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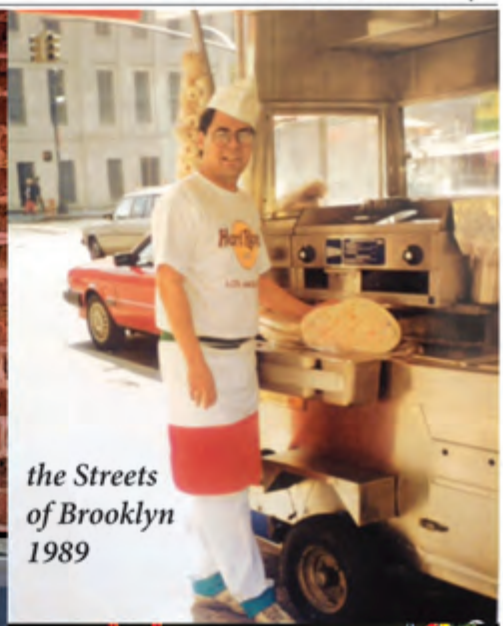

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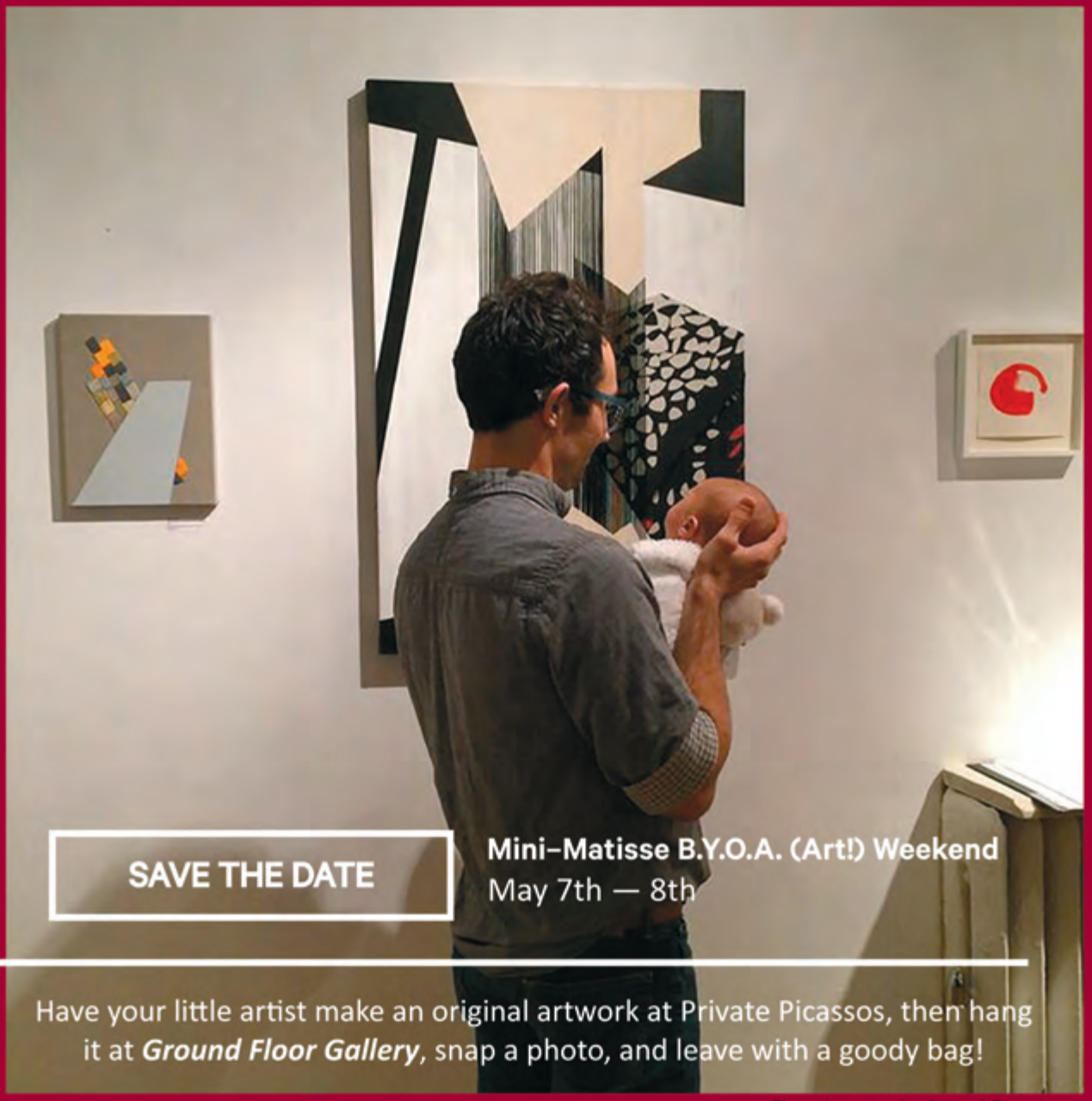

Photo by artist (and mom) Sara Jones

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PARK SLOPE READER

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READER GALLERY

David Barthold

David Barthold is a graphic artist and printmaker who works primarily in the medium of copperplate engraving. He is an active member at Gowanus Studio Space on 7th Street, and teaches Print Technology in the Communication Design department at New York City College of Technology. He will be teaching a class in engraving in the Fall of 2016 at the Manhattan Graphics Center on W 40th Street.

A native New Yorker, Barthold moved to Brooklyn in 1983 and often draws on the people, parks and buildings of the borough for his subject matter. For many years he produced ceramics for the interior decorating industry out of a small studio in Northside, and later branched out into the tabletop ceramics market. In 2004 Barthold returned to school to earn a degree in Dental Technology at City Tech, which eventually led to his present employment. He has lived with his wife Sarah and son Julian in Park Slope since 1996.

Carroll Street Bridge is based on a cellphone snapshot which was worked up into a brush drawing, then refined in Photoshop.

www.davidbarthold.net

Carroll Street Bridge

CONTRIBUTORS

MIRIELLE CLIFFORD once heard a poet say that "Brooklyn is the home of every new creation," and she just might agree. Her writing has appeared in One Green Planet and Philanthropy News Digest. She has studied poetry with Cynthia Cruz and Jean Valentine, and she is a co-founder of Sweet Action, a monthly poetry workshop.

AMBIKA SAMARTHYA-HOWARD is a documentary filmmaker and communications specialist. Her freelance projects focus on social issues, specifically gender, public health, and child rights. After receiving her MFA in Film at Columbia University, she went on to shoot and direct art and media projects in Japan, Bollywood, and West Africa. She completed the Dharma Teacher Training program at the Interdependence Project, a secular Buddhist organization in Manhattan, and has taught meditation at Third Root Community Center in Brooklyn and WeWorks. She has worked with organizations such as BBC Media Action, UNICEF, and other agencies in creating social activism tools and trainings.

NICOLE CACCAVO KEAR's memoir, Now I See You, debuted June '14 by St. Martin's Press, and she contributes regularly to Parents and American Baby, as well as Salon and Babble in between her dispatches at the Reader. You can keep up with her misadventures in Mommydom on her blog, A Mom Amok (amomamok.com). A native of Brooklyn, she lives in the Slope with her three firecracker kids, one very patient husband, and an apparently immortal hermit crab.

MELANIE HOOPES is the writer and director of Laurie Stanton's Sound Diet (sounddietradio.org), a hilarious but darkly painful radio drama show that's been described as a twisted, urban version of Garrison Keillor's A Prairie Home Companion. She also creates funny and poignant pledge drive spots for WNYC and WBUR (public radio stations). She's an Executive Storytelling Coach for The Next Level, Inc. and the Magnet Genius Machine and she teaches solo performance at the Magnet Theater. She lives in Westchester with her husband and their two kids and is a proud Girl Scout leader.

BETH KAISERMAN is a writer and restaurant worker in Brooklyn. Her work has appeared in Highbrow Magazine, Paste Magazine, Examiner.com and The Gotham Palate, a local food blog. She likes to cook and tap dance. Her biggest fear is losing her ticket at Katz's because it was scary enough the first time, and she still has flashes of pastrami and prison cells.

JOHN TUCKER is a long-time resident of Park Slope and the owner of Rose Water since it's opening in 2000. John's odd career arc has seen him, among other things, hanging gutters in his home state of Michigan, to Wonder Bread sales supervisor in New Jersey, to being the grandpappy of sustainable dining in Brooklyn since the turn of the century. Along the way he developed a deep affection for wine.

SARAH JACOBS is a Holistic Nutritionist, Actor, and Writer in Brooklyn, NY. She's the co-founder of The Wellness Project NYC, a creative corporate wellness consultancy that educates and inspires employees to live their healthiest lives. After curing herself from autoimmune disorder and chronic fatigue utilizing only diet and lifestyle changes, Sarah also works with individuals to practically develop healthy habits and cure chronic ailments naturally. She's also a regular contributor to The Huffington Post, a popular blog writer, a dabbler in spoken word poetry, and a yoga and fitness freak.

