



WHEN
"WELCOME HOME"
BECOMES
"WHAT NOW"

Everything
YOU WANTED TO KNOW
ABOUT HUMMINGBIRDS!

MY BODY IS A CRIME SCENE:
Surviving DES and the Chemical War on Our Hormones
by Caitlin McCarthy

*Every storm needs a
a lighthouse.*

Divorce and business transitions can feel like navigating a storm—emotionally exhausting and financially complex.

Sherri Swain shines a light of clarity & simplification for wiser resolutions amidst uncertainty. As both a mediator and a financial strategist, she offers 30 years of unique financial expertise to guide her clients to real win-win solutions for both parties. Having personally walked this path, she is driven to keep her clients in the driver's seat with deep compassion, helping you navigate safely.

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My Body is a Crime Scene:
*Surviving DES and the Chemical War
on Our Hormones*

By Caitlin McCarthy

Cover Photo Credit: Rory Lewis

Editor's Note

WELCOME TO HOME ZONE MAGAZINE!

As I pen these words, I am riding the glow of a recent family visit in Breckenridge, Colorado celebrating my grandson's first birthday, hiking among brilliant Fall foliage, and simply breathing in the beauty that surrounds us. It's a reminder that in all of our work no matter what type, we are all stewards of home, health, and human connection. Above all, I feel deep gratitude: for my loved ones, for good health, and for the opportunity to do what matters.

In this issue, we turn our focus to some of the hardest, yet most essential, stories in the home-and-health space.

Our featured article with Caitlin McCarthy speaks to healing, courage, and accountability. Caitlin is a DES daughter, educator, screenwriter, and advocate whose life has become a bridge between personal trauma and systemic change. Through her work and most notably her screenplay *Wonder Drug*, Caitlin has brought attention to the long-silenced legacy of diethylstilbestrol (DES), engaging governments, public health institutions, and the creative world. Her activism helped prompt the FDA to formally acknowledge DES as a "tragedy" in 2011, and she has testified at the Scottish Parliament as part of ongoing efforts for apology, awareness, and reparative research. Being introduced to Caitlin has been a gift as DES touches me personally with a very close family member also diagnosed as a DES baby.

Another powerful article explores the intersection of drug remediation and real estate legality, diving into how homes contaminated by meth or other toxins become hidden liabilities with real human cost. Through the lens of one young homebuyer's journey, we confront the emotional, financial, and health toll of such contamination, and the urgent need for remediation standards, legal protections, and informed advocacy.

We also take huge pride highlighting Make-A-Wish of Colorado as our feature non profit organization. Their mission to bring hope, joy, and memorable experiences to children facing serious illness is a powerful reminder that home means more than four walls. It means safety, belonging, hope, and the ability to dream. I am deeply honored we can highlight their mission and support the families they touch.

Issue #4 reminds us that "home" is never just about shelter. It is about sacredness, safety, memories, and legacy. As you turn these pages, I hope you will feel with me, a desire for action along with the possibility of continued enhanced and effective change. I am deeply grateful to our guest authors, our partners, my Team behind the scenes who bring this vision to life, and to you, our readers for caring enough to engage with these topics.



In Gratitude,

Kathi McCarty
Founder & Editor
Home Zone Magazine

MY BODY IS A CRIME SCENE:

Surviving DES and the Chemical War on Our Hormones

By Caitlin McCarthy

On May 18, 2005—the day after my father’s birthday—I learned my body is a crime scene.

I was three months shy of turning 35, lying on my back at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, feet in stirrups, undergoing what was supposed to be a routine colposcopy. My annual Pap smear had flagged atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance—nothing wildly alarming, just enough to warrant a closer look.

My mom had driven with me from Worcester to Boston. She was waiting in the lobby, probably flipping through a magazine, thinking about where we’d go for lunch. We’d planned a mother-daughter afternoon on Newbury Street. Something fun. Normal.

But this colposcopy was anything but normal.

Within seconds of beginning the exam, Dr. Louis J. Burke—renowned gynecologist, praised in medical circles as the Godfather of the Colposcopy—paused. Something had caught his attention. Then he asked a question that sent ice through my veins: “What year were you born?”

It wasn’t a medical question. It was a forensic one. And when you’re half-naked, legs spread, and someone asks what year you were born, you already know you’re in trouble.

“1970,” I answered, trying to steady my voice.

Then came the second blow. “Did your mother take DES?”

That one word—DES—hit like a punch to the gut. Diethylstilbestrol. A synthetic estrogen. Toxic. Carcinogenic. The stuff of medical nightmares.

I only knew it from whispers. A girl in high school, rumored to be a DES Daughter, once missed school after a terrifying episode of bleeding. We’d heard she had to lay in the bathtub before being rushed to the hospital. It all sounded unreal. Like a horror movie.

And now, the horror was mine.



Caitlin McCarthy with her mother Ann McCarthy

I told Dr. Burke I didn't think my mother had taken it while pregnant. But he could ask her—she was just down the hall.

He pointed to the monitor. "Look," he said.

There it was: my cervix on the screen. But not just any cervix. A cockscomb cervix, also called a "hooded" cervix. It looked like it was wearing a turtleneck—an unmistakable sign of prenatal DES exposure.

After the exam, the nurse went to get my mother. I still see Mom walking slowly down that hallway, like that nightmare scene in *Poltergeist*, when the hallway keeps stretching, and the mother can't reach her child.

When my mother finally arrived, Dr. Burke asked if she'd taken DES while pregnant with me.



Baby Caitlin in 1970

"No," she said, confused.

Then he asked if she'd had any complications.

Her face changed. "Yes," she said. "Early bleeding. My doctor gave me a prescription. He said it was a prenatal vitamin. To help the pregnancy along."

Dr. Burke nodded grimly. "It likely contained DES," he said.

And just like that, the floor dropped out.



The McCarthy Family 1970

My mom and I were casualties in a silent war we never even knew we were fighting. A medical disaster dressed up as care. A drug hailed as a miracle—but in truth, a monster. Prescribed to protect pregnancy, DES instead unleashed a legacy of infertility, cancer, reproductive abnormalities, and generational trauma.

That day, I stopped seeing my body as just mine. It became evidence. A living artifact of negligence, betrayal, and corporate greed. A time bomb planted before I ever took my first breath.

A secret history had exploded into the light—buried for decades beneath pharmaceutical lies and institutional neglect. Questions swirled in my mind:

How could this have happened?

Who let it continue?

And would DES victims ever get justice?

In that moment, I realized this wasn't just my story. It was the story of millions of pregnant women and their daughters and sons.

DES was the "hidden Thalidomide"—swept under the rug, buried in footnotes, ignored by medicine, forgotten by history.

And it was time the world finally heard the truth.

