Associate Editor Diane Kondratowicz and edited by the Editor-in-Chief, Baudelaire Ulysse)



Residents and guests gather in Périgny, France, during the 2004 memorial banquet honoring the American servicemen who lost their lives when their aircraft was shot down near the village during World War II.



GRANNY'S

WOVEN QUILT SERIES

THE ICE CREAM TRUCK THAT KNEW OUR NAMES

“

*THE BONFIRE IS LIT, DARLIN’.**PULL UP A SEAT AND GRAB A BLANKET.*

”

WRITER: GRANNY**PH: STAFF**

04

They say you can’t buy happiness, but for just fifty cents, it sure felt like you could on hot summer afternoons when the ice cream truck rolled into the neighborhood, bells jingling like church on Sunday.

We didn’t have smartphones or GPS back then. What we had was rhythm and routine. That truck, white, sun-faded, with cartoon decals half-peeled, came every day around 3:45, like it punched into a timecard we couldn’t see.

And let me tell you, it didn’t just roll

up and shout prices. That truck knew us. By name.

Mr. Danny, the man who drove it, had a face like a melted fudge pop and the kindest eyes this side of the river. He’d pull up, cut the engine, and say, “Afternoon, Elsie. Rocket Pop again, I suppose?” That was me, all freckles and pigtails and red-white-blue dreams.

He remembered your favorite flavor, your birthday, your little brother’s soccer tryouts, and whether your daddy had made it home from his shift on



time. The truck became a fixture of our summers, a rolling confessional, a momentary escape, a five-minute parade that brought the whole neighborhood outside.

Parents would wave from porches. We'd run barefoot, coins clutched in sweaty palms. Sometimes we didn't even have enough, and Mr. Danny would wink and say, "I'll put it on your sunshine tab."

No one went without.

That truck was more than ice cream. It was belonging. It was joy with a jingle. It was someone knowing your name on a day when you didn't feel seen.

And now, when the summer hum gets thick and the world moves too fast, I swear I still hear that distant bell. Or maybe it's just my heart remembering what it meant to be young, loved, and known.

Come tomorrow, we'll talk about Can-



Mr. Danny leans slightly forward with a gentle smile. Below him... A freckled little girl in pigtails reaches upward with two quarters in her hand.

ning Day in Grandma's Kitchen. But
for tonight, let's sit here a little longer.
I saved you a Rocket Pop.

Granny



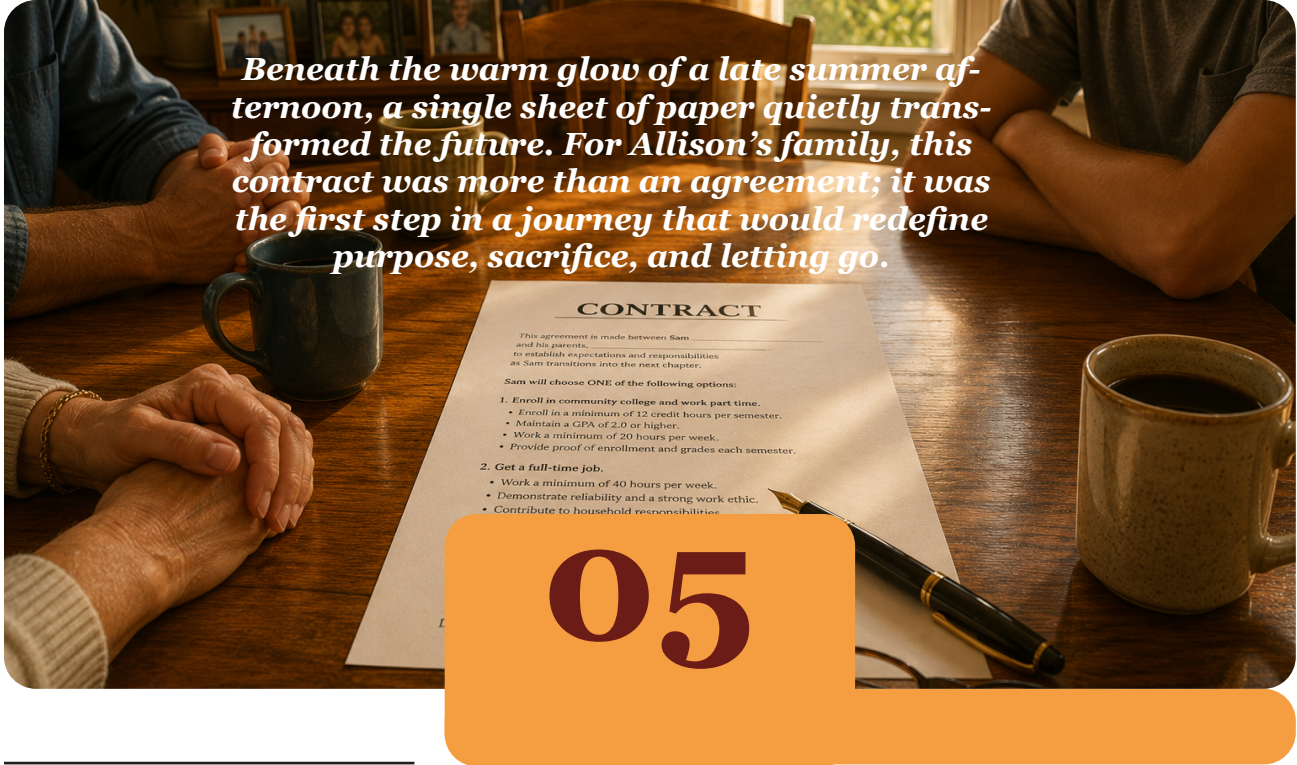
Granny sits in a rocking chair, smiling softly.