SUSAN VERDE In addition to having her own personal yoga practice she ultimately became certified to teach yoga and mindfulness to children has been doing so for the last 5 years. Susan is currently living in East Hampton, New York with her twin boys Joshua and Gabriel and her daughter Sophia where she writes children's books and teaches kid's yoga and mindfulness. Her children, her practice and the ocean at her doorstep keep her constantly connected and inspired. She is the author of the picture books The Museum, You and Me, I Am Yoga and the forthcoming The Water Princess with illustrations by Peter H Reynolds (due for release in the Fall of 2016)www.susanverde.com

JOHANNA GOHMANN has written for *Salon, Babble*, and *The Morning News*, and she is a regular contributor to *Bust* magazine. Her essays have been anthologized in *A Moveable Feast: Life-Changing Food Adventures Around the World, The Best Women's Travel Writing 2010 and 2015*, and *Every Father's Daughter – Twenty-four Women Writers Remember Their Fathers.* www.JohannaGohmann.com

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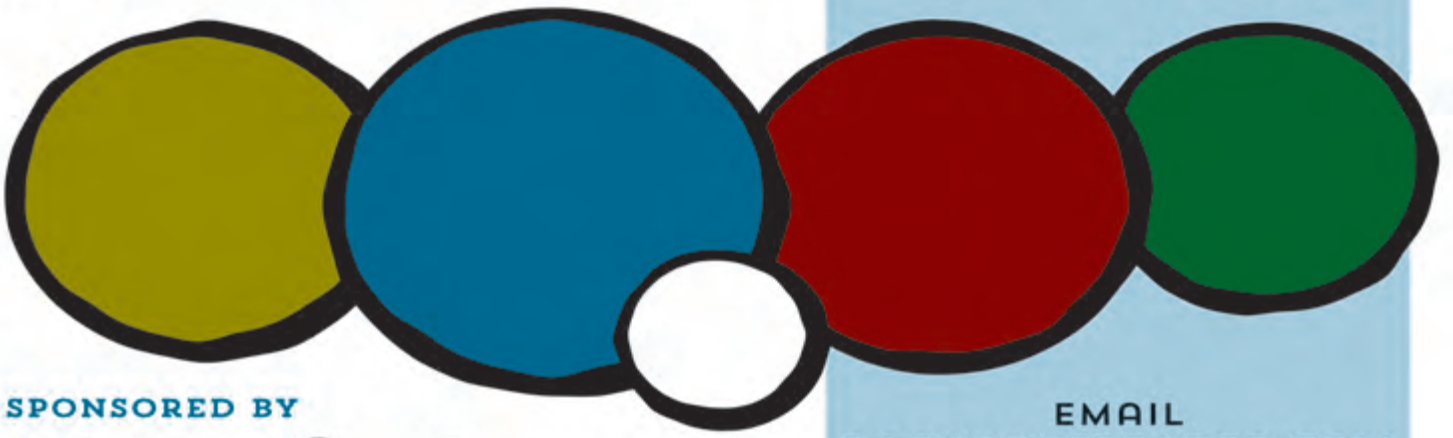

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—THE READER INTERVIEW—

THAT TINY ELEMENT OF MAGIC

Ryan Woods works with a group of students to identify vocabulary words in the text.

"If I were to get an E.L.A. tattoo on my forehead—which I wouldn't" Ryan Michele Woods told her seventh graders, "it'd say this: 'authors do everything for a reason.'" I had a chance to sit in on Woods' class one February morning at MS 51. Students were discussing Paul Volponi's *Hurricane Song*, and as Woods helped her students navigate the murky waters of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath, she encouraged the same kind of intentionality in them.

Interview and photographs
By Mirielle Clifford & Max English

As an alumna of PS 321 and a 1993 graduate of what was then JHS 51, Ryan Michele Woods knows a thing or two about education in Park Slope. Woods has taught Social Studies and English at MS 51 since 2004 and brings her infectious energy to Piper Theatre Productions.

In my conversation with Woods, she sheds light on the beginnings of activism, the similarities between teaching and acting, and how to get students hooked.

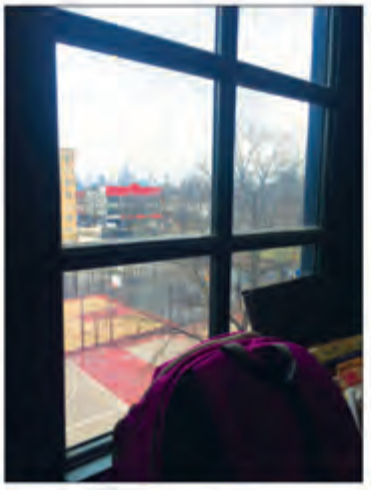
PS Reader: Describe a typical school day.

Ryan Michele Woods: I teach three seventh grade classes every day. What we're focusing on in reading and writing changes from month to month. Right now we're working on authentic details in fiction by reading Hurricane Song, which has really authentic eyewitness details from the perspective of a fifteen-year-old in the Superdome after Katrina. The kids are learning how to replicate this idea that fiction comes from your imagination, but it also comes from research. They picked topics for their own fiction today.

What are students writing about?

Everything! A lot of them are really interested in writing about September 11th, probably because it's so contemporary, but they weren't here yet. They're a little scared by it, but curious because it's so recent and particularly because if you look out the classroom window, that's the view. There's a special significance to that date in the culture of our building because everything was so visible.

A morbid fascination always comes up about the Holocaust. They're interested in things like cyberbullying and eating disorders. So issues that one human would face, compared to man against himself or man against his environment.



The room with a view.

It's a pivotal point in their education because, by nature, pre-teens tend to be pretty insular, and it's the first thing that really brings them out into the world of these human themes and issues, and how what they're reading reflects the real world. They're still at this point of disbelief. With Hurricane Katrina, they can't believe this happened. This is the point where they start getting outraged, the point of social responsibility, the point of no return for many of them.

Seventh grade is really great because they can start to process it. They're starting to go outside of the inner sanctum of their community and be curious about what's going on in the world. They're fascinated.

Do you do community service projects as a class, or is that something the school does?

The school does it. Schoolwide, we have partnerships with and fundraise for so many organizations. Sometimes we respond to a specific event we hear about. One sixth grade class is leading a book drive because they heard of a K-8 school that's in dire need of books. They asked all the students to bring their old books from home. It's the perfect thing to do because there's a surplus of books in our community. It's a chronic Park Slope parent problem—"Do you need books? We have all these books."

They're also fascinated when we've done projects on clean water in Africa and other developing nations. This issue that people don't have access to clean water is coming to them for the first time. When they realize that, that's where activism really starts. It doesn't always stay, but that's where it comes from.

Middle school is the best age to teach. He'd have to spin some webs to do this in high school. Their minds are not there. But in middle school, if you want their minds to be with you, they're with you. They're still open to that tiny element of magic that can come into the room.

You attended PS 321 and MS 51. Do you think the experience of a typical Park Slope middle school student has changed?

Absolutely. PS 321 has maintained this beautiful, creative environment. It was a great place when I went there, with wonderful teachers. They've always been very out of the box, and they seem to have maintained that identity.

Throughout most of the '90s, though, there was nothing safe or attractive about MS 51's location. It was the only option for middle schoolers who were coming from a feeder school like PS 321. It was attractive because of a gifted track, the Rainbow program, but it was not a good school. The one thing it had was really persistent teachers who stuck it out. They knew the environment of a school ebbs and flows and comes in waves. There were great things about the gifted program here, but, overall, it was how anyone from the outside would have imagined a clichéd Brooklyn middle school if they hadn't set foot in Brooklyn in the last decade. You didn't go below Fifth Avenue. There was no beautiful Washington Park. The Old Stone House was boarded up and abandoned. You stayed inside a lot of the time.

Much of my experience, which I'm so glad these kids don't have, had to do with keeping myself safe. We had more street smarts then, but I'm glad students don't need them now to such a degree. I really do think that when the "distraction" of keeping yourself safe is gone, you're going to have a higher quality educational experience.

There's an appalling lack of diversity in our schools now. It wasn't like that when I went to school here and when I started teaching. The students are having a wonderful time here, and I'm so glad I can contribute to that, but it's mind-boggling how quickly things can turn over from the way they used to be.

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Identifying vocabulary words in the text.

Are there any guiding principles you keep in mind while planning lessons?

Yes. You have to know what your access point is with these kids and figure out what they're going to hook on to about the concept. You have to present it in a way that's very real. With this Hurricane Katrina curriculum, it's not really in their lifetimes. They were two years old at the time and some have never been to New Orleans. They don't have any idea, really, of the ethnic and racial culture of the whole country because they live in such a beautiful, but liberal, progressive bubble. So you have to be able to introduce the idea that this thing happened and ask them, "How would you feel?" and, "Here are real photos." Once you capture them, and show you care about the content, they care.

Whether you're teaching about a comma, or Hurricane Katrina, or the periodic table, you have to make them feel you're getting them involved because it's important. You should be able to tell them what the real world application is and treat them like they're human and not like they're students.

So overall, you have to love content second and the kids first. You have to care about their experiences as individuals. I'd say they're the driving force behind lessons, not what wisdom I can impart to them about writing a paragraph.

Does your theater background impact your teaching style?

Yes! My Mom would probably say I've been acting since I started talking. I love reading aloud to students. What a way to get them riveted, by letting yourself go and giving a Laurence Olivier

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type performance at 9:00 on a Thursday morning. Teaching is performing, 100 percent. I'm also a director, which really helps with teaching and with visualizing what you want them to get from a lesson, what you want the period to look like, what you're not going to tolerate, and the things you need to fix. Both acting and directing lend themselves really well to teaching.

Your class is doing a meditation program with Mission Be, a mindfulness education group. How is that going?

The teacher, John, talks to them about their level of awareness, what stresses them out, how to calm themselves down, and purposeful breathing. I heard about it, and thought, "That is fabulous, I need to learn that!" So I signed one of my classes up.

I had this moment with them last week. I adore this class, but they're particularly chatty, even for seventh graders. The first two times they couldn't let go of their self-consciousness, which I get. I'm the person laughing sometimes in yoga because it's weird. But I told them, "If you're the person who needs to keep your eyes open and constantly monitor what others are doing, you're probably the person who needs this the most. So I'm really impressed with those of you"—reverse psychology, that's how I plan my lessons—"who let your self-consciousness go and who are able to sit there and be powerful enough to not be self-aware of how you look." The next time I asked them, "Is there anyone who feels they need to be in a different seat?" Half of them raised their hands. John turned off the lights and led them in a guided meditation. They were all sitting there meditating, and I thought, "This is incredible." ■

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BY BETH KAISERMAN / PICS BY AILEEN SIDERIS & BETH KAISERMAN

From top left, clockwise: Krupa Grocery, Prawn Shop, Shrimp boil with Far East sauce, Prawn Shop, Carnem, Hugo & Sons.

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Carnem, which opened last May, offers up classic steaks, sauces, and seafood with a side of whimsical delights like pork belly cotton candy lollipops. Yes, it's a delicious tender pork belly surrounded by a pink cloud of cotton candy, served on a stick. For the more straightforward meat fare, the beef carpaccio is excellent: filet mignon, served with fried capers, parmesan, oyster cream sauce, and crispy potato skins. The menu, curated by owner Jacob Krumgalz, offers a bit of fun with your standard steakhouse staples, perfect for a celebratory night out.