The Drug With a Mouthful Name

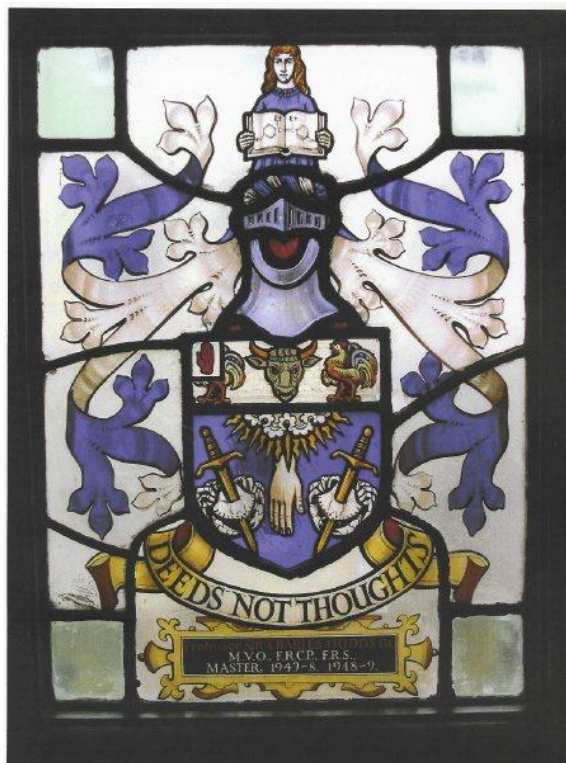
Diethylstilbestrol, or DES, sounds like a chemical tongue-twister, which is fitting—because once it entered the world, hardly anyone could pronounce it, let alone grasp the devastation it would cause.

It was first created in 1938 by Dr. E. Charles Dodds, a soft-spoken English chemist with thinning hair, thick glasses, and a towering ambition to revolutionize women's health. Born into a working-class family in Darlington—a town Daniel Defoe once described as having "nothing remarkable but dirt"—Dodds was a scientific wunderkind with a deep sense of purpose.

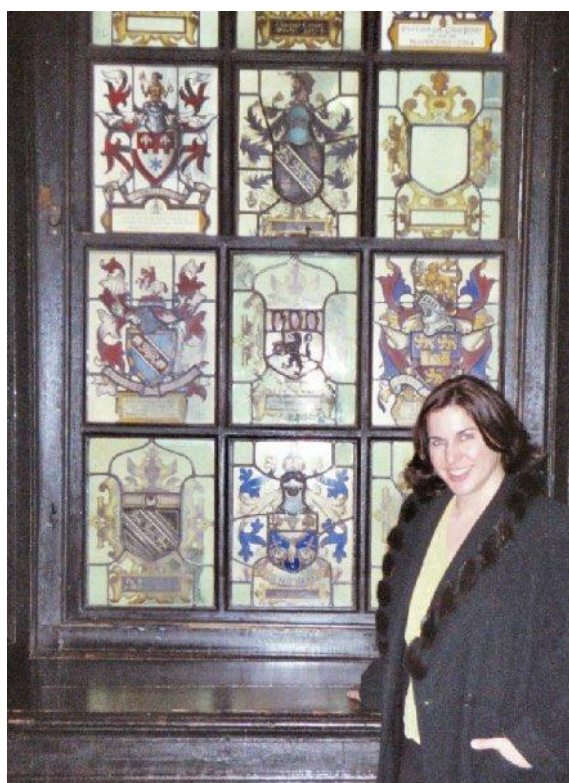
His father sold shoes, mostly without much success. His mother relied on her brother Edward, who became Dodds's early benefactor. When young Charles showed an interest in science, Uncle Edward suggested a safer trade—tailoring, perhaps—but ultimately helped fund medical school instead. It turned out to be the best investment he ever made.

When King George V came down with blood poisoning, the royal physician called Dodds for help. His work helped save the king's life. For this, he was inducted into the Royal Victorian Order in 1929. Not long after, he married Constance, the daughter of a family friend. He had the girl, the job, the honors.

Later, when philanthropist Samuel Augustine Courtauld financed a new Institute of Biochemistry at the Middlesex Hospital in London, Dodds became its first director. At the grand opening, every speaker gushed about the literal bridge connecting the research lab and the teaching hospital—a metaphor for Dodds's own vision: science serving medicine, not the other way around.



Dodds' stained glass window at the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London.



Caitlin by Dodds' stained glass window in London

Biochemistry, still in its infancy, completely captivated Dodds. He zeroed in on estrogen therapy, which desperately needed an upgrade. At the time, natural estrogen treatments came from animal extracts and were often given as painful injections. They varied in strength, risking overdose, and were expensive and unstable—hardly ideal for women seeking relief. Dodds's goal was simple: to create a synthetic version that was cheap, stable, and orally active. He envisioned it for short-term use with menopausal women—not for pregnant women.

Dodds had already been working on a compound called anol, but it was Dr. Robert Robinson—the preeminent organic chemist of his generation—who invited Dodds to collaborate. It was a coup. They formed a team, pooling minds and resources from Oxford and Middlesex: Dodds's staff chemist Wilfred Lawson and Robinson's grad student Leon Goldberg.

They tested compound after compound. Hundreds of them. And then—finally—success: a substance that showed estrogenic activity and passed every early biochemical test. They heated it, refined it, analyzed it. Eventually, they landed on the molecular formula: $C_{18}H_{20}O_2$.

The structure was striking. Symmetrical. Elegant. Two phenyl groups, alkenes flanking either side, clean geometry bisecting a central axis. Dodds couldn't take his eyes off it. He gave naming rights to Robinson, who dubbed it Stilboestrol. But Robinson, in a rare gesture of scientific grace, insisted Dodds take primary credit—he had led the work.

But there was a hitch. Dodds was working under a university grant that flat-out forbade patenting his discoveries, so he had to publish fast to claim priority. This rush wasn't just academic—it was geopolitical. Dodds knew Dr. Adolf Butenandt, a fellow chemist in Germany, was chasing the same goal. They'd once stood side-by-side in the group photo at the first sex hormone standardization conference in 1932. That was before Hitler's rise. Now, Butenandt—head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute—ran a lab seized from Carl Neuberg, a Jewish scientist forced into exile. The friendship between Dodds and Butenandt was over. Unlike Dodds, Butenandt's discovery could be patented—and profits could fuel the Nazis' war machine.

Dodds had beaten the Nazis to the finish line with DES. But in the end, no one really won.

The Dirty Secret Behind the “Wonder Drug”

Between the 1940s and 1970s in the U.S.—and into the mid-1980s in other parts of the world—millions of pregnant women were prescribed DES to prevent miscarriage, premature birth, or simply to make a healthy pregnancy “even healthier.” They were told it was safe. Effective. Essential, even. Some were given what they thought were just prenatal vitamins—laced with DES.

What they weren’t told?

Not a single drug company ever conducted a controlled study to prove DES was safe or effective for use during pregnancy.

In fact, early evidence showed the opposite: DES didn’t prevent pregnancy complications—instead, it increased miscarriage and premature birth.



In 1940, K.K. Chen, an Eli Lilly scientist, reported internally that DES was toxic. Animal studies showed it caused deaths in cats, rodents, chickens, and rabbits, as well as severe damage to reproductive tracts—including abortions. By 1941, Chen found DES was two and a half times more potent than natural estrogen and caused malformations in the endocrine organs and female genital tracts of rodents. Chen was a team player—aware of these dangers, yet did nothing to stop it. Still, he reported his findings to his employer, Eli Lilly. The disturbing evidence spoke for itself, but it was ignored as Lilly rushed to promote DES for pregnant women.