*Stay tuned for the next story from Granny's Wo-
ven Quilt Series. It's coming up in the August Issue.*



Choices...Directions

Every future begins with a choice. Before boot camp, before the uniform, and before the title of Marine, there was simply a young man standing at the threshold of adulthood, weighing three very different paths.



Beneath the warm glow of a late summer afternoon, a single sheet of paper quietly transformed the future. For Allison’s family, this contract was more than an agreement; it was the first step in a journey that would redefine purpose, sacrifice, and letting go.

WRITER: Allison Stefansson
PH: Staff

THE MARINE MOM DIARIES

Part I: Pride, Purpose, and Letting Go

It started with a contract. A simple contract with cut-and-dry terms, but also with significant implications.

The contract was the start of a whole new journey, but not just for the recipient, my 17-year-old son, Sam.

It was a document carefully crafted by my husband and me, an exhausted final effort to motivate Sam to take the reins in deciding about his future.

Our expectation was not that he should know what he wanted to do

“You don’t need to know your entire life plan, but you do need to choose a direction.”



"It was what prompted him to make the bold decision

to enlist in the United States Marine Corps."

for the rest of his life (I'm still figuring that out at the age of 50!); we simply wanted him to choose what would come next.

It was the summer of 2020, and Sam had just graduated high school pandemic-style; no pomp, no circumstance, an utterly anticlimactic sense of closure for such a milestone.

He had struggled throughout his senior year to commit to a post-graduation plan, and when COVID-19 impacted the world, it only amplified his indecision and procrastination. And this is how the contract came to be.

It offered three "simple" options:

1. Enroll in community college and work part time.
2. Get a full-time job.
3. Enlist in the military.

The first two options were detailed with various bullet points to ensure there were no loopholes that could

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“Sam had shown an interest in all things military from a young age.”

manipulated. The third option, however, held nothing beyond those words.

Sam actually learned that Option 3, which was visually to be the “simplest” of the choices, was what sealed the deal for Sam.

What prompted him to make this life-changing decision to enlist in the United States Marine Corps.

Looking back on this now, his rather unconventional way of arriving at this decision to enlist. But truthfully, his choice was not entirely out of left field. Sam had shown an interest in all things military from a young age.

Sam shared his news on August 20, not a second before it was official. And of him per the contract, I was relieved that he had come to this decision. The gravity of what he had chosen didn't fully sink in until

Sam was to spend one last holiday

season at home and leave in January for boot camp.

Those months were filled with emotional ups and downs: excitement and anticipation, worries and uncertainties, and most of all, a sense of readiness. Sam had always thrived best with structure.

But at 18 years old, he was clearly no longer interested in having that structure come from his parents, and he had not yet acquired the self-discipline necessary to create it for himself.

The Marine Corps would soon provide a different kind of structure altogether. To be continued...