Prawn Shop
669 Union Street

If you thought the closest thing Gowanus had to the seashore was the Whole Foods patio next to the canal, you're wong. Prawn Shop has asnwered the call for local, sustainable seafood, including creative seafood boils like the Far East, with sweet potato, green curry and coconut. They source from New York and New England, and Prawn Shop aims to showcase local fish and seafood, even if the options are less widely known. Hang out at a communal picnic table outside and enjoy dollar oysters and prawns for happy hour, or try out the newly launched brunch menu. Also, the chalkboard behind the bar helps you decode the art of crab shucking using Breaking Bad references.

Varrio 408
412 5th Avenue

The crew from Rachel's Taqueria, two doors down, opened this spot last year, slinging fresh tortillas and Mexican fare from Tijuana. Watch them make the nicely blistered tortillas using a comal, and order meats family style for build-your-own tacos. Tacos, burritos, and mulas are also available à la carte. Don't skip the carne asada

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Hugo and Sons

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On the first warm night of March, Hugo and Sons was buzzing with hungry, happy people. Andrea Taormina was running the show, seating people into slick, red booths and serving dishes inspired by his childhood in Palermo, Sicily. A delicious burrata is made light and refreshing by celery, apple, pine nuts, and parsley, with a light drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. The pappardelle with sausage, fennel, and chili peppers had just the right amount of spice that sneaks up on you while you bite through perfectly cooked pasta. A fairly simple menu offers mostly Italian dishes with a few French and American foods as well. Find pizzas, pastas, salads, a full kids' menu, and also gluten-free dough and a gluten-free bun for the burger. A fun spring activity might be working your way through their pasta selections and asking Andrea for wine suggestions, including a few unfiltered orange wines.

Page 22. From top. Burrata with apple, celery, pine nuts and parsley, Hugo and Sons; Breakfast gnocchi, Krupa Grocery. This page. Beef carpaccio with oyster cream sauce, crispy capers, potato skins and parmesan, Carnem.

Krupa Grocery

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Settle in for a nice breakfast at this charming spot right by Prospect Park, owned by the folks behind Slope Cellars and Windsor Wines across the street. Breakfast is served from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, and brunch is served on the weekends. The energy was sunny as I enjoyed breakfast gnocchi with fried eggs, bacon, kale, squash, and breadcrumbs and large lemon ricotta pancakes, and neither dish was too greasy or heavy for a satisfying morning meal. But the highlight was their serious attention to the beverage program, especially the coffee from Irving Farm Coffee Roasters. Good coffee is crucial to a solid breakfast spot, and Krupa offers both a rotating hot coffee option and a rotating nitro iced coffee. The cafe portion of the restaurant is open daily for grab-and-go coffee and pastries from Ovenly. There's also a rotating Kombrewcha on tap, and the draft lineup changes regularly. The spot's name pays homage to the newsstand that was there for twenty years before the restaurant. (The landlords still live upstairs.) The space was then styled in honor of legendary jazz drummer Gene Krupa. Enjoy a Tuesday night dinner accompanied by live music at 8 p.m. Though it was too early for me when I visited, the panko-crusted shrimp burger is calling my name for lunch or dinner. ■

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NATURAL SELECTION

"John, Table 10 doesn't like the half bottle of Burgundy."

Argh. For the second time this month and the third time this year, a customer isn't thrilled with this bottle that we love so well. Wines like these from the Burgundian appellation of Mercurey are often not as easy to drink as Pinot Noir from California or Oregon's Willamette Valley. Compared to a West Coast pinot, this bottle from Domaine Meix-Foulot is lean and dry and lacks the richness and intensely sweet fruit of many of its New World cousins.

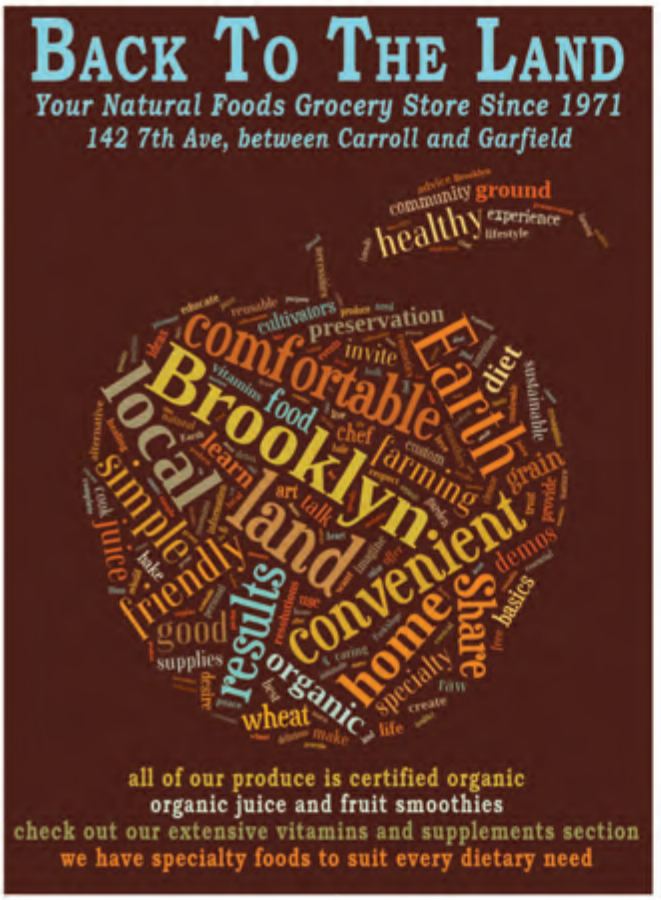
The Case for Restraint

What it does have in spades is restraint—an Old World earthiness and austerity, and an uncanny ability to pair with most of our food. It's usually our only half bottle of pinot noir, so folks order it expecting (hoping?) that it'll be more generous. Some, like the nice couple at Table 10, are disappointed.

The wine list at Rose Water has always been a reflection of our personal taste, with only minor accommodations made to popular trends, and even then it's on our terms. Instead of a fruit bomb malbec from South America, for example, we offer a more balanced and food friendly Cahors from southwestern France: Clos Siguier, which is a blend of malbec and tannat, has rich, dark fruit that's not overly sweet and has balancing acidity with smooth, firm tannins that enhance the flavor and cut the fat of meats like roasted duck and grilled beef. As a general rule, our US/New World selections are chosen for their relative balance and food friendliness. We seek out wines that are both natural (sustainably-raised fruit and non-interventionist cellar practices) and restrained. We define restraint as an approach to winemaking that favors nuance and a sense of place above overripe fruit, high alcohol, and a manipulated polish.

Our friends Jennifer Munro Clark and Andrew Scott at Eminence Road Farm Winery live and work on a small farm in Long Eddy, NY in the lower Catskills near the Delaware River and the PA border. They purchase sustainable grapes from excellent growers in the Finger Lakes and truck them back to their farm to make wine that is very much in the "natural" style that we favor—a low intervention, hands-off approach that produces wines of character and honesty.

Article and image by John Tucker



It's a less equals more philosophy. Hands-off winemaking starts with fruit grown with as little chemical intervention as possible, hand harvesting before the fruit is overripe, gentle crushing (usually by foot), fermentation by wild indigenous yeast, aging in old flavor-neutral barrels, little or no additives, little or no fining or filtering, and as little sulphur as possible, usually applied in very small amounts at bottling. Their homemade labels list the ingredients in each bottle (e.g. grapes, sulfites), and feature the words, "Bottled Alive."

Eminence Road has just released a 2014 Seneca Lake Riesling in a clear bottle with a crown cap (similar to a beer bottle cap) that epitomizes everything we love about their work—it has just a hint of sweetness, great acidity, and varietal character. It's fresh, lively and fabulous with food. Many Finger Lakes Rieslings these days are dry, but theirs is really lean. Andrew explains, "In the field we try to pick on the early side to preserve natural acidity and to avoid overt fruitiness in flavor and aroma. For the 2014 riesling, I would like to take credit for its delicacy and drinkability, but we did the same thing we always do, save for picking extra early—some would say those grapes were under ripe—and bottling when the fermentation stopped as opposed to when it was finished."

Andrew takes his unusual approach a step further with this wine in that he hopes that it will develop a little fizz over time, something a more conventional winemaker would go out of his way to avoid. "We decided on a crown cap for the '14 because there is a very slight amount of unfermented sugar left in the wine which may one day lead to a continuation of the fermentation. The crown cap is there so we don't end up with pushed, leaking corks. Bottled alive, indeed."

So, what about that half bottle of Mercurey at Table 10? Agnès Dewé de Launay is not your typical Burgundian winemaker. Very tall, soft-spoken and unassuming, she's delightfully frank about her approach; her goal is to produce wine that lets the earth speak of place and time, expressing the character of the soil, climate, and especially the vintage—the growing season from spring flowering to autumn harvest. As such, her wines vary a great deal from year to year. Some vintages are light and tight, others can be more powerful, but they always have high acidity (great for food) and express a beautiful earthiness and nuance. There's an austerity to these wines that has very little in common with their American cousins. Agnès likes to compare her holistic, non-interventionist approach to winemaking, and specifically to her vines, to that of parenting: "If your child is not sporty, you do not push them to play the sports, you know?"

We convinced the couple at Table 10 to sit with the wine a bit, let it open up in the glass and taste it with food, and if they still didn't like it we'd happily find them something more to their taste. After ten minutes—and some gnocchi with mushrooms—they were smitten. Given a little time and reflection, restraint usually wins the day. ■

Eminence Road Farm Winery Riesling "Seneca Lake" 2014. Available at Rose Water, direct from the winery, and at Uva Wines and Spirits, 199 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn. $22

Domaine du Meix-Foulot Mercurey 1er Cru 2011. Available at RW and at Mr. Wright Fine Wine, 1593 Third Ave, NYC. Half bottle $18

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CAMPS

BY JOHANNA GOHMANN

There Will Be Drama

PIPER THEATER

When I was 12, I attended a summer drama camp at our local community college. Under the guidance of the instructor, my friends and I penned original scripts and scavenged costumes from our parents' closets. I was a ferociously bossy child, with a big imagination and an even bigger perm, and I threw myself into my production like it was already shortlisted for an Obie.

