FOX VALLEY REVIEW

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

MAGAZINE

VOLUME I
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ISSUE 3

CONTENT

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.

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

Welcome to the third issue of Fox Valley Review, a labor of love and a vision long in the making. Rooted in our river towns and curated with care, this publication amplifies the voices, stories, and spirit that make the Fox Valley not just a region but a vibrant, diverse, unmistakably alive community.

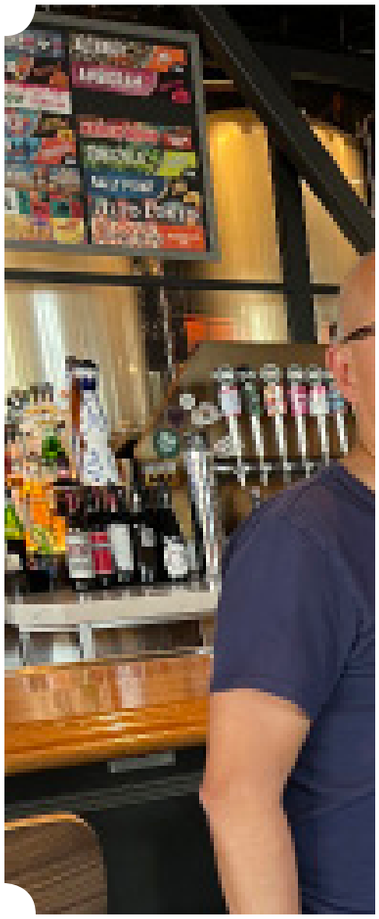
Coming off a strong second edition, I want to thank the talented contributors, diligent reviewers, and gifted photographers who bring these pages to life. A special shout-out to Associate Editor Diane Kondratowicz for her immense help with the September release party: festive, well attended, fueled by Caribbean jerk chicken, and capped with lively raffles.

Your creativity, hard work, and commitment to quality have shaped this magazine into a true reflection of our community. The response to our second issue was equally strong; the increased readership affirms what we believed from day one: the stories, voices, and images of the Fox Valley deserve to be celebrated and shared.

In this issue, dive into heartfelt and thought-provoking reads: Special Desserts, Hemp Club Jewelry, Leafman Season Looms, Jackie's Ledger, Caregiving for Aging Parents, Part II, and Timekeeper. You'll also find images from late-summer-into-fall across the Valley: scarecrow displays, pumpkin patches, sunrises and sunsets, and Oktoberfest celebrations.

Whether you're a lifelong resident or a curious newcomer, Fox Valley Review offers more than stories; it offers connection. Let this be your window, your mirror, and your invitation to life

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



in the Valley.

Enjoy every page; and please like, follow, and share our work so we can keep building this community together.

Dr. Baudelaire K. Ulysse
Chief Editor
Fox Valley Review

FIRST STREET PLAZA

St. Charles Jazz Weekend: Several bands turned the square into an open-air stage, with Shout Section Big Band featuring Tatum Langley and The John Wesley Experience stealing the show and keeping hundreds dancing, singing, and swaying.

MIKE, TATUM, & BEAU| ALTER BREWING | ST CHARLES

02

Special Desserts

The Best One Yet

WRITER: Jeff Weisman

PH: Staff

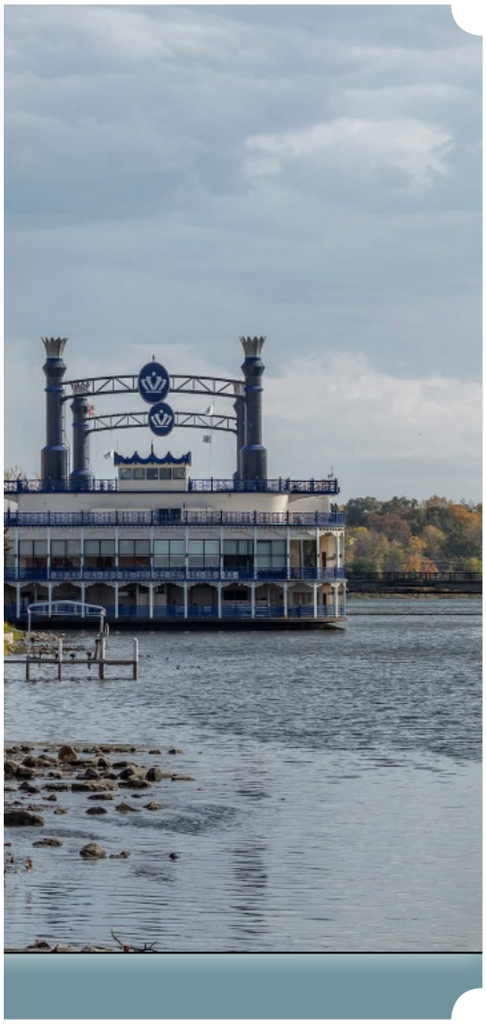
When my daughter turned seven, I decided it was time to teach her to cook. Before that, she helped me choose dinner and did small tasks in the kitchen. She couldn't use a knife unassisted yet, of course, but she was old enough to start learning; honestly, she could have started earlier.

She liked it, too. We made pasta, she helped me fry hamburgers, and we built homemade pizzas with every topping she could imagine. But it was dessert that captured her heart. Actually, it was making me dessert that she loved most.

For reasons that boiled down to love, I'd let her create one of her "special desserts." The rules were simple: I had to go into the living room, not watch, and trust her. Thankfully, her desserts were more assembly than

It quickly escalated into her seeing what she could get me to eat.