The late U.S. Congresswoman Patsy Mink was one of three “DES Mothers” who sued the University of Chicago and Eli Lilly for exposing them—without their knowledge—to DES in the early 1950s as part of the infamous Dieckmann Study.

That study, led by Dr. William J. Dieckmann at the University of Chicago’s Lying-In Hospital, was the first controlled, randomized, double-blind trial of DES in pregnancy. Published in 1953 in *The American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*, it found that DES didn’t prevent miscarriage.

Worse, Dieckmann’s own data showed that women given DES actually had higher miscarriage rates than those who weren’t.

But DES kept being prescribed. Why?

Largely because of a powerful Harvard duo: Drs. George and Olive Smith. In 1949, they published what became known as the “Smith and Smith Regimen”—a dosing schedule so aggressive, it bordered on chemical warfare.

It started with 5 mg of DES a day at week seven, ramping up weekly to 125 mg by week 35. Over one pregnancy, that amounted to the hormonal equivalent of 335,000 birth control pills.

Women had no clue.

Doctors, overwhelmed and under-informed, followed the Smiths' regimen. *The Physicians' Desk Reference* printed it year after year. Pharma reps pushed it like gospel. Most doctors went along because it had "worked before." Why stop?

By the 1970s, some were prescribing 100 mg daily throughout pregnancy. Others stuck to the stepped-up Smith and Smith model. A few avoided it entirely. It always came down to physician discretion.

"Trust me, I'm a doctor" became both a shield—and eventually—a punchline.

Meanwhile, pharmaceutical companies raked in profits and shrugged off mounting red flags.

In 1971, a link between prenatal DES exposure and a rare vaginal cancer—clear cell adenocarcinoma—was discovered at Massachusetts General Hospital in young women exposed in utero.



The findings were published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* and splashed across the front page of *The Boston Globe* in April 1971.

And the FDA?

It waited seven months.

In November 1971, it issued an alert to doctors contraindicating DES for use during pregnancy.

No ban. No recall. Just... discouraged.

Yesterday's Drug, Today's Disaster Blueprint

DES was one of the first endocrine disruptors ever identified—synthetic chemicals that mimic or block hormones, scrambling the body's most vital developmental messages. Hormones are the body's internal messengers. During pregnancy, they act as master architects, drafting blueprints for fetal development. DES is a synthetic estrogen that doesn't behave like the real thing. It binds tighter, lasts longer, and overrides natural development.

Imagine trying to build a skyscraper while someone keeps swapping the blueprints mid-construction. That's what DES does to a fetus.

Girls exposed in utero may develop abnormal reproductive organs, face infertility, and have a higher risk of rare cancers. Boys may experience undescended testes, genital malformations, low sperm counts, and fertility problems. Even DES-exposed mothers carry an increased risk of breast cancer.

But the impact goes deeper—DES can permanently alter gene function, sometimes affecting not just one generation but several. Through epigenetic changes—heritable shifts in gene activity—the DES Third Generation and beyond may face infertility, hormonal disorders, immune dysfunction, and developmental delays. They never took the drug. But the drug took something from them.

So why are DES survivors the "canaries in the coal mine" for humanity?

Because the whole world is now exposed to the same class of chemicals. DES was the prototype. Now it's BPA, phthalates, PFAS, parabens—endocrine disruptors hiding in everyday products, from cosmetics to food wrappers. They hijack hormones, confuse cells, and rewire fetal development. They don't vanish. They leave behind epigenetic scars—biological echoes passed on through sperm, eggs, and altered gene expression.

Living as a DES Daughter means navigating this invisible, lifelong risk. My chance of clear cell adenocarcinoma is 40 times higher than average, and my breast cancer risk is elevated too. Mammograms, ultrasounds, biopsies—they're as routine as paying bills or doing laundry. Yet doctors rarely bring up DES unless I lead the conversation. Medical education barely touches the subject.

But DES survivors are not a footnote in history. We're living proof of what happens when synthetic chemicals are unleashed without real testing or accountability. DES cracked open a window into the future of chemical exposure. Unless we learn from it, we're all standing in the same coal mine—breathing the same toxic air—just waiting for the next collapse.

Decades of Denial, A Future of Accountability

In April 1985, President Ronald Reagan declared DES Awareness Week—the only president ever to do so. But here we are, 40 years later, still fighting to be seen, still fighting to be heard. It wasn't until April 21, 2025, during DES Awareness Week, that Congressman Jim McGovern introduced House Resolution 342—the "DES Resolution." It still hasn't passed. Yet it demands what we've been denied for decades: truth, justice, and federal action—to raise awareness, restore critical research funding, and secure an official FDA apology.

I've lived this fight in my bones. Twice nominated for a Presidential Citizens Medal (2011, 2012), I worked with then-U.S. Senators John Kerry and Scott Brown, breaking through 40 years of silence and finally winning the FDA's reluctant acknowledgment of DES as a "tragedy" in 2011.

In 2022, I testified before members of the Scottish Parliament and shared my story—as a DES Daughter, marked by a poison passed down in utero—and called for an apology. That moment helped spur First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to include DES in her historic 2023 apology to victims of forced adoption. Many of those mothers were given DES to dry up their breast milk after their babies were taken.

On July 15, 2025, I stood shoulder to shoulder with fellow DES Daughters—including Dr. Gwendolyn Mink, daughter of the late Congresswoman Patsy Mink—as Congressman Jim McGovern delivered a powerful speech on the House floor in support of House Resolution 342.

Before the speech, we gathered beneath Congresswoman Mink's portrait, a symbol of honor and progress in the U.S. Capitol. Yet, the same government that celebrates her legacy still refuses to fully acknowledge—or apologize for—the suffering she endured as a DES Mother.

That bitter irony doesn't just sting. It fuels me. Every single day.

In addition to my activism, I originated a feature screenplay about the DES disaster called *Wonder Drug* (www.wonderdrugthemovie.com). The project is now in development with Lori Singer of *Footloose* fame as director, and Lori and me as co-writers.

Justice is finally stirring worldwide. Scotland's apology has set off a ripple—MPs in England are now calling for a DES apology, and activists in Australia continue the fight for recognition as well.

The time for reckoning, accountability, and healing isn't coming. It's already here—and together, we won't stop until justice is done.

A Call to Action

DES was the first alarm—and we hit snooze.

Endocrine disruptors didn't stop with DES. They've multiplied, mutated, and embedded themselves in everything from plastics to pesticides. And once again, the public is the test subject.

DES survivors are not relics of the past. We are living proof of what happens when corporations profit, regulators look away, and science is silenced.