After several days of rehearsals, all of our parents were invited to a one night only performance of our original work. My opus, entitled Cinderella II, was a sequel to the beloved fairy tale, and picked up a few years into Cinderella's marriage to Prince Charming. After several scenes depicting fights about credit card bills, Cinderella ends up leaving the Prince to elope with one of the evil stepsisters. Clearly, I was ahead of my time. And I can only assume my parents were hoping for a small asteroid to crash into the school when the lights came up. But that's exactly the kind of magic that can happen when you leave kids with a stage, some stretches of fabric, and the chance to pretend.

Along with being just straight up fun, summer drama camps can also teach kids valuable life lessons. Says Kristen Lynch of the Brooklyn Acting Lab, "Theatre is a collaborative art. It nurtures a child's ability to listen, share, and be an active part of a community. I think that theatre programs like ours give children the time and space to imagine possibilities and dream. Especially now, when digital life is so powerful and encompassing, this time and space to create is crucial."

John McEneny seconds this idea. The Artistic Director of the long-running Piper Theatre, McEneny believes there's much more to drama classes than the chance to jam on a wig and talk in a funny voice. "Theatre teaches children empathy; to experience inner lives of other people. Drama is about exploring what it means to be human. And what better time to do that than in childhood?"

So the next time you tell your kid to wash their hands for dinner, and they commence wailing and pacing a la Lady Macbeth, inform them you have the perfect outlet for all of that marvelous dramatic energy. Lucky for them, the Slope has many different summer performance opportunities – some big scale and elaborate, others more spare and intimate.

At the aforementioned Brooklyn Acting Lab, kids from rising Pre-K to the 8th grade create brand new plays from scratch. "Young people are involved in every aspect of the creative process from start to finish," says Lynch. "The work originates from them.

There Will Be Drama

Our teaching artists, directors, designers, and musicians are guiding them through a process, helping them sculpt and edit their work. Even when we are working from a scripted piece, our starting point is improvisation."

Piper Theatre offers classes for children ages 7-17, and is unique in that the camp utilizes the outdoor space at J.J. Byrne playground, as well as the beautiful Old Stone House. "Our drama programs are led by theatre educators with Masters Degrees in education," says McEneny. "The workshops for aged 11 to 16 are four- week intensives that culminate in two performances for the community."

And if your kid fancies himself more of a Scorsese than a Barrymore, Piper also has a filmmaking program.

Over at Spoke the Hub, they also offer workshops on digital filmmaking, along with classes on creating your own clothing line and learning to juggle rubber chickens. (Though presumably not all at the same time.) Doreen Miranda works at the performance space, and says their summer camps put a major focus on improvisational skills. "We want the kids to learn things that will stay with them for life, so we do improv, vocal work, and Shakespeare. In improv, they learn skills that help them be spontaneous, creative, and enormously collaborative."

PARK SLOPE PREFORMING ARTS

The Brooklyn Children's Theatre is another awesome option for thespian-minded kiddos. The instructors put their own unique spin on drama camp, shuttling the kids via subway into Shetler studio in Manhattan, where they record cast albums for original shows. But they mean business with their music – and kids are asked to show off their pipes beforehand and audition for this particular class. Fortunately, the camp also offers a workshop on auditions, so kids can brush up on their vocals and monologue skills.

For something a bit more low key, there's the Park Slope Performing Arts studio, where theater appears to be in the blood. The school is run by longtime Slopers Mary Rice, and her two daughters, Rebecca and Erin. They keep their summer classes on the small side so as to offer more individualized attention to the students. The kids can immerse themselves in Shakespeare, musical theater, and fairytale improv. (A

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SPOKE THE HUB

Cinderella 3, perhaps?)

Says Mary Rice, "Signing us up for performing arts classes was one of the greatest gifts our parents gave us as children and our time on stage made up some of our most precious and memorable childhood moments."

And I have to agree. When I'm out and about in the Slope, I often pass the drama camp kids. They stand about in their shorts and tees – faces sweaty, eyes bright – as they lose themselves in the worlds they are creating. It makes me incredibly nostalgic, and takes a lot of self-control to not run over, grab a wooden sword, and ask them what mysterious land we are discovering now. My drama class memories are some

DRAMA CAMPS TO WE RECOMMEND

Park Slope Performing Arts
135 Windsor Place
www.parkslopeperformingarts.com
After School Classes
Musical Theater (ages 9-11)
Bound for Broadway (ages 5-6)
Triple Threat - Beginner Ballet/30 minute Beginner Tap/ 30 minute Broadway Stars Combination (ages 5-7)*
Summer Camps - Ages 4-14

White Bird Productions
138 South Oxford Street, Suite 3A, Brooklyn, NY 11217
www.whitebirdproductions.org
Creative Theatrics - Winter After School Program (For Pre-K through 6th Grade)
Summer Theater Workshop

Brooklyn Children's Theater
135 Prospect Park SW #B7, Brooklyn, NY 11218
www.brooklynchildrenstheatre.net
After school classes at PS 130 and PS 230
BCT MainStage After school classes at for 1st - 6th graders
Recording Studio, Write a Musical and Show in a Week Summer Camps

Brooklyn Acting Lab
1012 8th Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11215
www.brooklynactinglab.or
Available Classes:
Imagination Station (2-3 yrs.)
Storybook Theatre (Pre-K & K)
Junior Musical Ensemble (1st-5th)
Improv I (1st-4th)
Musical Ensemble (6th-9th)
Acting Lab (5th-8th)
Improv II (5th-8th)

Piper Theater
336 3rd St, Brooklyn, NY 11215
www.pipertheater.org
Summer Camp - Ages 7-17

Brooklyn Arts Exchange
421 Fifth Ave, Brooklyn
www.youth.bax.org/home/
Drama & Theater Classes - Ages 5 and up
BAX Theater Company (BTC) (Ages 9+)

The Gallery Players
199 14th Street, Brooklyn
www.galleryplayers.com/the-peanut-gallery/
The Peanut Gallery (Musical & Theater Arts Summer Camp)

Spoke The Hub
748 Union Street
www.spokethehub.org
Actors Workshop (Ages 8-12)

The Dance Studio of Park Slope
630 Sackett Street Brooklyn, NY 11217
www.thedancestudiops.com

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of my most vivid, and I forged some lifelong friendships learning to paint my face like a rocking horse and sing Velveteen Rabbit the Musical while on all fours. Over 20 years later, I still catch myself singing certain lyrics in the shower. ("Real isn't how you look, or how you are maaaade. When a child loves you a long time, maybe then you'll make the graaaaaade!")

Best of all, I have some truly mortifying/hilarious video footage from my thespian youth. Nothing makes my husband weep with laughter quite like VHS footage of me in red pantyhose, belting "Everything's Coming Up Roses". But for me, watching those videos is like a glimpse into my childhood, and the magic of being anyone, or anything, that I could dream up that day. ■

READER RECOMMENDATIONS

Camps that we highly recommend:

BROOKLYN BOULDERS
www.brooklynboulders.com/brooklyn/youth/kids/summer-bkb-adventures/

DANCEWAVE
www.dancewave.org
info@dancewave.org
718-522-4696

GOWANUS MUSIC CLUB
www.gowanusmusicclub.com

KIM'S KIDS CAMP
www.kimskidscamp.com
kimskidscamp@gmail.com
718-768-6419

NATURE PLACE DAY CAMP
www.thenatureplace.com
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WELLNESS IN PARK SLOPE

EAST, MEET WEST

Acupuncture and Bridging the Gap between Western Sensibilities and Eastern Medicine

My first foray into Eastern Medicine and alternative healing therapies was at the age of twenty-eight. My body was shutting down, plagued with chronic fatigue and autoimmune disorder, I was desperate. I had been laughed at by gastroenterologists, endocrinologists, and various other -ologists, shipped from office to office as soon as I reached the edge of that particular doctor's particular scope of knowledge. A vegetarian at the time, I was smugly told that a cheeseburger was "probably the answer to my issue." Or worse, I was told that my "issue" didn't really exist at all. But, intuitively I knew something wasn't right. And so, I went on a quest for answers and for healing.

By SARAH JACOBS / Art by YEVGENIA NAYBERG

I am a skeptic by nature. An open-minded one, but a question asker. I always want to believe, but need to be shown a convincing argument in order to do so. Now, I am a practitioner in the realm of holistic health and nutrition myself, and I still like asking questions. But, I also still like being made to believe.

I'm no connoisseur of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and furthermore, no expert in acupuncture. But according to my research, acupuncture has been practiced in China for around 2,000 years, some experts even claiming that it's been around much longer than that. And while the amount of time it's been in use is up for conversation, so it seems, is its validity.

Like any good educated American doing research, I looked it up acupuncture on Wikipdedia. Of course, it mentions Traditional Chinese Medicine and explains the physical attributes that we all associate—thin needles being inserted at certain points on the body. But then it states, "…TCM theory and practice are not based upon scientific knowledge, and acupuncture has been described as a type of pseudoscience." …hmmm.

The Mayo Clinic goes into more detail explaining acupuncture's goal of balancing the flow of energy—known as *qi* (CHEE)—believed to flow through pathways—known as meridians—in the body. The Mayo Clinic also goes deeper, explaining acupuncture in terms of Western science, "…many Western practitioners view the acupuncture points as places to stimulate nerves, muscles, and connective tissue. Some believe that this stimulation boosts your body's natural painkillers and increases blood flow."

THE TRUSTY URBAN DICTIONARY CALLS ACUPUNCTURE, "A JAB WELL DONE". AND LAUGH IF YOU WILL, BUT IT MAY BE BENEFICIAL TO SUSPEND DISBELIEF WHEN IT COMES TO HEALTH, WHICH WE CAN ALL AGREE IS NO LAUGHING MATTER.

I've always found an interesting tug-of-war between Eastern and Western medicine. They seem to exist in the world as mutually exclusive entities. A haughty, my-way-or-the-highway type of attitude coming from the West, and a softer more "look at me, ma! No hands!" sort of need for attention from the East. But like any true wanna-be-believer, I wonder if there's validity to both arguments and a space where the two converge on even, healthy ground. And so in a quest, not unlike my personal one a few years back, I set out on foot, boots to Park Slope streets, to talk to a few practitioners and define acupuncture for myself.