"I opened my eyes to a wild, shimmering landscape of every sweet thing in the house."



cooking, safe enough; but I didn't realize what I was unleashing. Soon it became a game: what could she get Dad to eat?

She'd stack graham crackers on a plate, nestle marshmallows around them, drizzle honey over the marshmallows, dust everything with brown sugar, smear a glob of peanut butter in the center, spoon applesauce in a halo around that, tuck chocolate chips between the marshmallows, crown it all with gummy bears, then finish with a pour of maple syrup. The whole thing reminded me of my own "science experiments" with my grandma: taste-testing her spice cabinet. Whatever else I can say, my daughter took real pride in her creations.

"Don't look," she'd call, padding out of the kitchen. Half my mind wondered what she'd made; the other half wondered what had happened to the kitchen.

"I'm not, sweetie."

"Good, because I made it just for you."

"I know," I'd say, hearing her giggle as she came toward the living room. "I can't wait."

"It's the best one yet."

"I bet it is," I'd answer, bracing myself as a plate landed on the coffee table.

"Are your eyes covered?" she'd ask, hovering in front of me. I could feel her there.

"Of course."

"Good. Now open them."

"Okay," I'd say, opening my eyes to a wild, shimmering landscape of every sweet thing in the house.

"Try it, Dad," she'd say, vibrating with excitement. "Try it. I can't wait to hear what you think."

I'd pick up a graham cracker, with syrup or chocolate or honey dripping from it, and pop it into my mouth.

"Well?" she'd ask, transfixed.

"It's great," I'd mumble, chewing the strangest dessert I've ever tasted, trying not to think too hard about what, exactly, I was eating.

"Yay!" she'd shout. "Have more."

Thinking back makes me laugh. I'm not entirely sure what my goal was, beyond letting her explore and feel proud. I do hope that, when she's older, she finds joy in cooking. And if not that, then this: someday, when her child brings her a scary, sticky, heartfelt "special dessert," I hope she remembers to eat it out of love.

~Jeff Weisman

"A breathtaking view of Elgin Riverwalk with the colors of fall slowly emerging."

A tribute to a best friend, and the healing art of making, told through macramé, crystals, and community.

03

Hemp Club Jewelry

REFLECTIONS

WRITER: **Kelsey Rankin**
PH: **Staff**

I created Hemp Club Jewelry to honor my best friend Julie, process the trauma of losing her at just 21 years old, and keep her spirit alive by carrying on a creative skill she taught me macramé jewelry making using hemp cord.

In high school, around age 16, Julie was the friend our circle formed around. She brought together people from different ages and walks of life, and her parents' house was where we gathered most days.
Sometimes we played frisbee in her

> *I felt like Julie was my business partner from the other side, all along.*

yard, watched wonderfully campy movies in her basement, or played PlayStation (very poorly) and laughed until we cried. We took our dogs to the park, celebrated every holiday together (even Canadian Thanksgiving), and dreamed about getting an apartment aftter college when our careers launched.

Her laid-back attitude, infectious laughter, and tell-it-like-it-is personality made her a rock for many of us. She loved classic rock, the Beatles, wore aviator sunglasses, and had long, silky chestnut hair. She played bass guitar in an all-girl rock band (and clarinet in the marching band). She was honest and genuine, a natural at speaking her mind. We could trust her with our secrets and fears and share ourselves so easily around her. That kind of authentic, non-judgmental friendship is rare in high school. It's a gift I'll treasure for life.

On December 31, 2011, at age 21, Julie was gone in a blink after a tragic car accident. I've never felt a loss so profound, and I'd never had a friendship so deep. I needed to act on that loss. Julie's parents opened a memorial scholarship fund in her name, and I turned to my creativity. I thought fondly of the craft Julie taught me during our early years of friendship at what she dubbed "Hemp Club," friends around her back-patio table under endless summer sun, knotting hippie-style macramé hemp necklaces with twine and beads. She led us step by step, patient, observant, encouraging, troubleshooting whenever one of us messed up a pattern. She was a natural teacher.

In 2012, I began making an inventory of hemp jewelry to sell at small local events like the annual Julie Berls Memorial Scholarship fundraiser concert. I popped up with a table at the local film festival, farmers market, and flea market, and even tailgated at the Jimmy Buffett concerts I attended with my dad each summer.

I started experimenting with other forms of jewelry and craft: wire-wrapping, charms, beading, lampwork glass beads, polymer clay, gemstones and crystals, flower crowns and tiaras

More pop-up opportunities followed. I ordered business cards and a banner, opened an Etsy shop, and made my first online sales. It was thrilling, and I felt like Julie was my business partner from the other side. I would never have started this venture without her.

Today, I'm vending at larger festivals, but I still love talking about Julie and connecting with customers willing to listen. Many people who visit my booth have endured a similar, soul-rending loss of a loved one, and we connect as I share the origins of my creative journey. I love revisiting our memories and recounting how real it feels when she visits me in my dreams.

"Crowned & Captured — Artist Kelsey Rankin places a handmade flower tiara, then snaps the smile at the Folk Music Festival."

I know she's with me, a muse and guiding light as I grow my jewelry and flower-crown business.

I've been a "maker" since I was young, always drawn to crafting, art, drawing, and creation in many forms. At eight, I discovered the joy of entrepreneurship, selling bead lizards and freeze pops on the corner during free summer days. Now I'm proud of the two creative brands I've built: Hemp Club Jewelry and Boho Earth Headbands. I delight in crafting custom pieces, from essential-oil diffuser bracelets to beaded earrings, macramé necklaces, wire-wrapped rings, and crystal pendants. I also curate natural crystals and gemstone specimens to offer as complementary pieces with my jewelry.