Caitlin McCarthy
DES Daughter

Caitlin McCarthy helped secure the world's first government apology for DES from the Scottish Parliament in 2023. Back in 2010, she worked with Senators John Kerry and Scott Brown to pressure the FDA for a formal apology for the DES drug disaster. The agency stopped short—calling DES merely a “tragedy” in 2011, four decades after its cancer link was first identified. Caitlin is now partnering with Congressman Jim McGovern to push for an official FDA apology. A storyteller of documented Métis descent, Caitlin crafts narratives that tackle political and social issues with wit—blending humor and heartbreak while inspiring action. She is the screenwriter of the upcoming feature film *LITTLE AUDREY*, a supernatural spiritual mystery directed and produced by Michael Mailer and starring Emily VanCamp, Jennifer Esposito, Aidan Quinn, and Josh Bowman. Caitlin was an inaugural Sundance Institute Cultural Impact Fellow for her crime thriller *A NATIVE LAND*. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College and is represented by Barry Krost Management.

Learn more at www.caitlinmccarthy.com.



SMART HOME BUYING:

The Critical Role of Due Diligence in Today's Market

By Pat Mellen, Esq.

Whether you are a seasoned home buyer or it's your first time the need for professional advice during a home purchase is more essential than ever. Society has changed. I am seeing more and more situations where buyers are discovering undisclosed defects after closing. Some of these are truly oversights but too many are intentional misrepresentations where sellers withhold vital information that would significantly change a buyer's position about a property.

Methamphetamine contamination is a big one, but it's not the only one.

Even with professionals involved you **MUST** still be an informed consumer to ensure you are as protected as reasonably possible. However, don't ignore that professionals stand to earn big fees in what can be a tricky market. Market dynamics, real or perceived, and the momentum building to close every deal works against buyers making truly informed decisions. Getting caught up in the emotional experience of buying a home can be painfully expensive if it makes you blind to a property's risks. Responsible and ethical professional advice can help make this process more successful.

A real estate transaction is often the biggest financial decision in a person's life. Hiring professionals to guide you through this process may seem unreasonably expensive, but it's the best insurance available to minimize your risks.

But you have to be an informed consumer of professional advice. Here's what you can and cannot expect from the individuals and professionals in a real estate transaction – and suggestions of how to get the most for your money.

A. Your seller. Prior owners legally **OWE** you disclosure of whatever actual knowledge they have about the history and condition of the property – and it's based on what **YOU** would think is material, not what **THEY** think is material.

There are **LOTS** of different versions of prior owners – including but not limited to residents, investors, flippers, businesses and the agents for incapacitated people. How long they owned or were involved with the property matters. How they managed repairs at the property matters. Lots of non-resident owners want to claim they know nothing about the property. Hogwash. A flipper who gutted and rebuilt the house in 10 weeks often knows more about its condition than grandma who lived there 50 years. Landlords know what repairs were made and why.

Include language in the contract demanding to see every document about repairs. Demand to see prior inspections if any transactions before yours were terminated, which you or your broker can see on the internet. Include very specific questions or document a seller's representations in the contract – was this a rental, and if so long-term or short-term? Was there a property manager? Demand to see the rental history records, including a list of prior tenants with copies of leases and contact information. What has the HOA said about the unit, the building or the entire complex? Has the HOA delayed repairs? Are there huge pending assessments coming?

Whether you ask specific questions or not can be used against you by the seller's attorney later if problems arise after closing.

B. Your seller's broker. This person represents the seller in the transaction. This person has the **LEAST** obligation to the buyer, which is limited to disclosure of any adverse material facts about the property where the seller's broker has actual knowledge. Very tricky to prove. Most stay silent.

C. You buyer's broker. This person represents **YOU** in this transaction. You should get an Exclusive Right to Buy contract from this person immediately when they start representing you. This explains their duties to you – most important **IMHO** is their duty to advise you about the risks of a transaction. If they are advising you on the value of the property for an offer you are going to make they are assessing its condition and owe you information about what they believe about the property and how it's factored into the price they recommend.

If your broker ever asks you to sign a document that sounds like you are waiving any obligations that person has to you – **FIND A LAWYER** immediately to review it. You should not pay a broker who later claims he or she told you that you were on your own.

Have very specific conversations about inspections and document gathering with your broker. Be very wary if a broker discourages you from certain inspections, such as meth screening, sewer scopes or water quality testing. Put it in writing that you expect your broker to demand in the contract and obtain from the seller or seller's broker by the due diligence deadline every document that reasonably exists – prior repairs, prior inspections, septic permits, building permits, etc. If they won't take responsibility or avoid accountability for their advice and their duties to you then terminate this contract and find somebody else.

D. Your home inspector. Make sure you get three recommendations and look at their reviews online. Some are much better than others. This is a place where you definitely get what you pay for. Your home inspector does a standard review of the condition of the property. Every home inspection contract contains exclusions – often sewer or septic inspections, mold testing or meth testing – and those need to be contracted separately. Many inspectors do radon testing – and make sure this testing happens.

It cannot be stated strongly enough – **READ EVERY DETAIL IN YOUR HOME INSPECTION REPORT.** Ask the seller every question you can think of from this information. This document seems like it is supposed to help you but it ends up being a seller's best defense later. You are considered to have actual notice of **EVERY LITTLE THING** noted in the inspection – and constructive notice of anything those "little things" might suggest about the condition of the property.

E. Specialty inspectors. Make sure you arrange inspections for every specialty aspect of a property. Methamphetamine contamination cannot be reliably seen or smelled – and certification is required for proper screening and testing. Do a meth screening every time because meth use crosses all social and economic levels – and flippers are notorious for making things look pretty and safe when they are not. Talking to the neighbors is also a really helpful step.

Sewer scopes are necessary to ensure that the lines are in good condition. Transfers of septic use permits are required by the county health departments. Have well water tested. Have a structural engineer review plans if a flipper ripped out walls for that "open concept" that's so popular now. Mold inspectors are critical if there is any indication of past water intrusion or visible water damage – because the sad truth is that owners often fix the water damage visible on the surface on the but leave the water soaked subfloors or interior walls to rot and grow mold.

Talk to your broker about what other specialty inspections could be necessary – and how to get them done. Be very wary of brokers who discourage requesting repairs or allowances in the inspection objection stage. You made an offer based on what the seller and the seller's broker represented about the property and what little you could observe during a 15-30 minute showing. Inspection objections are your opportunity to come back and say – this is what I know now and the price should be different.

F. Loan Officers. Shop around even if your broker steers you toward his/her loan guy/gal. Loan officers have very limited duties to the borrowers and plenty of duties to their employers to sell loans. Know the difference between conventional and FHA loans. Know the going interest rates and terminology. Loan officers have no duty to explain this to you. Be very honest on your loan applications. Don't let them convince you that "everybody does it" when it comes to faking gift affidavits for your down payment or closing costs. It's loan fraud that may come back to haunt you.

G. Appraisers. You have no control over the choice of an appraiser because appraisers work for the loan companies who hire them. An appraisal is done for the benefit of the lender – not you. The one exception to this is on FHA appraisals where the condition of the property is material to the loan being approved. Ask to see the appraisal and make sure it accurately reflects the features and condition of the property. If there are material differences between the appraisal and the home inspection raise concerns immediately and get them resolved before you sign any loan documents.

Be your own best advocate. Be nosy. If the seller or your broker balks about sharing information, keep looking. Buying a property is a risky transaction because some repairs can be extremely expensive. What seems like a "great deal" may be hiding some nasty surprises where asking the right questions can either make you move on or prove after the fact you were duped.