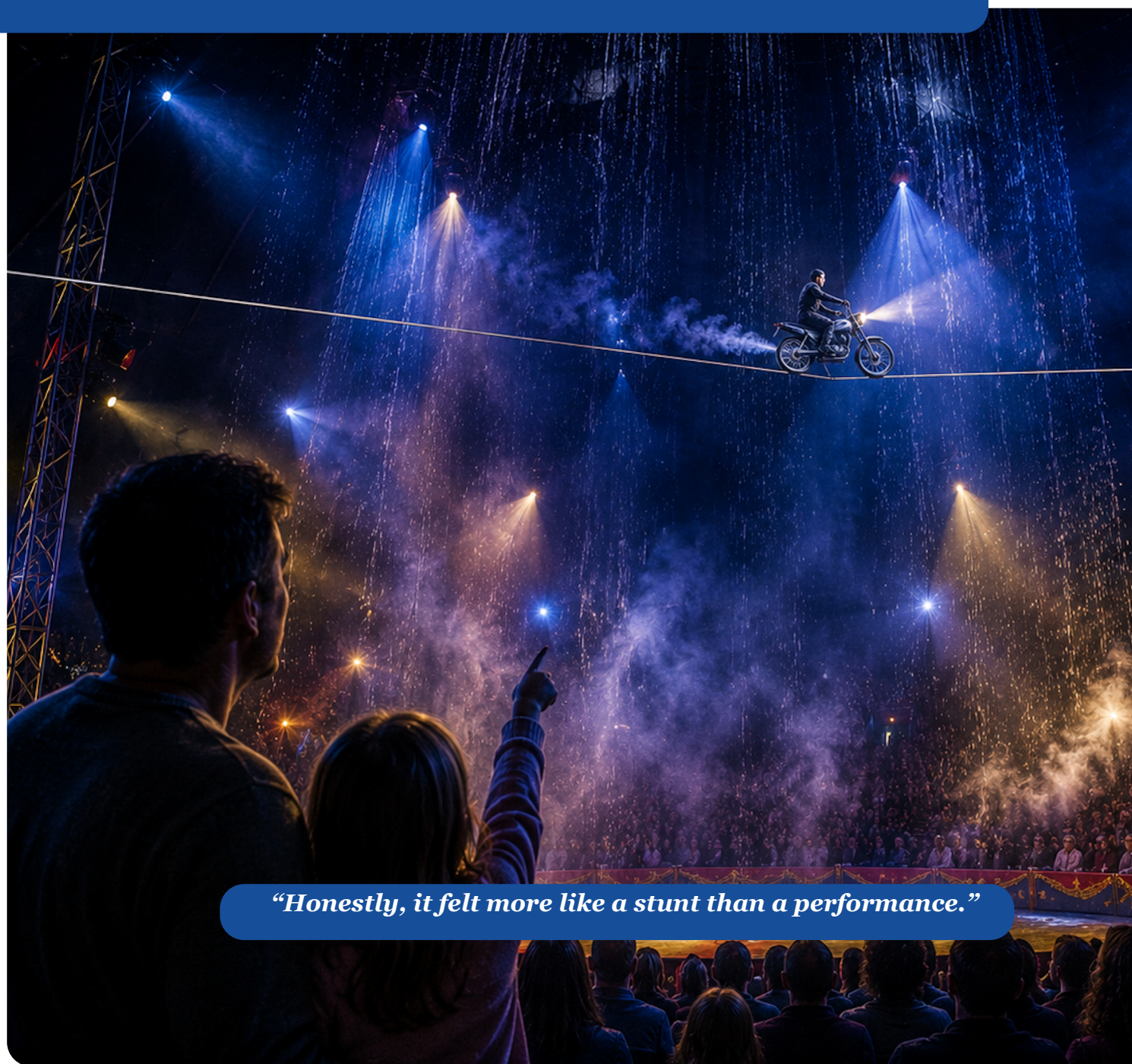
OFF THE ROPE

WRITER: Jeff Weisman

PH: Staff

CIRQUE ITALIA

Part II: The Wheel of Death



"Honestly, it felt more like a stunt than a performance."

“One millimeter different... and that man would have plummeted to his death.”



The illusion of spectacle gives way to something far more dangerous where a single mis-step could turn wonder into tragedy.