My earthy collection of flower-crown headbands and mushroom tiaras is loved by customers of all ages. I've created custom headpieces for multiple weddings and love incorporating crystals into my crowns for one-of-a-kind designs. I was humbled to learn a customer gifted her beloved flower crown to her terminally ill friend, who cherished it so much she was buried wearing it.

Over the last 12 years of art pop-ups, festivals, and markets, I've connected with a wonderful circle of local artists, small business owners, and makers who inspire me daily. I'm proud to share my craft with aspiring artists of all ages, offering free demos and lessons at my booth whenever possible. Part of my goal with Hemp Club is to pass on the joy and fulfillment of making jewelry to others, just as Julie did for me. I've also provided space for budding artist friends to sell their work at my booth, helping them taste vending at shows without committing to a full booth alone.

I'm always exploring new creative adventures and keep an ever-shifting inventory with new collections each month and limited-edition designs. I love bringing custom ideas to life, so please reach out if I can help realize your vision for a custom piece of jewelry or a custom flower-crown design. I also offer wholesale on select collections; contact me if you'd like to carry my work in your shop or boutique.

~Kelsey

"Fitting joy: Kelsey Rankin of Hemp Club Jewelry helps a customer slip on her new bracelets at the Folk Music Festival."

GRANNY'S

WOVEN QUILT SERIES

HOW WE COURTED IN GENEVA

> *TEA'S READY; LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT ROMANCE THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY.*

WRITER: GRANNY
PH: STAFF

04

You know, darlin', there was a time when courtship was a gentle art, a kind of poetry in motion, with a rhythm set to moonlight and manners. And nowhere was it more tender than in the heart of Geneva.

Back then, if a young man fancied a girl, he'd show up in pressed slacks and polished shoes, not with a text message but with flowers, usually from his mother's garden. A knock at the door meant something. And if her father answered, you'd best stand straight and speak clear.

Our strolls began near the soda fountain at the corner drugstore, where we'd share a phosphate drink or two straws in a vanilla malt. Sometimes we'd find a quiet booth and talk until the shopkeeper flicked the lights to nudge us out. Other times, we'd walk hand in hand along the cobbled paths downtown, past the shop windows glowing with warm light.

But it was the Fox River that held our secrets. After dinner, and if we were lucky, her parents' permission we'd walk the river trail under a blanket of stars, talking about everything and

nothing. I remember one boy, Charlie, who used to bring his harmonica and play while we sat on the bridge near Island Park.

He wasn't very good, bless him, but it made me laugh; and laughter, that's a kind of love all its own.

We didn't rush. We weren't trying to skip to the ending. We courted slow, like good soup on the stove.

A dance here, a church social there. Sometimes he'd write letters, folded just so, with poems tucked inside. We'd sit on the front porch with our fingers barely brushing; that was intimacy back then.

And when it was right, we just knew. There wasn't a proposal broadcast on social media or rings the size of walnuts.

Just a promise whispered on a walk by the river and a kiss under the sycamores.
So, pour your tea, sweetheart. Ro-

"1960s couple waltzing beneath chandeliers in a luminous, elegant ballroom."

mance isn't gone; it's just forgotten. Let's remember it together.

~Granny

"Couple kissing under a sun-drenched sycamore tree in a park, beaming post-nuptial bliss and glow."

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

Prairie Wrangler : Yorkville Scarecrow Walk

A jack-o’-lantern in denim and a cowboy hat stands guard along the trail, part of Yorkville’s Scarecrow Walk where neighbors turn straw and imagination into fall magic.

"Girl Scouts Have Superpowers"—a caped quartet brightens Yorkville's Scarecrow Walk, stitched with color, creativity, and community pride."

05

WRITER: Staff

PH: Staff

-Leafman Season Looms-

PART I

We're sitting on the stretching mats at the St. Charles gym when Don's eyes tilt somewhere past the wall. "Carbondale," he says, rolling his shoulders. "You ever stand on the side of Route 51 and watch the whole state pass by?"

He doesn't wait for an answer. The room hums with treadmills; his voice folds into the memory.

He was a skinny Fox Valley kid with a canvas duffel and a habit of trusting strangers. Southbound to Carbondale for college, thumb out, boots in gravel. A maroon Pontiac rolled to the

"Rides came easy then; farmers, students, a traveling salesman who talked nonstop about radios. Someone always had a story."

"A plaid-clad sentinel glows under the night sky, leaning against a tree, crafted by Girl Scout Troop 4223."

shoulder, window cranking down.

"Where you headed, kid?"

"Campus."

"Hop in."

Rides came easy then; farmers, students, a traveling salesman who talked nonstop about radios. Someone always had a story. Someone always had a cooler. More than once Don arrived late to class because the ride detoured through a backyard barbecue or a house band's living-room rehearsal. "You'd get an address and a first name," he says, "and somehow that was enough."

October hit different. The air sharpened; flyers for Halloween parties multiplied: milk carton notices stapled to telephone poles, hand-lettered with arrows and bad jokes. Carbondale felt bigger at night: porches strung with cheap orange lights, drum kits thudding through open windows, a thousand costumes that looked like they were scavenged from attics an hour earlier.

And then there was Leafman.

Centennial Park aglow at Yorktoberfest: families on hay bales, music and booths lighting a crisp Fox Valley night in Yorkville.