My first stop was Brooklyn Acupuncture. I went up a small staircase and opened the door that was left propped for me after I rang the buzzer. As I waited in the tiny entrance area, out of one of the treatment rooms walked a woman a bit groggy and clearly in a relaxed state of being. Just after her, walked Zoe, all tattooed arms and chill vibes.

After setting up another appointment with her blissed-out patient, Zoe and I sat to chat. I learned she was once a dancer and baker in Portland, and years ago when she injured her back, acupuncture was the only thing that led her to find relief. Soon after, she decided to study.

It appears that her approach to wellness is as chill as her vibe.

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"Some people come in and want me to boss them around, give them strict rules. But, I don't really work like that," she said. Of the belief that extremes are part of our culture's problem, she prefers a gentler approach. And, while she's not against cutting things like dairy and gluten from the diets of some, she's not the practitioner to put a patient into a box and take a singular course of action.

We chatted more about the state of health and the state of humans. We commiserated over our culture's glorification of busy. Everyone's living, "up here" she said, as she waved her hands above her head. "Even just sitting still and going into this rest-and-digest, meditative state, which acupuncture does, is probably incredibly beneficial for some." But, Zoe emphasizes life outside of the treatment room, too, "diet and lifestyle is step one, that's what keeps you well. Acupuncture and Chinese medicine is when that's not enough."

When I asked her about skeptics and non-believers, her response was simple, "not believing in it is like saying we don't believe in what lots of other cultures have been using for lots of years." And while she understands the importance of studies, she knows they can't really be applied to acupuncture. "How do you do a double blind study on acupuncture? If you're touching those points, you're already energetically doing something," she reasoned. A final chat about sugar in our food supply, I snapped a few pics and was on my way.

I walked quickly to make my next appointment. Garden Acupuncture's office was big and much more medicinal in its feel. It sits on a main drag of the Slope, near some other health and wellness focused businesses. In the window, a large statue of Ganesh presides—the Hindu god of wisdom and good luck, known to clear obstacles and difficulties.

It isn't clear at first, but throughout conversation it becomes evident that Alex and Lisa, the co-founders of Garden, are husband and wife, and they seem a balanced team—Alex answered questions technically with a formal and even cadence, while occasionally his wife would chime in with a warmer, more personal tone.

Garden has been around for seven years, and the two know their stuff. Alex started training with a doctor in his teen years after being treated personally, and then later he and Lisa met while in school in Ohio. They see patients for a variety of things, but their self-proclaimed specialty is fertility. "Personally, that's all I do," Alex said. When I mentioned that within the context of fertility, "success" is pretty definitive—you either you have an extra human or you don't—they were very happy to tell me that their success rate is very high. "We're happy to say we see a lot of extra humans," Lisa said with a smile.

They employ many different types of TCM practitioners, are open late, and soon will be open seven days per week. This allows for frequency of visits, as they stress that acupuncture is accumulative and requires multiple and consistent treatments. It's clear that the team is dedicated to becoming a neighborhood kind of place.

A few blocks walk and I arrived at what Helene Kostre has named, Acupuncture and Healing Arts of Park Slope. Upon walking in, the space is welcoming. Helene was warm, her thick Brooklyn accent a nice surprise. She feels familiar. I was offered water in a cute little paper cup, the kind I remember from the dentist when I was a kid. I was shown down the hall to the treatment rooms, and all elicited that same feel—oddly familiar and reminiscent of some distant relative's home.

We sat down in her office in the back. Our conversation was very natural and flowing. You can tell she loves talking about health and alternative healing as much as I do. She made it clear pretty quickly that she incorporates many modalities in her approach to healing and attributes this to her realization that sometimes she "needs to go deeper, on an emotional, physical, spiritual level." And so, she's also proficient in nutritional counseling, emotional therapy, kinesiology, and what she calls, "clearing trauma."

I quickly came to understand why she calls her practice, "Acupuncture and Healing Arts," she takes a creative approach to an individual's health and you can tell that she's interested in figuring out the root cause of her patients' ailments. "I treat the whole person because it's all connected. The thing they came in for may be the last thing to get fixed. There are just so many layers." She explained. And you get the sense that she sees layers that others don't, "Everything is energy. It's a flow." She also mentioned the body's innate ability to heal itself, but that there's so much stress and so many environmental toxins that things go wrong and it gets past the point of knowing how. The body needs direction. Acupuncture, she says, and the rest of her work tap into the body's natural ability to mend itself.

We talked about kinesiology and how miraculous I think it is. The use of muscle testing for diagnoses and treatment of the body is a bizarre approach that I probably wouldn't believe if I hadn't watched it work on my own flesh and bone. To me it was like magic, but Helene was less enchanted than I. To her, kinesiology just makes sense. "You aren't testing the muscle," she explained, "you aren't testing strength, you're testing the brain's response to various nerve endings and muscles. The body—it's all connected." It doesn't surprise me that Helene keeps using the word, "connected".

My last stop was on the border of Gowanus. The entrance to Park Slope Acupuncture was the epitome of quaint. I knocked on the door and was greeted by a cheerful and animated, Sarah Rivkin. She welcomed me in and gave me surprisingly comfy slippers in exchange for leaving my shoes at the door. Her office is small, but like any good New York space, well executed. It was brightly colored and cheerful, and it made sense later in the meeting when she mentioned that pediatrics are one of her specialties.

She and I bonded a bit over our shared histories in the performing arts—she was an opera singer before going into TCM, and organically Opera fell away as her practice began to grow. Like the other practitioners, she seemed a bit skeptical of me when I mentioned skeptics. She, too, explained acupuncture with a Western twist, citing studies and putting it in the context of nerve endings and pathways, more so than qi and meridians.

Her pediatric specialty was intriguing. Sarah works with a lot of teenagers, because "there's a lot of stress with school work and expectations." It was nice to hear someone talk candidly about teens without rolling their eyes and mentioning hormonal shifts and erratic behavior. We all remember how hard it was being a teenager and, acupuncture aside, her presence and compassion I'm sure are welcomed by that age group.

A few more opera recommendations and we said goodbye. I had one more phone call with Kimberly Kulseng of Compass Acupuncture and Wellness before my research was complete. And, like the other practitioners, Kimberly, too, seemed a bit skeptical of me. The repeated caution I encountered made me wonder how often these practitioners have to explain or defend their chosen profession. Kimberly and I chatted about her offerings, as she also

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involves other modalities including reiki, and what she calls, "the usuals," when it comes to TCM—Chinese herbs, moxibustion, cupping, and gua sha. She sees patients for a variety of things, but said she deals with a lot of stress management and anxiety. We agreed that life is very stressful these days.

When I asked her, "Why do you think acupuncture works?" She laughed loudly and warmly and replied, "Well that's a loaded question!" Her explanation was familiar with reference to studies and nerve bundles. And, she went deeper to say that a lot of doctors are making the connection between acupuncture and the body's fascia, or connective tissue. But what stuck out most in her explanation was that at one point, she took a moment to think, and then said, "You know, the body's just a miracle. It sounds cheesy, but the human body is miraculous. How everything works synergistically. We take it for granted all the time." I couldn't argue with her there.

My acupuncture adventure over, I let the notes of the day settle in my mind as I found my way home. Visiting so many practitioners back to back highlighted differences that are less discernable with space and time. And the difference didn't come in the form of experience, schooling, or the level of care that patients receive. It was more that each practitioner had such a specific vibe and (taking a tip from acupuncture) energy.

And energy is interesting. We have no problems talking about this force in our daily lives—about whether we have high energy or low energy, about the energy in a room, or the energy that's given off by certain people. But for whatever reason, we bring that idea to the topic of health, and somehow it loses all relevance.

Our Western minds need science. Things like qi and meridians are uncommon, a stuff of magic, and maybe even nonsense. But every practitioner I spoke to had the same approach when explaining the stuff of acupuncture: "You bring it to the Western mind," as Alex of Garden Acupuncture put it. He and his wife equated it to a circuit within your body and electricity. And Helene explained it like this, "you can send a text on your phone to print something from halfway around the world. You, personally, don't know how it works. But it just does."

So, it seems, that there might also be a fair amount of faith in acupuncture and alternative healing, accepting knowledge that can't necessarily be explained with a double blind study and Harvard educated doctors. But when it comes to your health—when the worst adverse reactions to treatment are a little bruising and grogginess—it seems to make more sense to me to be skeptical of prescription medications than of acupuncture.

While you can say what you will about the science, there was one thing that stood out about all of the practitioners—they each exuded a deep willingness and hope that they can help. And sometimes, when you're looking for answers, finding someone that's on your team, listening, and fighting for you to win is enough. I don't know how long I would have been sick if I hadn't opened my mind to alternative schools of thought. And while Wikipedia may include "pseudoscience" in its definition, the trusty Urban Dictionary calls acupuncture, "A jab well done". And laugh if you will, but it may be beneficial to suspend disbelief when it comes to health, which we can all agree is no laughing matter. I was a skeptic. And while I could look to explain acupuncture in terms of nerve endings and neurological pathways, Kimberly Kulseng put it best, "the body is a miracle." And really, all the science aside, we simply can't argue with what works. ■

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DISPATCHES FROM BABYVILLE

THE MOTHER'S DAY MINEFIELD

IN MY FIRST FEW YEARS AS A MOTHER, I TOTALLY FELL FOR THE MOTHER'S DAY HYPE. IT'S VERY NAME, AND THE KAY JEWELERS COMMERCIALS THAT RUN CONSTANTLY, LED ONE TO BELIEVE THAT IT'S A DAY IN WHICH THOSE WHO CONSTANTLY CATER TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS FINALLY HAVE THEIR NEEDS CATERED TO, THE ONE DAY AMONG THE OTHER 364 IN WHICH MOTHERS ARE GIVEN THEIR DUE, HONORED FOR THE TERRIFIC MARTYRS THEY ARE.

BY NICOLE CACCAVO KEAR / ART BY CAITLIN MALONEY

Awesome idea. Stellar. Too bad it's a load of malarkey. I should clarify here that I'm a holiday person. I make homemade costumes for Halloween and throw elaborate themed birthday parties for my kids. I hurtle myself headlong into Christmas, like a moony teenager falling in love for the first time. Once, when my kids and I boarded a bus only to discover the meter was broken and no fare required, I declared it "Free Bus Day" and we sang jubilant songs on the theme, on and off all day.