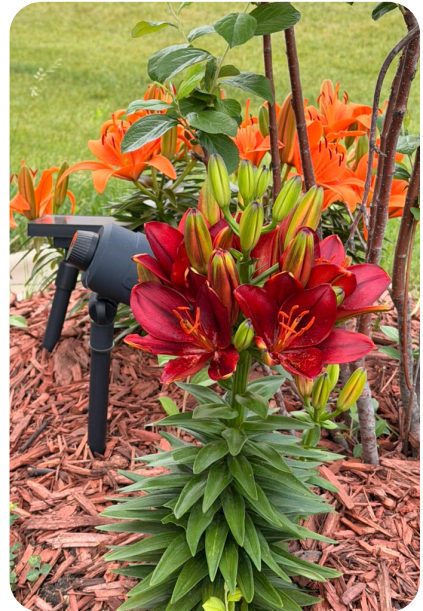
The lights dimmed again.
The magic shifted.
The ringmaster stepped onto the stage and continued his story.
Then, a motorcycle appeared.
High above the arena.
Balanced on a wire.
The engine roared.
Smoke filled the air.
Water rained down from above.
“Wow,” my daughter yelled.
The motorcycle sped across the wire, thirty feet in the air, deafening, chaotic, thrilling.
It turned.
Came back.
The crowd erupted.

Honestly, it felt more like a stunt than a performance.
But my daughter loved it.
And that was enough.
Then came the final act.
“The Wheel of Death.”
A massive steel contraption descended into view.
Thirty feet long.
Suspended in the air.
A man stepped inside the wheel.
At first, it moved slowly.
Rocking.
Turning.

Then faster.
And faster.
He flipped.
Spun.
Balanced.
Defied everything that should have been possible.
Then, he climbed outside.
Now standing on the wheel.
Running to stay alive as it spun beneath him.
He grabbed a rope.
Stopped the wheel.
Balanced at the top.
Thirty feet in the air.
Then, he began jumping rope.
“One millimeter different... and that man would have plummeted to his death.”

The rhythm was perfect.
Until it wasn't.
The rope frayed.
Just slightly.
Enough.
His foot caught.
He stumbled.
For a moment, everything stopped.
Then instinct took over.
He dropped the rope.
Ran.
Recovered.

The crowd never realized how close it was.
But I did.
My heart pounded.



Fox Valley Summer in Full Swing

From release parties and patriotic celebrations to beloved community festivals, these moments capture the people, places, and traditions that make summer in the Fox Valley unforgettable. At Fox Valley Review, we're proud to celebrate the stories that continue to bring our communities together.



*“We left, talking about how much
we enjoyed the circus.”*

My hands shook.
Because I knew: one fraction of a
second.

One misstep.
And we would have witnessed a man
die.

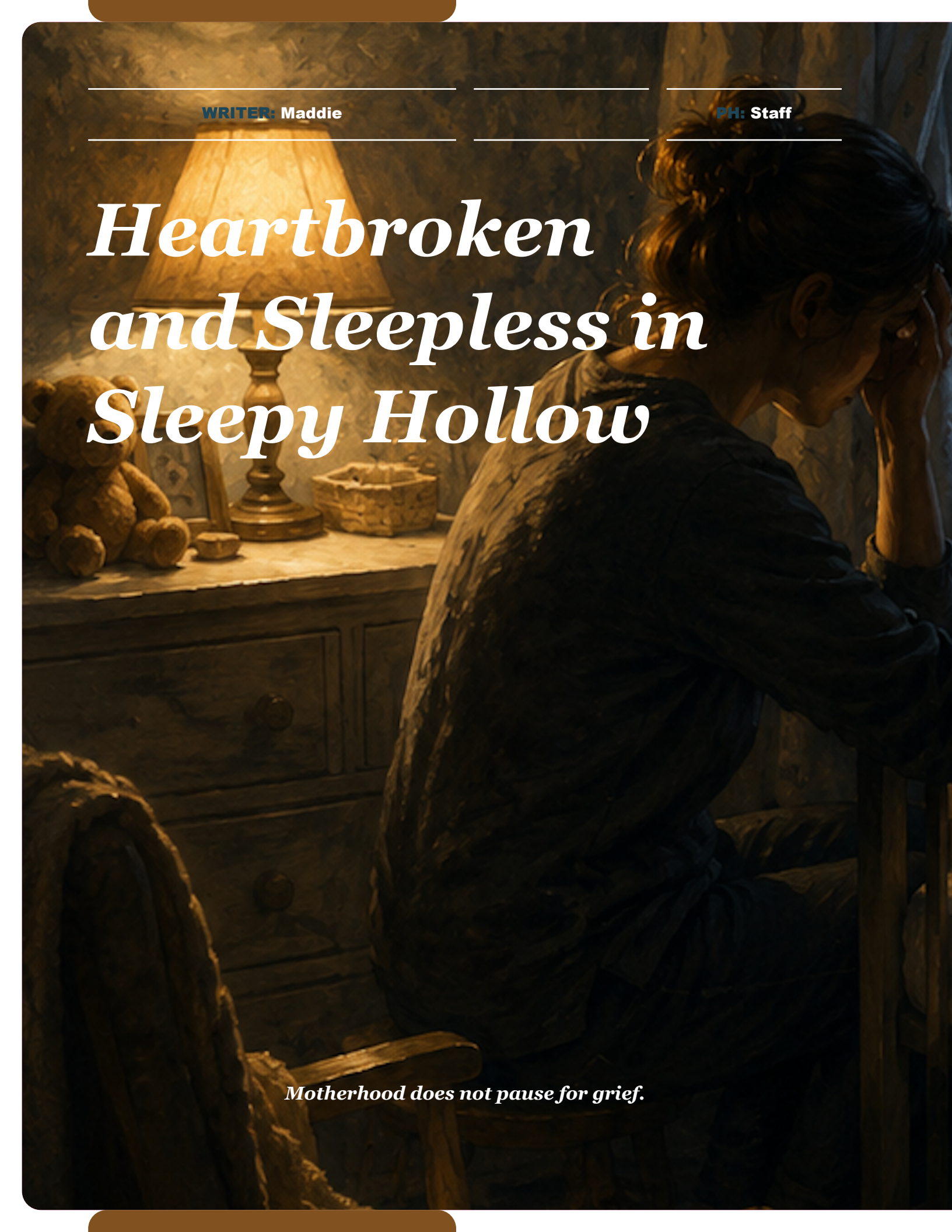
Not metaphorically.
Not theatrically.
But right there.
In front of us.
He finished.
Took a bow.
Walked off.