The legend ran ahead of him. Some swore Leafman was an art major, others a campus groundskeeper, a theater kid, a ghost. What everyone agreed on was the sound: a dry rustle before he appeared, head to toe in leaves stitched to old clothes, face masked in oak and maple, twigs braided into the cuffs. He never said much. He didn't need to. He slid into rooms, lifted a cup of punch with gloved hands, and left a trail of leaf crumbs on linoleum.

One night, a fraternity printed a flyer: $500 to unmask Leafman. "Five hundred?" Don said, staring with half a grin and a broke student's math in his head. "That's a semester of rent."

"No one's quick enough," the bartender said, polishing a pint. "And no one wants to be the guy who ruins it."

The party swelled. A garage band pounded through a Motown cover; someone in a bedsheet toga started a conga line. Don leaned against a door frame and felt it; rustle, pause, the faint smell of damp leaves and cigarette smoke.

Leafman slipped past, head cocked like he was listening for a private beat. Don reached out on impulse.

"Who are you, man?"

The leaf mask turned. For a second Don saw eyes, gray or green, it was hard to tell, and then a voice, low, amused: "You already know." A gloved finger tipped Don's cup, a tiny clink, and Leafman was gone, out the side door, a gust of dry whispers following. It simply asks: Are you here now?

The bounty stayed in the glass frame all October. Students tried everything: ambushes, fake leaf costumes, whispered tips about where he'd appear next. One kid swore he followed Leafman for three blocks only to lose him at a hedge that looked like it had swallowed him whole. Halloween night came and went. The five hundreds never moved.

"It wasn't about the money," Don says now. "It was about having a legend to chase."

In daylight, the town felt ordinary again, with lecture halls, library carrels, the laundromat's warm lint smell. At night, the same streets turned elastic. Don learned the rhythm: mornings for classes, afternoons for cheap coffee and used books, evenings for porch talk and guitars. Hitchhiking gave him a wide circle. Parties made it wider. The Leafman rumor gave everything a center, a reason to stay out one more hour, to take one more turn down one more street.

"People will tell you the sixties were about politics or music," Don says, shrugging. "Sure. But sometimes they were about a kid in a mask reminding us we didn't know everything."

On the last Sunday of October, a cold rain pinned leaves flat to the sidewalks. Don walked back to his boarding house with his jacket zipped to his chin, hands in his pockets. A beat-up pickup crept alongside.

"You need a lift?"

He glanced in, seeing a couple in their thirties, thermos between them, heater hissing. Don climbed in, water pattering off his sleeves.

"You a student?" the driver asked.

"Yeah."

"Good time to be young," the man said, eyes on the wipers' slow sweep.

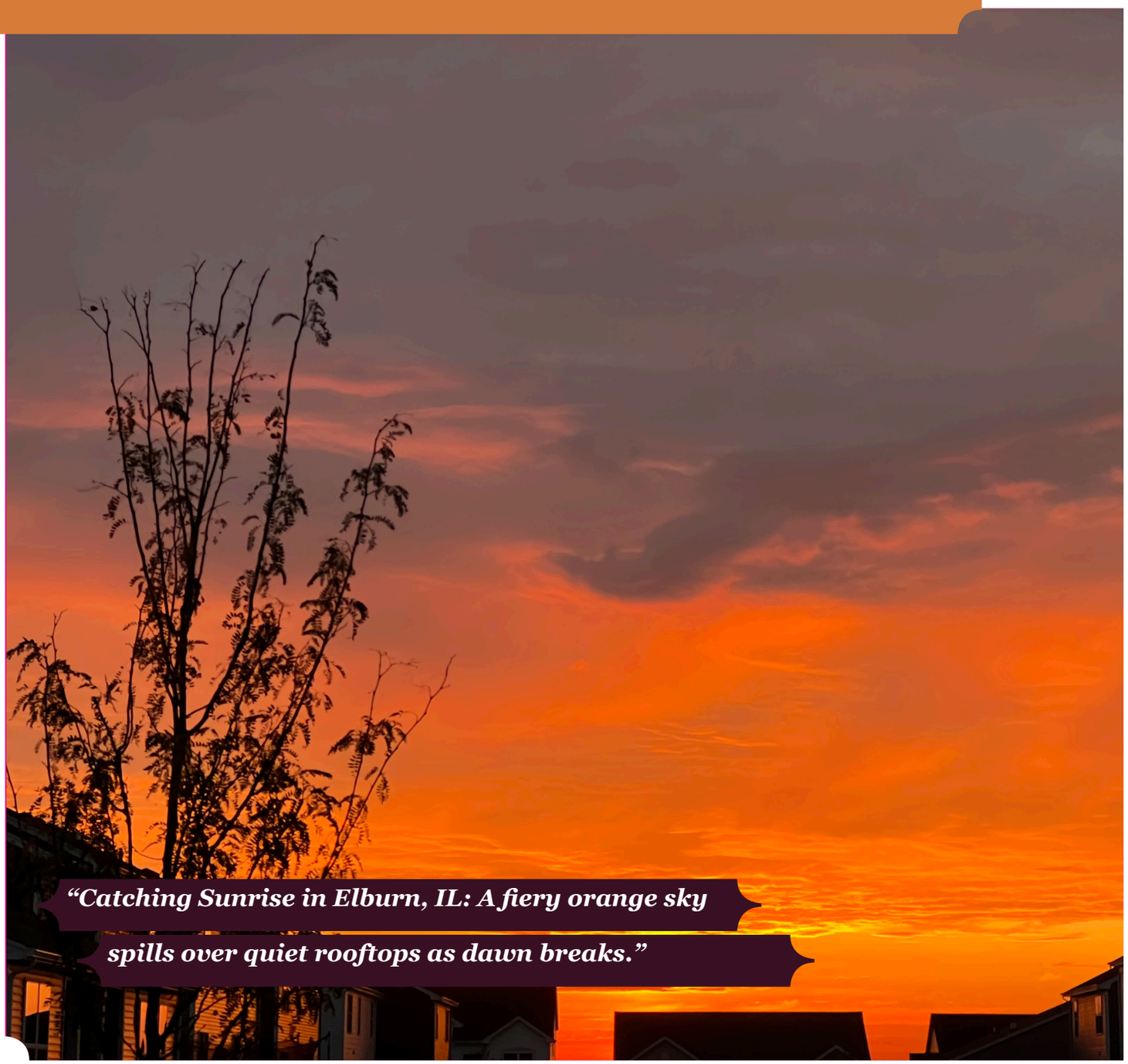
Don wanted to believe him. He watched the glass blur and clear, blur and clear, the campus rising out of the rain like a set someone was still building.