I like celebrations. And I especially like celebrations in which the person being celebrated is me.

I respect, but do not understood, folks who try to ignore their birthdays, people who forbid their spouses and co-workers to make a big deal. David, my husband, is one such person, and it caused some arguments in our early years together.

> I've reconciled myself to the fact that I will never get a whole day of hugs and kisses and gratitude. But I can get five to ten minutes.

He has a particularly strong aversion to surprise parties, which I discovered when I threw him one for his twenty-third birthday in our living room. I convinced him to take a nap, and while he was sleeping, I hung streamers, sneaked out the German Chocolate Cake I'd spent two hours baking according to his mother's recipe, and ushered in the guests. When everything was ready, I woke him from a dead sleep by crying: "The kitchen sink! It's flooding! Come quick!" Still half asleep, he stumbled into the living room in his boxers and T-shirt and when everyone yelled "Surprise!" he about-faced with nary a word and marched right back into the bedroom.

Looking back, my surprise party plan was not as well-conceived as I'd thought. I nailed the surprise part—the party part, not so much.

Of course, in marriages we give our partners what we want. I have been waiting patiently for several decades for someone to throw me a surprise party—for my birthday, Mother's Day, International Women's Day, even Free Bus Day, I'm not picky.

Sometimes, I wonder if maybe David has been planning a surprise party all this time, and he's just playing a long game, so that I'll be absolutely flabbergasted when it happens. It'll be Mother's Day in my seventy-sixth year of life and David will contrive for me to play mah jong with my girlfriends (by that time, I will have started playing mah jong and calling my ladies "girlfriends"). But when I arrive, instead of being greeted just by Ethel and Martha and Frances (my friends' names will age along with them), I'll be greeted by a room packed full of friends, my children, my grandchildren, maybe even the barista of my favorite coffee joint, who's always thought of me as a mother figure. The mayor might swing by for a minute, say a few words.

There will be not only a chocolate fountain but a prosecco fountain and a marble bust in the exact likeness of me. This will

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DISPATCHES FROM BABYVILLE

all be possible because one of my three kids will have become a billionaire, having invented the cure for the common cold. After everyone yells "Surprise!" David will turn to face me, leaning on his walker, and he will say: "All these years, you thought we were slacking off, but we were really planning this. Happy Mother's Day "

And I will finally feel satisfied on Mother's Day. I will finally feel adequately honored.

It is no surprise that on a recent Mother's Day, David's card to me read: "I love you. I hope you have a great day. Just manage your expectations."

For my part, I think my needs are fairly simple. While I would certainly enjoy a ticker tape parade, I don't expect one. All I want are heartfelt, homemade cards from each of my children, some kind of dessert with so many calories it's illegal in some states, and the privilege of choosing the afternoon's activity.

Of course, I can't help but hope that, on this one day, my kids will tone down the bickering, or even eliminate it—for one day, how hard is that? I can't help but dream that they might toss me a moment of gratitude, in the vein of, "Thank you for your joie de vivre and the priceless gift of hope"—that, and maybe pick up their dirty clothes off the bathroom floor.

I always tell my kids that "practice makes perfect—or at least, better" and this is true of Mother's Day celebrations, as well. Over the past eleven years, David and I have gotten better at hopping around the Mother's Day minefield, without detonating any explosives.

The primary lesson David had to learn was that it is his job to oversee the children's card-making. This came as something of a surprise to him. It was a little like watching the sausages get made.

When the kids were in nursery school or Pre K, this was a non-issue because their teachers made the construction of such cards mandatory. Those cards were the best, the Rolls Royce of Mother's Day cards. Quality materials, like heavy weight card stock and tempera paint, were used. Time was devoted to the enterprise. The cards were both funny and sweet, including phrases like: "Today, I wish for you a donkey!" and "I lov u mame beecaws u ar nis and pretee and giv me candee."

But when the children were either too young for too old for nursery school, they fell into a dead zone of cardlessness. A two-year-old will not think to make a card for her mother. A six-year-old will think to do it but lack the follow-through to make it happen, hatching extraordinary plans and then getting distracted, permanently, by a stale gummy bear under the couch. Thus, there was one Mother's Day early on in which I waited and waited for the official Presentation Of the Cards and alas, I waited in vain.

"Why didn't you have the kids make cards for me?" I asked David.

"That's their responsibility," he countered.

Then I let forth a bitter laugh. An "Oh, to be as ignorant as you!" chuckle.

"Why do you think you get Father's Day cards every year?" I asked. "I stand over them and make sure they do it. And not just a two-second scribble either. I make them go back and revise

and give you the good stuff. Acrostics, Haikus. Drawings with verisimilitude."

So David started overseeing card construction. He doesn't have the natural ability of a Pre K teacher, and I've yet to receive a sonnet, but he gets the job done.

I've learned a thing or two myself. I've learned to lower my expectations. The lower, the better. If I could bring those expectations to street level, and then pulverize them underfoot, that would be ideal. As it stands, I've managed to get them from Sky High to about Fifteen Stories High, which isn't half bad.

I've reconciled myself to the fact that I will never get a whole day of hugs and kisses and gratitude. But I can get five to ten minutes. And the good news is, I don't just have the chance for these moments on Mother's Day. Because I'm a mother every day.

Much as I'd like to shout "Action!" and instantly call up Hallmark moments, these moments tend to happen spontaneously, sometimes at the most inconvenient times. I've noticed children get very lovey when it's way past their bedtime or you're in the middle of talking to someone else about something very important or when you really, really have to go to the bathroom. No matter when they occur, I try to savor the tender moments. I have a whole folder full of heart-melting, no-occasion notes from my kids, as well as drawings of me and them holding hands in a field of flowers and hugging in a room full of cats and smiling while standing next to Frankenstein (mysteriously, I am always wearing a pearl necklace, though I do not own one. Pearl necklace, I've learned is the signifier for "Mother").

That's to say nothing of the moments we share for which there is no paper trail. The early mornings when my three-year-old clambers into my bed and nuzzles in my shoulder. The bedtimes when my nine-year-old will curl up next to me as I read *Little Women* aloud. The sporadic, sudden hugs from my eleven-year-old who is so much taller than me that my head nearly rests on his shoulder now.

String these moments together and you get one hell of a Mother's Day. ■

Nicole C. Kear is the author of the memoir *Now I See You* (St. Martin's, 2014), and the forthcoming chapter book series for kids, *The Fix-It Friends* (Imprint, 2017).

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PLANNING THE UNEXPECTED

Tibetan prayer flags decorated my couch for weeks. Each was created by a friend to encourage me through labor and to welcome my son home. Between preparing playlists for all stages of labor, reading childbirth books, and drinking daily raspberry tea, I had become obsessed with when and how I would give birth. How did I get here??

By Ambika Samarthya-Howard Artwork by Heather Heckel

Ambition and desire plays a part in everyone's life. Since I was a teenager I had envisioned the exact Ritu Kumar red and gold dress I wanted to wear for my grand Indian wedding. I dreamed about living in New York after college. I read books and essays fantasizing about working and traveling in distinct corners of the world, which I pursued with passion. And I took all my plans seriously, putting them into motion. But I had never given being pregnant or birthing any thought.

Then here I was pregnant, with everyone asking me how I wanted to give birth, and what I had imagined it would look like. I had always assumed birth happens, not that I had to plan it. I knew I would not necessarily have control over my body – so why fantasize?

But my doula, doctors, and hospital had all encouraged me to come up with a birth plan and I enjoyed the exercise. The plan included words describing how I wanted the birth to go, what medications I was open to, who would be involved and how, and procedural consent. Every woman I spoke to who created a birth plan had an entirely different labor, but I still felt at least asking the questions to myself would put me in a good place emotionally.

THE LESSONS I LEARNED TO LET GO AND ACCEPT MY BODY AND MYSELF FOR WHAT IT IS WILL STAY WITH ME THROUGH MY MOTHERHOOD.

When the day came, I went from early labor to more intense labor, from bathtub to bouncy ball to wall clutching in 18 hours, I put all my tools into use until I felt I could no longer take the contractions and wanted an epidural. At 3:1:1 (1 minute contractions every 3 minutes for an hour) I felt ready to go to the hospital. "This is just pain. This is not suffering." I repeated those phrases repeatedly in the dreaded cab ride to the hospital.

Hoping I was close to 6 or 7 cms dilated, the nurse solemnly told me I was not dilated at all, and the baby had hardly even fallen. I was experiencing prodromal labor – where a woman is in labor for hours, days, weeks, without her body dilating as one would in active labor. The writing was on the wall: within 14 hours I went from an epidural to Pitocin to induce labor to a c-section. I was thrilled to feel my lovely baby boy finally on me and relieved to eat and just be with my family.

The c-section was not in my birth plan, and it made me feel like a failure and less of a woman/ mother. But as I began nursing and getting to know my son, I realized motherhood was just beginning. I asked Leigh Kader, a doula whose birth education classes I attended this fall, about the point of doing a birth plan, as I grew in the coming weeks to slowly question why I had spent so much time in my pregnancy creating expectations. She responded: "If you don't know your options, you don't have any. But because of the unpredictability of birth, I prefer the term "preferences" to "plan" because plan feels rigid (and rigidity leads to disappointment) whereas preferences imply open mindedness. Writing your preferences down insures that you and your partner on the same page about what is important to you both during the labor and immediate postpartum."

It definitely had helped in discussions with my husband and doula. "It's a useful tool for thinking through what is most important during the birth and the immediate postpartum time. It can also be a great way to get to know your care provider and feel reassured that your birth team is all on the same page about your preferences." another doula, Sarah Lewin, described. I still had a hard time wrapping my head around writing down choices for an event I couldn't control.

People can clearly see the harm of holding onto the image of the perfect relationship, the ideal partner, or the dream apartment. So how does one envision birth without attachment, to hold preferences without expectations?

Maybe the focus should be about the process itself: the idea of birth plans as a movement for pregnant women to have their voices and choices heard in a process that has become overly medicalized and less personal. Roseanna Seminar, a midwife at Park Slope Midwives, pointed out that "items that people used to put in the birth plan are now automatic (skin to skin, no separation, delayed cord clamping etc). We build a trust with women during the pregnancy. This helps when things don't go as planned and we need to change it." I definitely did appreciate looking forward to the choices I made about skin to skin and not being separated from my son.