These professionals are paid handsomely for their work, and you should insist they provide value for the money. Beware the momentum that builds for a transaction to close. Be an informed consumer of the services you are paying for in a home transaction. When it is all over these professionals will get paid but you will be the one holding the bag, so to speak, of whatever problems the property has that you did or did not discover.

Terminate the transaction or ask for more time to investigate if you discover information that calls the condition of the property into question. Losing that property may cost you time to find another one but almost always that is less expensive than dealing with a problem property after closing.

ABOUT PAT MELLEN

Ms. Mellen brings the maturity and resourcefulness earned during more than 30 years of work experience at all levels of several industries, such as manufacturing, IT, retail management, not-for-profit, and national security clearances, to her practice of law.

Seeing a dispute from a systematic standpoint - a problem's real world roots and a resolution's possibilities, Ms. Mellen focuses on creative compromises, and when necessary, putting the power of the Court behind your claims.

A true believer of the rights plaintiffs have to be made whole when damages are thrust upon them, Ms. Mellen is an advocate for equal access to the courts, education about individual rights, and harnessing the legal system's tools.

A graduate of the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law with a Certificate in Environmental & Natural Resources Law, Ms. Mellen is admitted to practice in the State of Colorado and Federal District Court, District of Colorado.

Ms. Mellen is also holds a B.S. IOE from the University of Michigan College of Engineering, and a M.A. in Journalism from the University of Missouri.

A portrait of a woman with shoulder-length, wavy brown hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a bright pink textured blazer over a white top. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with a warm, golden light, possibly from a setting or rising sun.

DRUG RESIDUE CONTAMINATION:

The Invisible Threat in Occupied Spaces

By Cheryl Chiasson

Is your property affected by a silent threat that can persist for years if not professionally removed? Illicit drug residue is a growing risk for property owners and managers. Residue contamination can be found on virtually any surface in areas where illicit drugs have been used or produced, including pills, powders, vapor or smoke buildup, liquids, skin patches, and paraphernalia. Because residue is often invisible, it creates hidden health, safety, and financial risks. Residue may be found in all property types, including homes, garages, rentals, hotels, retail spaces, workplaces, vehicles, and public transportation. Anywhere people gather indoors can be a potential contamination site.

Typical locations include non-porous surfaces such as counters, walls, and floors, semi-porous materials like wood and concrete, and porous materials including carpets, upholstery, and drywall. HVAC and plumbing systems can spread contamination throughout a building, especially in kitchens and bathrooms where fans and vents are common hotspots.

Top 4 Drugs in 2024

Understanding which drugs are most frequently abused in the U.S. helps us identify the substances most likely to contaminate properties and affect communities.

Key Insights:

- Marijuana remains by far the most widely used illicit drug in the U.S., with over 64 million people reporting use in 2024.¹
- Cocaine ranks second, followed by methamphetamine and ecstasy.¹
- While marijuana has been legalized for recreational use in 21 states, it remains illegal under federal law.

Consumption:

- Marijuana: a mind-altering (psychoactive) drug. Smoked as a cigarette or in pipe or bong. Smoked in blunts (cigar emptied of tobacco and filled with marijuana and sometimes mixed with additional drugs). Mixed with food (edibles) or brewed as tea.²
- Cocaine: an intense, euphoria-producing stimulant drug with strong addictive potential. Snorted or dissolved in water and injected. Cocaine users usually binge on the drug until they are exhausted or run out of cocaine. Crack cocaine is smoked.²
- Methamphetamine: a stimulant that speeds up body's system that comes as pill or powder. Crystal meth resembles glass fragments and is an illegally altered version of the prescription drug that is cooked with over-the-counter drugs in meth labs. Consumed as Powder, pill, smoked, snorted, injected to intensify the effects, users may take higher doses of the drug, take it more frequently, or change their method of intake.²
- Ecstasy/MDMA: acts as both a stimulant and hallucinogen, producing an energizing effect, distortions in time and perception, and enhanced enjoyment of tactile experiences. Known as a party drug, ecstasy comes in pill or powder form; pill has a variety of logos and colors. Swallowing gel capsules (Molly), pills, tablets. Powder, Crystal, liquid. Crushed or snorted. Occasionally smoked.²



Several states eased drug laws, starting with marijuana. It is critical that states consider drug decriminalization history in their ongoing discussions of law, order, and public health. As states have dialed back their drug laws in the last two decades, the nation has been introduced to a deadly drug and seen skyrocketing overdoses. Whatever the justification for more lenient drug laws, data suggests that drug use becomes more widespread in places that perceive less of a risk in their use. This has profound implications, including the potential for increasing overdose deaths.³

Note on Fentanyl:

Although fentanyl is not among the top four most used drugs, it is the **leading cause of overdose deaths**. Even trace amounts can be fatal, and it is often **mixed with other drugs** like methamphetamine, cocaine, or heroin — often without the user's knowledge.



Fentanyl (and its analogues), excluded from the 2024 top four abused drugs, is of significant concern due to its potential overdose and fatality outcomes and presence in other illicit drugs. Illegally manufactured fentanyl causes more overdose deaths than any other type of drug in the United States. A lethal dose of can be as little as 2 milligrams—an amount equal to 10 to 15 grains of table salt.

Stronger opioids have emerged on the illicit drug list that are stronger than fentanyl, the first of which is for veterinary use. The powerful synthetic opioid carfentanil is used to tranquilize large animals such as elephants. It is extraordinarily potent and not approved for human use. It is estimated to be 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times stronger than fentanyl. Because of its strength, a nearly microscopic amount of carfentanil can induce a powerful, and often deadly, effect in humans.

Carfentanil has been found mixed with other drugs or pressed into pills that look like prescription painkillers. This increases the likelihood of fatal overdose and poisoning deaths, especially among users who are unaware they are ingesting such a powerful substance.⁴

Nitazenes (benzimidazole-opioids) are a class of extremely potent novel synthetic opioids. They are frequently mixed with or counterfeited as other drugs (e.g., heroin, fentanyl, benzodiazepines, or other synthetic drugs) to increase potency and cut costs.

I heard the heartbreaking story of a teenager who tragically lost his life by taking what was thought to be a Percocet after basketball practice. I'll never forget how I felt as a parent as I listened and watched with misty eyes that day, as his father poured out his heart to share the story to help prevent this from happening to other families. The sudden loss of a son tragically to a fentanyl laced pain reliever who had no idea what he was ingesting. You can learn more about Xavier's story by visiting the X Foundation website, <https://xfoundationx.org/>.

THE HIDDEN HEALTH RISKS OF DRUG RESIDUE

As illicit drug use rises, more properties are becoming contaminated, often without the owner even realizing it. Drug residue is dangerous for both humans and pets. Even low-level exposure can cause headaches, nausea, breathing issues, and skin irritation. Children and pets are especially vulnerable due to their smaller body size and frequent contact with floors and surfaces. Residue doesn't stay on the surface — it spreads throughout a property. Smoke, vapor, and fine drug powders can settle deep into carpets, drywall, and cracks in wood, while HVAC systems and fans carry contamination through ducts and vents. In properties where drugs like meth were produced, hazardous manufacturing chemicals can damage building materials and severely compromise indoor air quality.