Back on the mats, Don smiles, a small thing at the corner of his mouth. "We never found out who he was. Maybe that's the point. Every campus needs its Leafman."

EARLY FALL REFLECTIONS

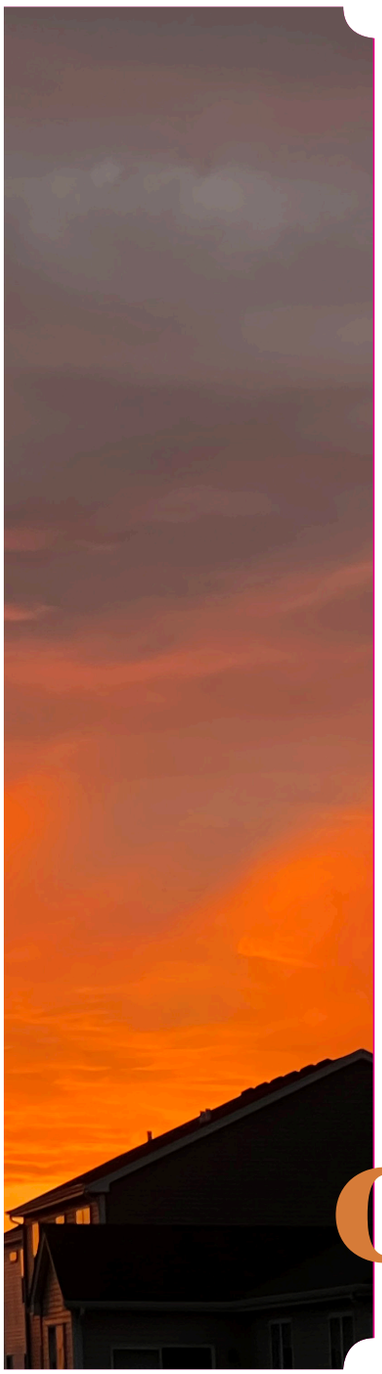
Jackie's Ledger

WRITER: Staff
PH: Staff



"Catching Sunrise in Elburn, IL: A fiery orange sky spills over quiet rooftops as dawn breaks."

KEEPING A FAMILY AFLOAT AMID MISSED ALIMONIES AND CHILD FROM HER EX-HUSBAND.



06

On Saturday mornings, Jackie moves through the St. Charles farmers market like a woman with a list and a clock. There are apples to bag, soccer cleats to replace, a math packet to print before the library closes.

Five years out from a 14-year marriage, Jackie has stopped measuring time by anniversaries and now measures it by pick-up windows and court dates. Her children know the rhythm of Tuesdays (library and leftovers) and Thursdays (practice and pancakes for dinner). They also know their father's ring tone, a distant bell that surfaces and vanishes like a radio station at the edge of range.

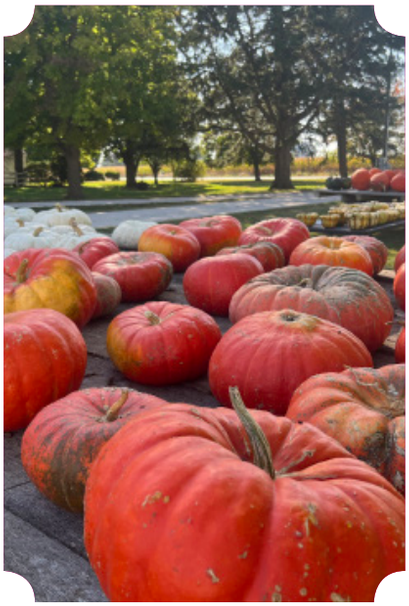
The order says he owes child support. The reality says he quit the job that made compliance traceable. Off-the-books work turned income into rumor; cash folded into pockets, odd jobs that live in the fog between "I'm trying" and "You can't prove it." Jackie has learned that a person can be both present in memory and absent in math. The ledger doesn't lie. Rent, groceries, sneakers, co-pays. On the other side: promises, IOUs, a trail of could-haves.

She is not naive, nor is she new to the machine. She's filed motions, kept receipts, carved hours from shifts to sit on courthouse benches where air registers in vent-cold drafts and names are called like lottery numbers without prizes. The hearing rooms smell of toner and patience. When her case is called, she stands with a spine made from equal parts caffeine and resolve, answering questions with the precision of someone who has lived inside paperwork. Dates, amounts, missed weekends, text transcripts. There is nothing theatrical about a parent trying to feed a household.