As I reflect at my recovery, my healthy boy, and the loving manner in which my surgery occurred (my son was on my chest the entire time), I am thankful. The lessons I learned to let go and accept my body and myself for what it is will stay with me through my motherhood. ■

3 weeks after he was born, due to the lovely and surprising warm winter we took Ananda out for his first stroll to Lark cafe.

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THE HYPOCRITES ALMANAC

A BIT OF A DEPARTURE

When I started this column 10 years ago, I was really bossy. I insisted you do things like recycle and shop local and volunteer. After six years, it occurred to me most of you do recycle and shop local and volunteer and those who don't, well, a column in a free magazine wasn't going to change that.

BY MELANIE HOOPES, ART BY DAN MCCANN

Then I went the advice column route, which I might return to, wherein I attempted to solve the problems of hardworking Park Slopers in hopes of providing you perspective or at the very least, a healthy dose of schadenfreude. But now, that's feeling a bit stale. So I'm taking a break from that, too. This issue I'm going to tell you something that happened to me and then I'll attempt to make sense of it. If you're bored by introspection, check back next issue when, most likely, I'll be back giving advice to a compulsive liars and adulterers.

Twenty years ago, I taught improv to wannabe child stars in LA. One night I was waiting for parents to pick up their kids when I noticed an older woman, alone, clutching her purse on the corner of the busy street and our parking lot. Odd. In LA people are outside for two reasons: They are walking to their car from a nearby building or they are walking to a nearby building from their car. This woman was small but sturdy with a mop of wiry gray hair and wearing pants that they used to sell in the back of TV Guide in ten colors. She was making a great effort to not look confused but she it was obvious she was. She was walking in a figure eight pattern in blue terrycloth slippers. After the last parent pulled away, I went over and asked if she was okay.

She was lost. She walked out of her house for a breath of fresh air and got turned around. Her daughter would be worried. Could I help her? Of course, I'd escort her back. She told me her name was Mary Murdoch and then she gave me her address. I went to my car to get my Thomas Guide, the pre GPS,

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indispensible street atlas/bible, and looked it up.

The address she gave me was about 25 blocks from the acting school across several busy streets. Was it possible she'd been walking for an hour? She didn't look exhausted and certainly someone else would've stopped her and offered help. I asked for her phone number to let her daughter know she was safe. She couldn't recall it. The heat, she offered, she couldn't think straight. She repeated the address and asked me to drive her there.

When you decide to help a stranger there's a moment when you regret it. This happened after I helped her into my car and shut the door. What was I risking in helping her? Could she be having a stroke? A heart attack? What if she died in my car? I decided if her behavior changed I'd drive her to the emergency room. I attempted small talk as we drove across West LA in my Mercury Tracer. At a stoplight I glanced over at her. She was looking out her window smiling, beaming even.

THEY SAY WE DIFFER FROM ANIMALS BECAUSE OF OUR THUMBS. ANOTHER DIFFERENCE IS THAT WE ARE THE ONLY SPECIES TO TELL STORIES TO ONE ANOTHER TO MAKE SENSE OF OUR LIVES.

We pulled up to the address. It was a small neat craftsman with a front porch that ran the length of the front of the house. I helped her out of the car and up the path, but she stopped short of the front steps. I walked up and knocked on the door. A woman in her late forties answered but kept the screen door closed.

"Hi," I said, "I think I have your mom?" I said gesturing over the shoulder to Mary who had turned a quarter of the way in the path to face a hibiscus shrub.

"My mom died 10 years ago," said the woman at the door.

Mary walked up behind me. "This is my house," Mary said softly studying a rattan bench on the porch, "but it's different."

"What's your name?" the woman asked Mary.

"Mary. Mary Murdoch." Mary looked down at her slippers like a schoolgirl caught late in the halls.

The woman made a short gasp and turned to me.

"We bought this house from The Murdochs twenty five years ago. Her parents?" She addressed Mary again whose eyes were still on her slippers. "Was your mom Lucille?"

Mary's head shot up. "Yes, that's my mother. Do you know her?"

The woman opened the screen door and gestured for us both to come inside.

The woman, Karen, and I introduced ourselves to one another and strategized. We asked Mary for her purse and checked the contents. The only thing inside was a green plastic checkbook cover with a single deposit slip from an account belonging to Joanne McMaster. No address below the name but there was, miraculously, a phone number.

"Hi, I'm with your mother," I said to the woman who answered.

"What? No, you're not," she sounded annoyed. "Ma?" A pause. And then to someone in the room with her "Shit, Mom's got out again."

I told her the address and it was her turn to gasp. "That was my

grandparents house! We'll be right there."

Ten minutes later, Joanne, her husband Al, her kids—a boy around 8, and a girl maybe 10—and Lisa, a friend, were in Karen's front hall. Mary sat on a chair facing into the living room with her back to her family.

"She's been doing this now for a few weeks," Joanne said. "She has an ID bracelet but she takes it off before she leaves the house. We put a card in her purse—she tears it up and throws it in the wastebasket. It's as if she wants to be lost. I can't watch her every minute and we don't want to lock her in." She looked to us for answers or maybe forgiveness. Karen and I smiled sadly back at her.

Conversation turned to memories of the house so Karen gave the family a tour. I stayed with Mary where we could hear Joanne saying "I like what you did with the kitchen," "…there used to be a wall here" and "…we used to play marbles on the floor there." Back in the front hall, the family offered their thanks for helping Mary and we said our goodbyes. I got back in my car and watched Joanne pull her mini van away from the curb. Mary was in the back seat with the kids, looking very small and—was I imagining it?—embarrassed.

Over the course of the next twenty years I would find myself returning again and again to that night as a moment when something shifted for me. Soon after that night, I got fired from that horrible teaching job, gave up my bungalow by the beach and made plans to leave Los Angeles for grad school in NYC. What about that night struck such a deep chord in me? Over the past couple days I've been turning it over in my mind and just recently, like ten minutes ago, I hit on something. My experience with Mary that night had a dream-like quality so I decided to try to interpret it in that context. Jung believed that dream characters can represent an unacknowledged aspect of the dreamer. So if Mary was me, what was she trying to tell me? Or rather, what message did she tell my subconscious that got me to pack my bags and leave LA two decades ago?

This is what I've come up with: Mary had dementia. Because of that, when she strayed from home, she'd gotten turned around. When she attempted to go back to the home she remembered, it wasn't as she left it. Someone else was living there and they had knocked the walls down and put an island in.

At that time, I, too, was walking the streets of LA in my metaphorical slippers where nothing looked familiar. I had wandered from home and was, like Mary, in need of a stranger to guide me back. Los Angeles was like Mars to me. I think it's like that for everyone who moves there at first. You either adjust or you don't. If you do, you can make a home there. If you don't, it's hard to breathe and there's nothing to nourish you. For the seven years I lived there, I waited for my own version of a Mercury Tracer to take me to safety. While waiting, I lost my bearings, my confidence and I believe, my sense of self. Seeing Mary lose her way set me into motion. I had to leave. To Joanne and her family, the night we met was just another time that Mary got out. For me, our meeting was an awakening.

They say we differ from animals because of our thumbs. Another difference is that we are the only species to tell stories to one another to make sense of our lives. This was one of mine. I'm sure you have hundreds of your own. I wish I could hear them. ■

DIANA KANE
BROOKLYN NEW YORK

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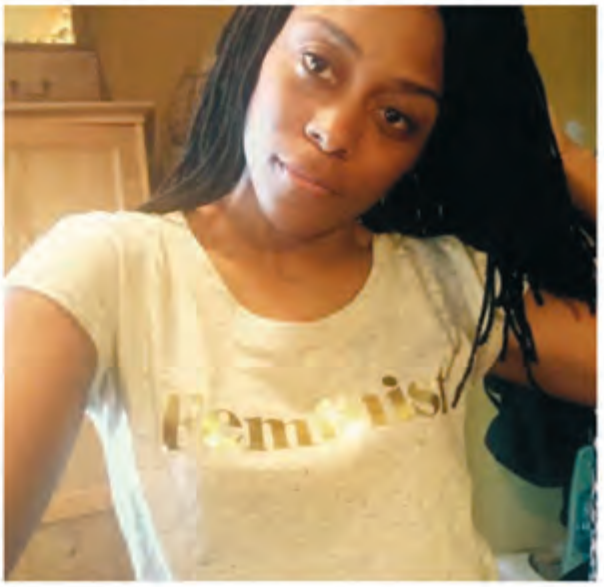

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MUSIC

At the WAY STATION

Photo by Chris Carlone

A conversation with with Elisa Flynn

Prior to moving from the suburbs to New York City in the spring of 2000, seeing bands in the city meant schlepping all the way in through massive traffic, driving home during the wee hours of dawn, and aching the next work day. By Florence Wang

We were fortunate to have a great roster of local bands that played routinely, but the city was always the draw. So moving to New York felt like I had hit the jackpot. The ability to see any band and be tucked back in bed in time for the next work day was amazing. I saw everyone perform: new bands, established bands, friend's bands, co-worker's bands, friends of co-worker's bands. The ones I loved, like Joe Strummer and Rocket from the Crypt, I saw every date they played in the NYC. That lasted for about a year; then I started to get a bit more selective. Later, I had a baby, and it all went out the window. Now, I still love seeing live music, but I have very specific requirements for venturing out: it has to be interesting, with performers who engage the audience, convenient to home, and I'd like not to be the oldest person in the audience. Seems like a tall order? Needless to say, I'm not getting out as much.

When Brooklyn musician Elisa Flynn introduced the Tripeg Lobo series at the Way Station, it seemed like kismet. Her perfectly curated night occurs every three months and features a rotating roster of musicians. Each event has a theme; first record, songs about God, civil war, and a tribute to Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music, for example. Participating musicians perform two songs within that theme, one cover and one original composition. Interpretations may be broad, or succinctly literal. Each performance bears a unique character that adds to the synchronicity of the evening as a whole. The setting is cozy; The Way Station feels almost like the large living room of an older relative – one who really, really likes Doctor Who. There is little separation physically and mentally from the stage, which adds to the collaborative feeling of the shows. Share a table with a stranger in the beginning of the evening and before the night's over you may become fast friends.