Common meth lab chemicals include red phosphorus, ether, paint thinner, acetone, lithium from batteries, hydrochloric acid, anhydrous ammonia, drain cleaner, battery acid, lye, lantern fuel, antifreeze, and iodine.

I experienced some of these effects on a minor level when re-entering a meth affected property after an assessment to quickly retrieve an item that I had left, a quick process, leaving my respiratory protection in the car. What a mistake! For the rest of the day, I hung out of the couch with a severe headache, throat irritation, nausea, and dizziness. Lesson learned for me.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL RISKS OF DRUG CONTAMINATION

Drug contamination doesn't just pose health hazards — it can also create serious legal and financial consequences for property owners. Many states require property owners to disclose known contamination to potential buyers or renters. Failing to do so could result in fines, lawsuits, or even criminal liability if someone becomes ill from exposure.

Owners and landlords may also be held legally responsible if tenants, guests, or employees are harmed by drug residue left unaddressed. Even after cleanup, properties with a history of contamination may face lower market value or reduced buyer interest, especially if proper documentation of remediation is missing. Many real estate transactions now include requests for drug residue testing, especially for methamphetamine and fentanyl. In some cases, buyers arrange for testing before purchase, while sellers test ahead of listing to prevent delays and provide reassurance.

RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS

Illicit drug activity isn't always obvious. However, there are warning signs that may indicate use, production, or contamination in a property. Knowing what to look for can help property owners and managers to act quickly.

Physical and Odor Indicators:

- Strong chemical smells like ammonia, solvents, or unusual, sweet or acrid odors
- Powdery substances or residue on counters, floors, or furniture
- Stains, burn marks, or scorch patterns on surfaces
- Burned foil pieces, glass pipes, or other paraphernalia
- Excessive use of air fresheners, candles, or other odor-masking attempts
- Blacked-out or covered windows
- Bathrooms with evidence of flushing substances repeatedly, leaving residue

Behavioral and Property Clues:

- Frequent, brief visitors at odd hours
- Unexplained property damage
- Sudden increase in tenant complaints about noise or disturbances
- Good tenants moving out quickly or unexpectedly

Health Symptoms in Occupants:

- Headaches, coughing, or dizziness that improve when leaving the property
- Unexplained skin irritation or respiratory issues, especially in children and pets

UNDERSTANDING STATE REGULATIONS AND CLEANUP LAWS

Cleanup standards for drug contamination vary widely across the United States. To ensure that you're About half of the states have regulations for methamphetamine cleanup, while others rely on local rules or have no formal guidance. In Colorado, where my firm and technicians are state certified for meth decontamination - any property with meth

contamination, whether from production or consumption - is legally considered a 'meth lab' and must be handled under strict requirements. Colorado requires that remediation firms must be state certified, technicians must complete state-approved training, and a state certified supervisor must be present during cleanup. Currently, no state has specific regulations for fentanyl cleanup, although this is expected to change soon due to the extreme dangers of fentanyl exposure.

THE DECONTAMINATION PROCESS

Proper decontamination goes far beyond basic cleaning. Drug residues behave like smoke from a fire — spreading far beyond what you can see. Attempting to clean drug residue yourself is ineffective and dangerous. Scrubbing or vacuuming can spread contamination, household cleaners cannot neutralize hazardous substances, and even trace amounts of fentanyl can be deadly if disturbed and inhaled. Certified professionals have the training, equipment, and legal knowledge to safely remediate contaminated properties.

Typical Steps in Professional Decontamination:

1. Assessment and Testing: Some states require that testing be performed by certified consultants or industrial hygienists. In Colorado, a state-certified consultant is mandatory whenever methamphetamine contamination is suspected. Our team utilizes airport and border patrol level technology to test for explosives and narcotics, with same day results. However, this method is not recognized by the state as fulfilling the regulation requirement for meth testing. When our testing detects the presence of meth, we refer the customer to a certified consultant to ensure compliance with state regulations. Look for your state requirements, if any, on the state's website.
2. Evacuation and Safety Measures, including required signage from local health dept. in some states.
3. Containment and Removal of contaminated materials that cannot be cleaned.
4. Specialized Cleaning using state-approved cleaning agents.
5. Ventilation and Air System Cleaning.
6. Verification and Clearance testing to confirm the property is safe.

CONCLUSION: PROTECTING PEOPLE, PROPERTY, AND PEACE OF MIND

Drug residue is invisible but dangerous. It can linger for years on surfaces and within ventilation systems, affecting occupants without them realizing the source of their health problems. If you suspect drug activity or contamination in your property, have it tested by a certified consultant and remediated by a certified cleanup company. Document the process to protect property value and meet legal disclosure requirements. Staying informed and acting quickly protects both health and investment value.

For questions about drug residue decontamination, call me directly at 720-289-9185. For property needs in Colorado, call our Bio-One Denver office at 303-946-8834.

Resources

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) publishes a document titled Voluntary Guidelines for Methamphetamine and Fentanyl Laboratory Cleanup. You can download it [here](#).

The 2025 National Drug Threat Assessment is published annually by the DEA. The 2025 NDTA highlights the threat to public health, the rule of law, and national security in the U.S. posed by the trafficking of powerful synthetic drugs like fentanyl. Drug overdose deaths are finally decreasing across the country, but too many Americans, especially young Americans, are still dying from poisonings caused by drugs like fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine." It is available for viewing and downloading [here](#).

Click [here](#) to access The DEA 2024 edition of the [Drugs of Abuse, A DEA Resource Guide](#), designed to be a reliable resource on the most commonly used and misused drugs in the United States.

In the event of an opioid overdose, naloxone may save a life if delivered in time. The brand name most recognized is Narcan.

Citation Sources

¹ <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt56287/2024-nsduh-annual-national-report.pdf>

² <https://www.dea.gov/factsheets>

³ <https://www.common senseinstitute.org/colorado/research/housing-and-our-community/the-consequences-of-drug-decriminalization>

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Cheryl Chiasson
Owner, Bio-One of Denver

With nearly a decade of experience in property restoration, Cheryl Chiasson is a seasoned professional specializing in biohazard remediation. Holding numerous industry certifications, Cheryl is well-equipped to tackle any challenges property owners may face with biohazard conditions, including meth and other drug contamination.

Her dedication to excellence is evident through her extensive industry certifications and training, showcasing her ability to handle even the most challenging biohazard situations with professionalism and grace.

Cheryl has expanded her expertise to include methamphetamine remediation and fentanyl decontamination, requiring additional state certifications for both herself and her company.

In addition to her work in property restoration, Cheryl is deeply committed to giving back to her community. She serves on the Foundation Board of Arapahoe Community College, the South Metro Denver Chamber Board of Directors, and the Colorado Suicide Prevention Commission. Alongside her husband Gregg, Cheryl has received numerous awards for their outstanding service in both business and community endeavors.

Cheryl is passionate about educating others on the dangers of drug contamination and remediation. She welcomes the opportunity to share her knowledge with commercial and residential property owners, property managers, realtors, and interested organizations.