Fox Valley is full of quiet economies. The neighbors who swap hand-me-downs on porches. The coach who waives a fee. The librarian who prints the extra pages without counting. Jackie's world runs on these small mercies. She returns them where she can: extra snacks tucked into other kids' hands, a ride home, a borrowed winter coat that never needs to be returned. The village may not raise every child, but it does keep a shelf steady when a parent's arms are full.

When the kids sleep, she makes lists of the future. There's the practical list: dental appointments, FAFSA forms, the cracked phone that needs repair. And then there's the list she writes in a private notebook: take the certification course; stop apologizing for being both strict and soft; remember joy is not a luxury good. She copies down quotes like vitamins. Lately: "Resilience is not a personality trait; it's a community technology." Underlined twice.

People ask gentle questions that are really astonishments in disguise.



Fall's alluring images from Sonny Acres and Weidner Pumpkins & More.

Autumn at Sonny Acres: pumpkins on parade beneath an amber canopy, waiting for the perfect pick."

How do you do it? By not having the option not to. Don't you get mad? Yes, but anger is terrible at packing lunches. Do the kids ask where he is? Sometimes. She tells them the truest thing that isn't cruel: grown-ups are complicated and we are doing our best. Then she shows them what "best" looks like homework checked, bedtime stories read, sneakers found under the couch even when she feels like collapsing.

On Sundays, she walks the river trail, the Fox a steady ribbon under sky. The water doesn't argue with itself; it moves around obstacles and keeps going. There is a lesson there she pretends she learned on purpose. She counts her breaths to the beat of her shoes and imagines a courtroom where effort counts as currency, where hidden income can't hide from the simple arithmetic of needs.

It would be easy to write Jackie as emblem or indictment, but she is neither. She is a person in a place, raising kids in a season that demands more than it pays. Her ex is not a villain in her telling; just a man lost inside his choices. That's not forgiveness. It's triage. She saves her fiercest energy for the living work: permission slips, permission to hope, permission to rest for an hour between loads of laundry. October brings pumpkins and budget spreadsheets. She will stitch a costume from thrift-store scraps and make it look like it was always meant to be magic. The kids will run ahead, sugar-high and loud. She will follow, a flashlight in one hand, the ledger in the other, still adding, still balancing, still moving forward like the river that refuses to disappear simply because the rocks won't.

Forged in Time But Not Bound by Time

WRITER: Staff

PH: Staff

Timekeeper: Octavio Fuentes

A story of time that crosses borders, seasons, and generations.

“Elgin’s Art Deco landmark: the Tower Building watching over downtown on a blue-sky afternoon.”

At noon in a Tijuana neighborhood, people paused. They drifted toward the Fuentes house and waited for the music of metal and air: twelve bright chimes from an Elgin clock Octavio's parents considered their greatest treasure. The clock did more than keep the hour. It named a place. It suggested a future.

In the early 1960s, at eighteen, Octavio followed that sound north. He arrived in Elgin with a suitcase, a borrowed address, and a belief that if you respect time; show up, listen, learn—it will open doors. In Elgin it opened the right one: a job at the Elgin watch company whose name had echoed through his childhood kitchen.

Inside the factory were long benches, magnifiers, and careful hands. Work felt, to Octavio, like being trusted with something sacred. Each tiny wheel and spring was a promise that hours could be made orderly, that a day could be assembled from precision and patience. His parents' clock had predicted this life; time, he liked to say later, had written the invitation. He also fell for the Fox Valley's seasons, a rhythm he hadn't known in Tijuana.

Summer sang with cicadas and late sunsets; then September arrived with marching bands and the first cool breath over the river. He loved how maples flared like struck matches, how porches dressed themselves with pumpkins, how neighborhoods told their own lores; stories of harvest parades, scarecrow streets, and bridges where a first kiss might secure a lifetime of luck.

Winter taught him the hush of the first snow and the discipline of morning scraping; spring offered a green crescendo that felt like hope on repeat.

"Inside the factory were long benches, magnifiers, and careful hands. Work felt, to Octavio, like being trusted with something sacred."

And he delighted in the time changes themselves. When the clocks sprang forward, he'd tap his wrist and say, "Mira—faith in tomorrow, paid in advance." When they fell back, he'd grin: "Time can be generous." He never treated the hour shift as a nuisance; it was another reminder that time is arranged, negotiated, honored.

At church he listened for the old bell and thought of his parents' chimes; both belonged to a wider music.

But time also changes in harder ways. In 1968, the factory closed. The whistle went silent. For some, that was the end of a story.

For Octavio, it was another hour beginning. He found work with other companies around Elgin;

places that needed the steadiness forged at the bench: machine shops, manufacturers, outfits that valued a worker who showed up early and stayed until the job was right. He learned new tools, new rhythms. He traded the tick of a balance wheel for presses, lifts, and lines, and he kept moving forward.

His measure of success shifted, too. It wasn't the shift bell or the assembly tally; it was stability—the quiet miracle of rent paid on time, of a refrigerator that never went empty, of children who could look at their future and see choices instead of limits.

The legacy he built was not a single job but a continuous line of responsibility: saving for a car, then a home; coaching a youth team; finding a church; timing family life by the ordinary sacraments of dinner, homework, birthdays.

Image above: Globe sculpture along Elgin's Riverwalk: a sunlit reminder of our place in a wider world beside the Fox. Image below: Historic Building.

On weekends he would walk downtown, past the river and the old factory grounds, and imagine the hours stacked inside those walls: the expertise, the stories, the clockwork of people who came from everywhere to put their craft into something that lasted.

The company had closed, yes, but the city still beat with the same dependable pulse. Elgin had made watches; now it made families like his possible.