The crowd applauded.

We left, talking about how much we
enjoyed the circus.
But I couldn't shake it.
The realization that what we had wit-
nessed wasn't just performance.

It was risk.
Real risk.

And for a brief moment, that line had
almost disappeared.



WRITER: Maddie

PH: Staff

Heartbroken and Sleepless in Sleepy Hollow

Motherhood does not pause for grief.



Sleepy Hollow is supposed to be just that, sleepy. Quiet streets. Friendly neighbors. Parks where children laugh and bicycles glide past in the evening light. It is the kind of place where people imagine peaceful beginnings and happy endings.

For me, it became the place where sleep disappeared.

I grew up in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, raised by a strong mother who carried more than anyone should have to carry alone. My father was never part of my everyday life. Like many children growing up without one parent, I didn't always recognize the ways that absence quietly shaped my choices. Looking back, I sometimes wonder whether I was searching less for romance than for security, stability, and someone who made the world feel a little less uncertain.

Throughout college, I often found myself drawn to older men. Friends questioned the age differences, but I brushed their concerns aside. They saw numbers. I saw maturity, confidence, and someone who seemed to know where life was headed. Or at least I thought I did.

Three years ago, I packed everything I owned and left Minnesota behind. I moved hundreds of miles away to Sleepy Hollow, believing I was beginning the next chapter of my life with someone I trusted. Leaving family and familiar places was difficult, but love has a way of making uncertainty feel like adventure.

For a while, life seemed to settle into a rhythm. Then, two years ago, I became pregnant.



“She is no longer surviving

yesterday. She is walking

toward tomorrow.”

The news changed everything. I imagined birthday parties, bedtime stories, first steps, scraped knees, family dinners, and a future built together. Becoming a mother was frightening, but it was also the happiest anticipation I had ever known.

Then, only two months later, everything unraveled. The man with whom I had built those dreams left. He moved on, leaving behind not only our relationship but also the future I thought we had been creating together. One day I was preparing for motherhood with a partner.

The next, I was preparing to become a single mother.

Heartbreak has a way of making nights longer.

There were evenings when the house felt impossibly quiet except for the sounds of my baby breathing. I would rock my child to sleep, then lie awake wondering how life could change so completely in such a short time. Family was hundreds of miles away. Friends had lives of their own.



There were no grandparents around the corner to call when exhaustion settled in or when I simply needed someone to tell me I was doing okay.

Some nights I cried.

Other nights I simply stared into the darkness, waiting for morning.

Yet every sunrise arrived with the same small voice needing breakfast, a diaper change, another story, another hug.

Motherhood does not pause for grief.

Image 1 : A quiet and lonely night in Sleepy Hollow

Image 2: Quiet morning in the cozy kitchen.

Image 3: Maddie strolls along with who matters most in quiet path.