Recognized through multiple business awards and nominations, Cheryl's success reflects her hard work and determination. Her active involvement in various community organizations highlights her dedication to networking, building relationships, and supporting her local community.

You may reach Cheryl at Cheryl@biooneden.com, or call 303-946-8834.

A close-up photograph of a hummingbird hovering in front of a cluster of small purple flowers. The bird's wings are spread, showing fine details of the feathers. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting foliage.

*"One day a forest fire broke out.
All the animals ran for their lives.
They stood at the edge of the blaze, looking
at the flames in terror and sadness.
Up above their heads a hummingbird was flying
back and forth to the fire, over and over again.
The bigger animals asked what she was doing.
"I am flying to the lake to get water to help put out the fire."
The animals laughed at her and said,
"You can't put out the fire!"
The hummingbird replied, "I'm doing what I can."*

(The story of the hummingbird originated with the Quechua people in Peru Shared from unwater.org)

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT *Hummingbirds*

Jacqueline Crivello

Recently I wrote a book about a very friendly hummingbird that visited my mountain garden for seven years. She had very discernible markings, in this way each year I knew it was her. Her presence changed my life, and I hope it will change the lives of hummingbirds everywhere. There was something that bothered me in how we feed them, so I decided to be the change. Read on as I first share some amazing facts of the most beloved, graceful, resilient bird in the world.

Ah, yes, the mighty power of a tiny little bird that weighs no more than a single penny in your hand. A tiny little bird that's so powerful it can migrate over 3,000 miles per year. A tiny little bird that breathlessly captures our attention every Spring and Summer. Together, let's find out more of what fascinates us and causes us to plant endless flowers and fill brilliant red feeders all season long.

Depending on where you live, there are approximately 12-15 species of hummingbirds that migrate to the United States every year. In the eastern half of the U.S. the ruby throat is the singular expected arrival, and in the Western U.S. the rest of the migratory species visit. Hummingbirds migrate alone, even the young which are only a few months old will migrate in the fall on instinct alone. They fly low, and will average 20-23 miles per day. They can also cross the Gulf Of America, 500 miles, in one continuous flight. Their miniature hearts will beat at 1,260 beats per minute, while their wings will flap up to 80 times per second. The rufous hummingbird is known to migrate the furthest with an average of 3,000 miles on way to reach as far as Alaska to breed.

A hummingbird can have a metabolism up to 80 times faster than our own. For this very reason it is so important to feed these little ones responsibly. If you can't monitor the feeder, planting tubular flowers in many colors so they can feed on the natural nectar is a great idea. The nectar provided by a flower is a 25% sucrose solution when chemically broken down. This means to mimic nature precisely and make the food they love, a 4 to 1 sugar solution will imitate nature exactly. Please no red food dye, if it's unhealthy for us, we can only imagine what it could do to our tiny feathered friends.

In my mountain garden, some of my favorite plantings are petunias for full sun, in every color. I also love salvia, the purple variety seems to be very popular. The Big Blue salvia seems to be really resistant to heavy rain, hail and wind. If I only planted one summer flower it would be any color of salvia. Penstemon isn't as hardy but is rich in nectar. Annual verbena for the bright colors that make the baskets so attractive and almost irresistible, is also a great choice for sun. The flowers that provide the most nectar for hummingbirds are native flowers such as columbine, bee balm, and lupine. To provide an excellent flower for full shade, the fuchsia is a hands down ultimate choice. The aroma of the flowers will not matter, as the hummingbirds have no sense of smell.

While spending time in my mountain garden, filling the feeders and enjoying the sublime experience, I got to thinking. I've spent 35 years in the bird feeding business and I've seen nearly every hummingbird feeder made. So I decided to put the three and a half decades of my knowledge to work. Most



Hummingbird feeders have a plastic reservoir. These feeders spend a lot of time in the sun and hot weather. I began to not like the idea of providing nectar in a plastic reservoir. Personally, I don't even like drinking water from plastic, especially any plastic that's been in the sun. So it took 14 months of design work, but I created a hummingbird feeder with a glass reservoir. My desire is to feed these precious little birds as purely as possible, without the chance of any toxin, or extra bacteria leeching into the nectar. The feeder I designed is leak proof, has a plastic convex top that does not touch the nectar. The top has silver ions infused to make it antimicrobial. The top was also made larger than the reservoir in order to shade the nectar and keep it cooler. This feeder has perches, an ant moat, is dishwasher safe, and is super colorful. The feeder ports are smaller so most bees cannot wiggle their way into the reservoir. I wanted to be the change for these little birds and leave a healthy legacy for them. Their importance to nature and survival in our world as we feed them will keep the populations well for generations if we do the right thing.

To make the nectar, combine sugar and water. Four parts water to one part white granulated sugar. Boil the mixture, cool, and fill your feeder. Do not use any other type of sugar, especially avoid these- brown sugar, honey, raw sugar, organic sugar, corn syrup, or any type of juice or soda. The chance of causing a fungus on their tongues that could eventually kill them is not worth using anything other than white granulated sugar. Fill your feeders only half way until they arrive. On hot sunny days change the nectar every day. On cooler days I recommend every other day. I keep several back up feeders on hand, and when I change the nectar I also change the feeder so I can clean the feeder that was being used. Place extra nectar in the refrigerator but don't allow it to be there for more than a week.

Please don't forget to check out my hummingbird feeder that will excellently and safely change the way we feed, 'The Glass Sipper'

About Jacqueline Crivello

Jacqueline Crivello is an internationally published outdoor/nature photographer based in Evergreen, CO, whose work vividly brings the spirit of the Wild West to life through dynamic and detailed images. Her photography has earned distinguished accolades, including one of National Geographic's Photo of the Year, with two Nat Geo Top Shot Awards, Sigma's Best of Photography, and the International Nature Photography Award by the Audubon Society of greater Denver. Her striking images have appeared on Bing's landing page, in Digital Pro Magazine, Kingston.com, Cowboys & Indians Magazine and other publications and media Children's Literature

As of 2020, Jacqueline expanded her creative pursuits into children's literature, becoming a best-selling author. Her debut book, *The Magic of the Forest*, won a Mom's Choice Award (Gold Seal) and achieved widespread commercial success in stores nationwide and internationally. She followed this success with *Fireball Fox Saves the Forest* and later authored *The Magic of Wings* and *The Magic of the Mountains*, all of which have been honored with Mom's Choice Gold Awards. Entrepreneur & Innovator

Jacqueline is also the inventor of "The Glass Sipper", the first antimicrobial hummingbird feeder in the US, designed with safety and functionality in mind—featuring an all-glass reservoir to protect the nectar from plastic contamination and bacteria. (Patents Pending)

From an early innate passion for wildlife starting with a childhood photograph of a black bear—to award-winning photography, bestselling children's books, and inventive craftsmanship, Jacqueline Crivello's creative journey is a testament to her deep connection with nature and storytelling.