In autumn, as daylight thinned and the valley glowed, he'd tell his kids the old allures of the season: that a clear October sky can bless a decision, that a first frost sharpens the mind, that keeping your word is how you keep time.

Ask his children what their father gave them and they'll use words like steadiness, respect, drive. They remember him resetting the clocks twice a year with a small screwdriver and a smile. They remember the pride in his voice the first time he said, "This is your country, too."

Octavio's working life was predicted by time but never limited by it. The Elgin clock that charmed a neighborhood in Mexico became a bridge, a way for a young man to step into a city and feel it welcome him back.

The factory that closed did not close his story; it widened it. He moved with the seasons, honored the hours, and taught his children that time is not only counted; it is kept, together.

If you listen closely at noon in Elgin, you can still hear it; not the whistle, not even the chime, but the quieter sound of a life assembled with care.

That's the music Octavio brought at eighteen. That's the music he leaves behind.

Caring for Aging Parents, Part II

Personal Self-Doubt

Throughout my caregiving years, I felt ill-prepared and inadequately trained for this critically important role, especially for medical tasks (the proper way to facilitate mobility and safe transfers; toileting and attention to bowel issues; performing wound care between hospice visits; etc.). Although I closely observed and sought instruction from nurses and physical therapists, I often thought it would be ideal to receive formal training to carry out these tasks. To my knowledge, no such instruction existed.

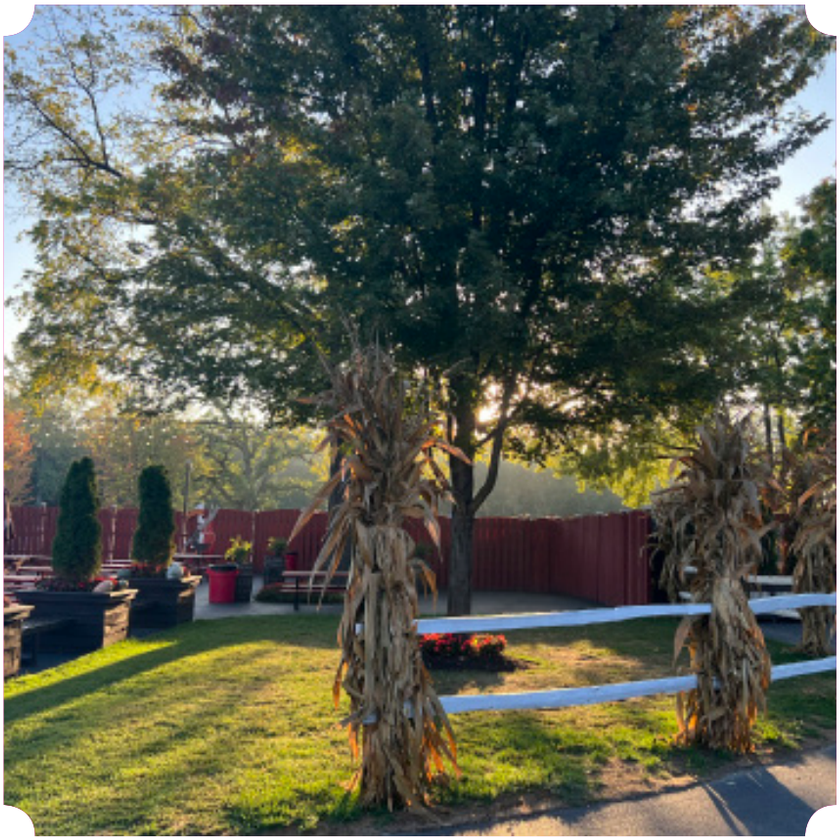
WRITER: Mirian

PH: Staff

As my caregiving continued, I constantly questioned whether the responsibilities I had taken on were beyond my capabilities. This was especially true in managing my mother's dementia. The increasingly formidable challenges: personality changes and behavioral symptoms like sundowning, agitation, and otherwise uncharacteristic aggression, were daunting.

I experienced mounting loss and premature grief, particularly for my mother. I later learned this is common in dementia, as profound changes in a loved one alter who they are an how we experience them.

Images from Sonny Acres and Weidner Pumpkin & More



That grief also deepened my sense of isolation, despite regular calls from my siblings and the support of a dear friend who was on a caregiving journey with aging, sickly parents that uncannily mirrored mine.

Personally, I Paid a High Price

Caregiving required me to take a diminished role in the workforce, with adverse implications for both income and professional growth. Financially, my insurance status changed; I moved to Medicaid after being on the Affordable Care Act.

Professionally, my work was essentially placed "on hold" to meet caregiving responsibilities. When I did engage in my reduced workload,

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I found it extraordinarily difficult to focus, concentrate, and complete tasks. I was physically and mentally exhausted from the daily demands and the emotional toll of caregiving.

I had been fairly quiet and stoic about what I was experiencing. During several brief encounters with health care providers, I came to appreciate that what I was carrying wasn't routine; it was extraordinarily difficult. In one ER visit, when my agitated mother had to be restrained, a nurse shared that their family was caring for a sickly father, though she and six siblings shared the load.

During one of my mother's hospital stays, a social worker asked, matter-of-factly, "How are you holding up?" I simply shook my head and, despite my stoicism, quietly broke

down. I felt embarrassed to be so vulnerable, embarrassed to recognize I was struggling to provide the care my mother needed. I knew I had certain skill sets: attentiveness, organization, detail orientation, some ability to multitask, yet what was increasingly required seemed to push the limits of those skills in ways that not only surprised me but also frustrated and genuinely saddened me.