Children have an extraordinary way of reminding us that life continues, even when our hearts feel stuck.

I have learned that resilience rarely arrives all at once. It grows quietly in ordinary moments in preparing bottles, folding tiny clothes, wiping away tears, reading one more bedtime book, and somehow finding enough strength to begin again the next morning.

I still miss the life I imagined.
I still mourn the family I hoped my child would know.
But I no longer measure my future by what I lost.

Instead, I measure it by the little hands reaching for mine every morning.

Sleepy Hollow may have become the place where I lost sleep, but it also became the place where I discovered something I never knew I possessed. The strength to keep showing up. The courage to love without guarantees.

And the quiet determination to build a beautiful life for my child, even if it looks nothing like the one I once imagined.

Sometimes the strongest families are not the ones that begin according to plan.

Sometimes they are the ones rebuilt, one sleepless night, one hopeful sunrise, and one unconditional embrace at a time.

NAPERVILLE

Where the River Teaches a City How to Breathe

What began as a modest civic project has become the living spine of a city where memory, movement, and identity flow together.

On summer evenings, the Naperville Riverwalk hums with a quiet rhythm: footsteps on brick paths, laughter drifting across the water, the soft glow of lanterns reflected in the current. But the Riverwalk is more than a scenic amenity. It is, in many ways, the soul of Naperville, a deliberate act of civic imagination that reshaped how a city understands itself.

Originally conceived in the early 1980s to commemorate Naperville's sesquicentennial, the Riverwalk was not inevitable. It required vision: residents, planners, and leaders willing to see beyond utility toward

WRITER: Fox Valley Review

PH: Staff

something enduring. What emerged was not just a path, but a philosophy: that public space could be both beautiful and binding.

Bridges arch gently across the water, each one offering a different vantage point. The Dandelion Fountain sprays upward like a moment frozen in

motion. The Millennium Carillon rises nearby, its bells marking time over a landscape that feels both curated and organic.

Generations pass through here: first dates, wedding photos, solitary walks after long days. The Riverwalk absorbs it all. And perhaps that is its quiet genius: it invites people not just to pass through, but to belong.



***Dandelion Fountain located
along the Naperville Riverwalk***

In a region defined by growth, Naperville found a way to anchor itself, not in buildings or roads, but in something softer, more enduring.

A river.

A path.

A shared memory.

Yet the story does not end there. Stretching alongside the gentle curves of the DuPage River and its celebrated Riverwalk is a community that has learned to blend natural beauty with the energy of modern life. Winding brick pathways invite morning walkers, afternoon strollers, and evening conversations beneath the shade of mature trees. Charming footbridges connect one discovery to the next, encouraging visitors to slow down and enjoy the journey rather than simply arrive at a destination.



Naperville Riverwalk

Throughout the seasons, festivals, concerts, farmers markets, and community celebrations transform these familiar spaces into gathering places where neighbors become friends and visitors quickly feel at home. The Riverwalk is more than a scenic destination; it is the thread that quietly weaves together Naperville's history, culture, recreation, and civic pride.

Perhaps that is what makes Naperville so memorable. It is neither simply the beauty of the river, nor the elegance of the Riverwalk, nor the vitality of its downtown. It is the way each of these elements flows naturally into the next, creating a place where residents cherish everyday moments and visitors leave already planning their return.

Strong Enough

WRITER: Beau

PH: Staff

A companion reflection to “Molding Broken Pieces,” published in the June issue of Fox Valley Review.

I believe I am strong enough;
strong enough to stand alone,
strong enough to carry on,
strong enough to cry,
strong enough to be weak,
strong enough to be vulnerable,
and to be soft.

You are strong enough;
strong enough to grieve,
strong enough to emote,
strong enough to hold,
strong enough to receive,
strong enough to care,
strong enough to love,
strong enough to give and forgive,
and strong enough to be bold.

You are, therefore, strong enough;
strong enough to feel pain,
strong enough to be wounded,
and strong enough to heal.

We are strong enough;
strong enough to feel content,
strong enough to be resilient,
strong enough to be absent,
and be present with myself
and become one within myself,
strong enough to be present,
to be present with others,
sharing myself with others,
becoming one with others,
yet be myself without others,
and thrive without borders.



Promotions

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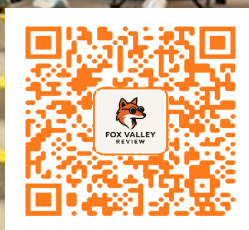
Promotions

FOX VALLEY REVIEW

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