Elisa Fynn has a full schedule outside of her "straight job" in the arts. She has played with a variety of punk, indie rock, and American bands. Recently, she released her fourth solo album, Henry Lee. I have my reason for attending, and Elisa has her own for taking on this ambitious project:

What led you to put this series together?

A couple of things. One, I had been playing solo shows for around 5 years, and I was getting tired of the constant need to push gigs with a lineup of solo artists. The shows were starting to feel all the same, and not getting out a lot of people to come out, and I wanted to try something different. When I lived in Danbury, CT in the '90's, I hung out and played with a big group of musicians and artists, and we were lways working together to create shows and events that everyone would want to come to. There was very little else to do in Danbury, and we worked hard to create our own scene. We had not only music shows, but also an art gallery where we did events and a yearly music festival. I

missed that camaraderie and the idea of producing events with a group of people.

So one day I had this idea about starting a variety show, and brought it to Andy Heidel (owner of the Way Station), and he gave me a slot to try it out in Sept. 2012. The first one was so successful that we made it a quarterly thing. It has not really gone into the variety show realm, but it always features 8-10 musicians and often 1 or 2 writers as well.

Is any musician invited, or do you want to create a specific atmosphere?

It's a mixed bag. There are a few people who've played most or all of the shows, and always want to participate. Then there are people who've come and gone. I meet people at these shows, through other musicians, and so the cast slightly revolves each time. I have invited specific musicians I really like, and I've been pleasantly surprised by friends of friends who've turned out to be great fun additions to the roster.

What do you enjoy most about doing this?

So much! I love coming up with the theme (which is different every time, although we did do Murder Ballads twice), but the shows themselves are so much fun. People run with the ideas, and everyone's take on each theme is completely different. We've had acts play their first show at Tripeg Lobo, as well as long time performers, and everyone is very supportive of each other.

No matter what, we're all usually laughing super hard at multiple points in the show. I really just wanted to create an event that would be fun to attend, that people would tell their friends about and make it a repeat positive experience for everyone, and I think I've definitely achieved that.

What do you feel the Way Station adds, as far as a setting?

I unabashedly love the Way Station. They're one of the best venues in the city, as far as I'm concerned, because their support for music and musicians is completely whole hearted. Everyone who works there is great, but Andy and James Coyle (who does sound and booking) work continuously to make the venue a positive place to play and see shows.

Tripeg Lobo typically features around nine different performers, including Elisa who is sometimes accompanied by some of the evening's participants. It's always different, and that's what seems to make it exciting for both the musicians and the audience. For me, it's the perfect opportunity to get a sense of the local music scene. And to be honest, it gets serious bonus points for letting me get to bed at a reasonable time. ■

TriPeg Lobo hosts the next installment of this series on June 22nd, from 8-10pm at The Way Station (683 Washington Avenue). The Theme is *RunRunRun: Songs of Escape*. To learn more about the series and find upcoming events, visit www.elisaflynn.com.

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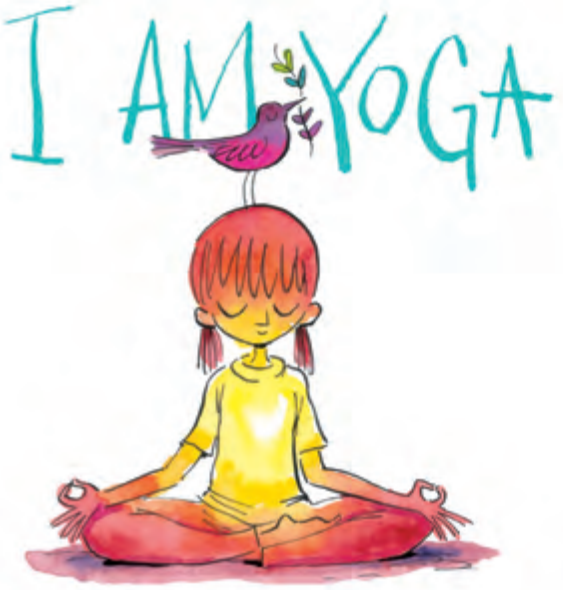
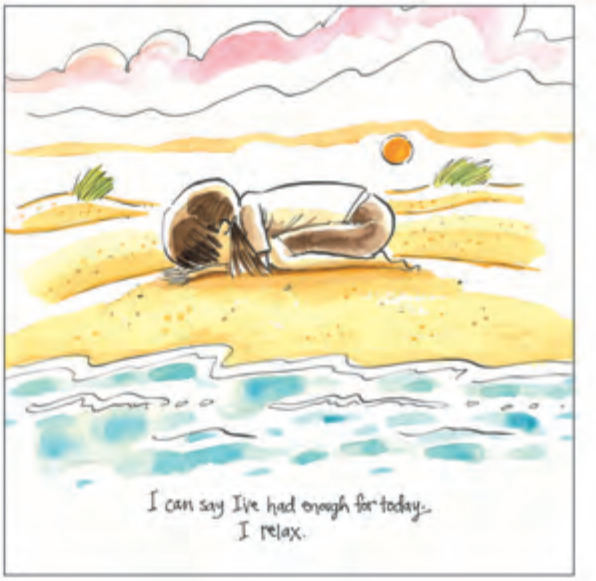


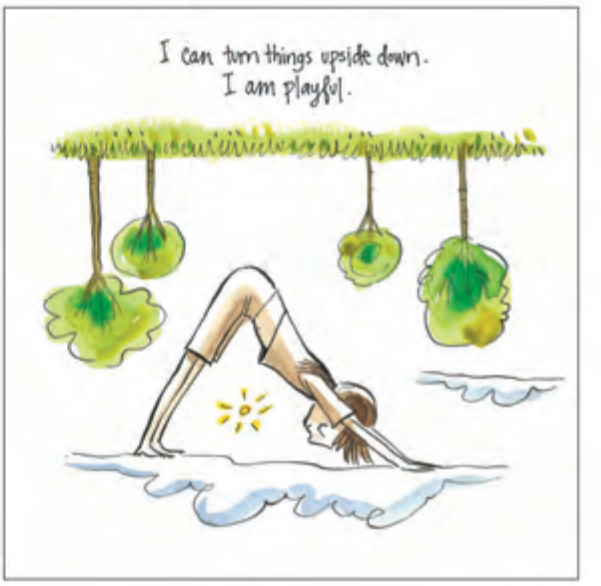
THE WORD "YOGA" MEANS UNION. YOGA IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MIND AND BODY. MY OWN YOGA PRACTICE IS A WAY TO HANDLE STRESS, FIND CALM IN MY MIND AND STRENGTH IN MY BODY, AND BE PRESENT AS AN EDUCATOR, A PARENT, A KID'S YOGA TEACHER, AND A PERSON IN A BUSY WORLD.

Kids are yoga. Their practice begins naturally as part of their development when they are just infants. Tummy time is Cobra pose. When they are on their backs grabbing for their toes, it is Happy Baby pose. As they grow, children, like adults, encounter stress on many levels, from bad dreams to arguments with siblings to pressure from friends. There's school-related stress, stress from overscheduling, and, in extreme cases, stress from trauma. The poses and games, the meditations and mindfulness activities of children's yoga help kids strengthen their bodies, calm their minds, and become aware of the mind-body connection in a noncompetitive, playful way. Kid's yoga, with all its components, is a toolbox for helping a person manage a world that often feels too big to handle.

My hope is that this playful story of what it means to be yoga serves as a way for children to tap into all that yoga has to offer. As they read, play, imagine, explore, express themselves, and breathe, they can know that whoever they are, however they are in this big world, they fit in just fine.

Book By Susan Verde • Art by Peter H. Reynolds





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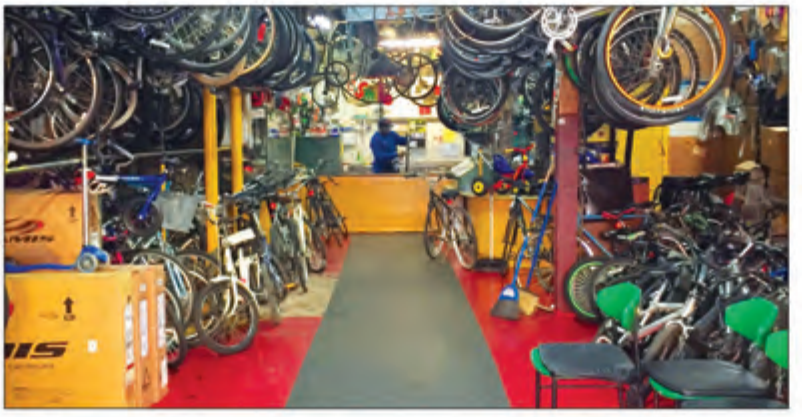
SLOPE SURVEY

— By Mirielle Clifford —



Dave Dixon

For our first Slope Survey—inspired by Marcel Proust and his eponymous questionnaire—we reached out to Dave Dixon, co-owner of Dixon's Bicycle Shop and D's Lounge. Dixon's, which has graced Union Street for 50 years, is Park Slope's oldest family-owned bike store. It seemed only fitting that Dixon help us kick off the Survey.

What brought you to Park Slope? I was born in Brooklyn, and my parents bought a brownstone in Park Slope. **What is your most memorable Park Slope moment?** My most memorable moment in Park Slope would be running home from my Dad's shop, while a gang fight was getting ready to start in the middle of the street. This was in the mid '70s. **A good day for you is...** A good day for me is being able to fix bikes. **Describe your community superpower.** Just keeping busy, making sure that everyone is pleased with my service and that everyone can get to their next destination. **If you could change one thing about the neighborhood, what would it be?** I would set up more fun things for kids and grownups to do. **What do you think Park Slope will look like in 10 years? in 20 years?** In 10 to 20 years, I think the Slope will look a lot more crowded, with all the new buildings going up. **What were your childhood nicknames?** One of my childhood nicknames was the Butcher because of my big appetite. **What is your greatest extravagance?** Probably my bicycle collection. **If you couldn't live in Park Slope or in Brooklyn, where would you go?** If I couldn't live in Brooklyn or the Slope, I would love to live in Jamaica or Miami or South Beach. **Who is your hero, real or fictional?** I would have to say my Dad. I have so much respect for him, and my mom for what they have done for the family. ■

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