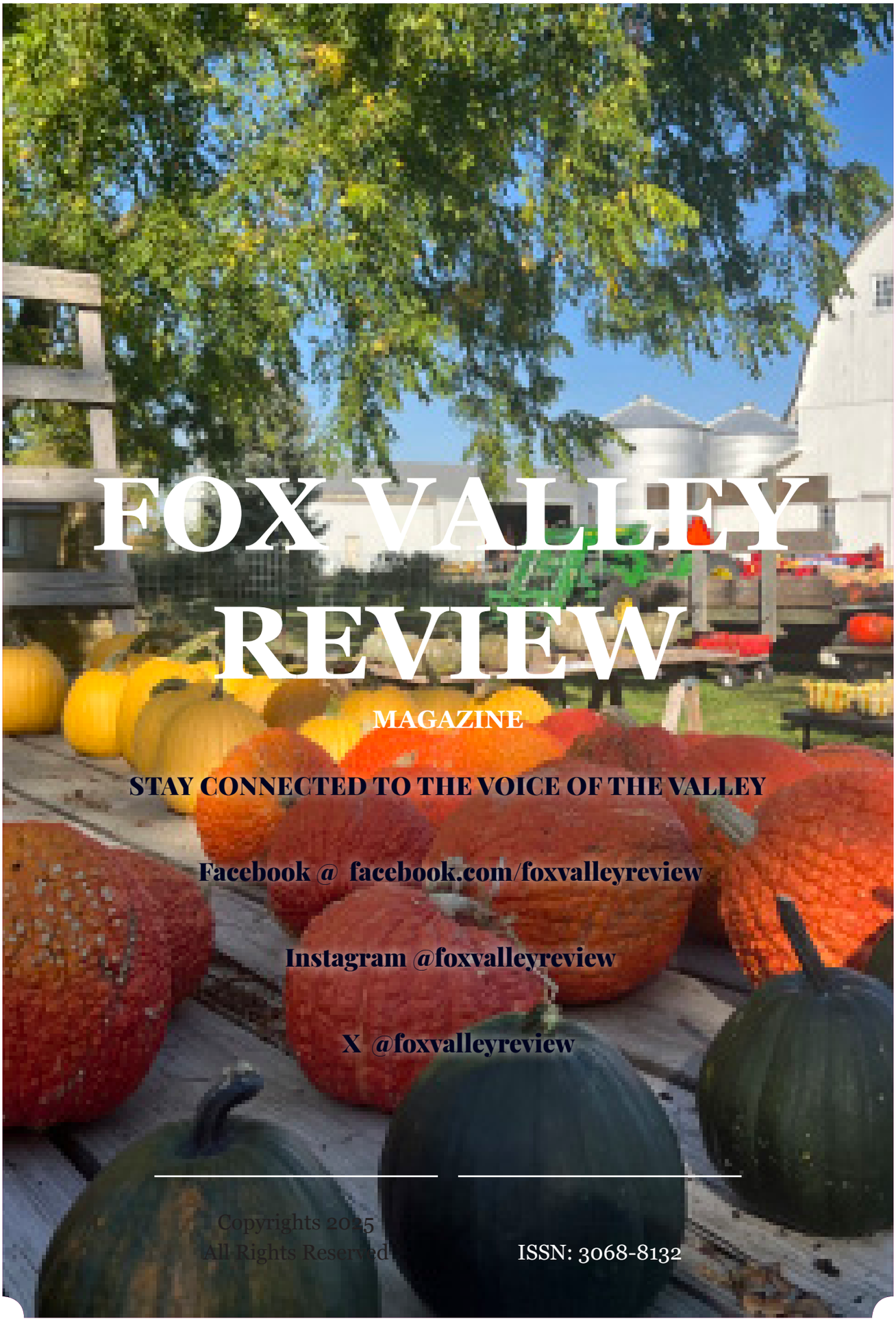
Since caregiving, I have experienced serious, ongoing personal health issues that have required diagnostic testing, medical procedures, and surgeries. Testing also identified a prior heart attack, thought to have occurred in my early fifties, earlier in my caregiving role. I was surprised, though not shocked, by the finding. My siblings, noting that I am the youngest in the family, offered a possible explanation: the accumulated "years of stress" I endured while caregiving.

Lessons Learned

Our mother was last hospitalized for an infection requiring a lengthy course of antibiotics, initiated in the hospital and followed by a three-week stay in a rehabilitation facility. So affected by the infection, she became profoundly confused: she could not answer basic questions from the Infectious Disease specialist and did not know my name, nor who I was. After a week of treatment, as she began to improve, the doctor asked her, "What do you think of all this?" Without hesitation, she pointed at me and said, "I think she is learning a lot." Her statement was profound and true. Both of our parents were health care practitioners, so she knew of what she spoke. In my caregiving role and, having worked for decades in the health arena as a non-clinician, I had learned a great deal about illness and disease processes; the drawbacks to and marvels of treatment; the critical role providers play in patient and family experiences; ethical practices and issues; insurance realities; and the many facets and challenges of caregiving, especially when meeting critical needs and striving to enhance quality of life.

I also came to recognize and now deeply appreciate the limitations of caregiving, particularly when one person serves in this role for a loved one or friend. Despite the best intentions, there are limits to the presence, attentiveness, capability, energy, and patience any single caregiver can consistently offer. Recognizing this, adopting a posture of humility, and extending oneself a measure of grace can make self-imposed expectations and the disappointments that sometimes follow more tolerable.

~Miriam



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