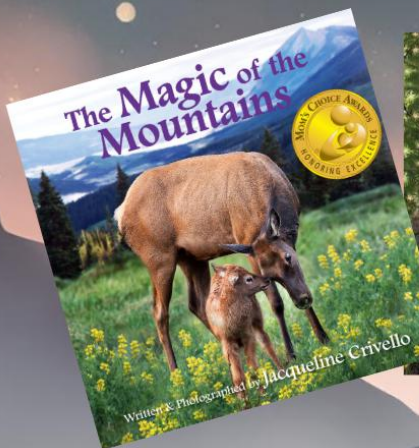
Jacqueline Crivello
PHOTOGRAPHY



Jacqueline Crivello is an internationally acclaimed outdoor and nature photographer whose work seamlessly merges extreme action with striking detail. Her photography vividly brings to life the untamed essence of the Wild West, drawing viewers into a world where nature reigns supreme. Traveling extensively both across the United States and globally, Jacqueline is on an unceasing mission to capture the perfect image. Her home base in Evergreen, Colorado offers her the unique advantage of living amidst the very scenery and wildlife she passionately documents.



Order Jacqueline's new book, *The Magic of Wings*, an enchanting semi-true tale of Gracie the hummingbird



Check out Jacqueline's other wonderful books at www.jcrivello.com



WHEN “WELCOME HOME” BECOMES “WHAT NOW?”

by Michaela Brennan

A First-Time Buyer’s Story of Discovery, Disbelief, and the Long Road to Restoration

The Dream of Homeownership

On May 24, 2024, I achieved something I never thought possible: I bought my first home.

As a part-time worker who devotes much of her life to volunteer service, I had long assumed homeownership was out of reach. I grew up on my family’s sesquicentennial farm in Michigan, where my parents have lived for the past 40 years, so I had little exposure to the modern buying process.

Still, after moving back with my family during the pandemic, I slowly worked my way out of debt, found a better job, and saved a little. Renting felt like “throwing money away,” so I started researching, got pre-approved, and toured more than 15 homes.

When I found a small house in Lansing’s Old Town neighborhood, it seemed close enough to perfect: a quiet street, a park nearby, friends in the area, and plenty of potential to build equity. The inspections revealed minor flaws but nothing catastrophic, and a bit of elbow grease promised to boost the value.

I thought I had done everything right.

The Shocking Discovery

Not six hours after closing, a friend helped me move the first items to the garage and began opening cabinets & drawers. Tucked inside one was a small jar filled with crystals and tiny baggies of powder.

We called 911. Two officers arrived, bent down with a flashlight, and confirmed it with a chuckle: “Yep, that’s meth.”

Suddenly, the strange yellowish stains on the walls I had asked the inspector about didn’t look like nicotine or soda explosions. They looked like chemical residue.

Confirming the Hazard

Hoping it was a mistake, I bought an at-home AccuMeth Test kit. The little test kit indicator literally ranges from “least amount of meth” as a dark line to “Most Meth” as a lack of a line. The results? That line was invisible, no where to be seen.

I then hired a professional environmental testing company, AQC, led by Jeff Rostoni. Dressed in full protective gear, he sampled every room, the basement, and the garage. When the lab results came back, my worst fears were confirmed: contamination was present everywhere.

Michigan’s legal limit for meth contamination is just 0.5 µg. My house exceeded it in every test. Shock turned into a sinking feeling of despair straight to my toes and “What Now?”

The Cost of Remediation

The financial blow was crushing. The initial remediation quote was \$34,000 – an initial detergent clean with a full gut of drywall, flooring, & cabinets. Potentially even ductwork, the furnace and appliances would have to go.

Insurance wouldn’t help. Unlike fire, mold, or asbestos, meth contamination isn’t covered under standard homeowners’ policies.

Eventually, I found a second company that quoted a remediation process that could cost closer to \$20,000. This cut the cost of cleaning of appliances, ductwork, & the furnace – a process that would cost up to three times what it would to replace them with no guaranteed residue would be fully removed from every nook & cranny. If post testing did not clear, we would do a second application. If that did not work, we would consider drywall removal at an estimated \$15,000 more.

Legal and Financial Roadblocks

A meeting with my agent, the seller, and his broker revealed more: stolen checks, guns & silencers, Fraud in the name of the deceased owner, a video that was “lost”, the original owner supposedly dying of “Poly-substance abuse.”

We tried a practical path: ask the seller to file a vandalism claim with the estate's insurer and let the adjuster decide. The seller initially agreed and then stopped responding. I tried to hold the seller accountable. Mediation went unanswered, and lawyers I contacted said the case wasn't worth their time.

Eventually, I qualified for help through Legal Aid Services of South-Central Michigan. A pro bono attorney reviewed my case - litigation wasn't viable. Insurance typically doesn't cover this type of contamination. Though we've been exploring other options.

I was left to move forward. My planned roommate moved back home. Found a place to stay with friends. Wrestled doubts and cried more than once in my car. Relied on dark humor to bring some levity when the tears were exhausted.

Unfortunately, only the garage passed the first round. I held my breath waiting 5 weeks more for the second round and final test results. Thankfully we passed. But that initial \$20,000 & the additional testing costs were still expenses far beyond my budget or lending power as a first-time buyer. Not to mention the costs to put the house back together.

What I want for the next first-time buyer

I am not sharing this to scare anyone away from homeownership. I am sharing because no one should be blindsided by contamination they can't see and didn't cause.

Imagine if first-time buyer education included a basic primer on environmental risks, including meth residues—right alongside mold, lead, asbestos, and radon. Imagine if standard contracts offered a simple meth screening option with a clear “yes/no” choice, just like a radon test. Imagine if tenants had the right to transparent histories before signing a lease.

These are small shifts that could spare someone else a very big heartache.

Choosing courage over quiet

There are days this journey feels like a whirlpool—like someone pulled the drain and the lifeguards are waving from shore, saying, “That's tough—hope it works out.” On those days, I remind myself: I did the best I could with what I knew. And now that I know more, I can help someone else know more, too.

That's why I'm telling this story—so another buyer asks for a test, another agent learns the signs, another inspector adds a checklist item, another insurer rethinks an exclusion.

Homes should be places of rest, not risk. Communities should protect each other, not pass along unseen harm.

If you're facing something like this, take a breath. You are not alone. There are credible testers, ethical remediation companies, legal aid resources, and advocates who will walk with you. Keep records. Ask questions. Test before you tear out. And when you can, share what you've learned—because your story might be the one that saves someone else's.

Legal and Financial Roadblocks

Meth contamination is not just my nightmare—it's a growing hidden environmental hazard.

Unlike mold, asbestos, radon, or lead, testing for meth residue is not typically included in first-time homebuyer education or inspections. Yet the risks are serious: contamination can cause respiratory illness, neurological damage, organ failure, developmental issues in children, or even death. Cleanup costs often rival those of fire damage.

Some states, including Kentucky, West Virginia, Oregon, California, and Colorado, already have disclosure requirements or remediation guidelines. In Colorado, advocates like Kathi McCarty are pushing for broader awareness and protections. But in Michigan, buyers like me are left in the dark.

Lessons for Future Buyers

If I could offer advice to anyone preparing to buy a home, it would be this:

- Testing is key. Ask about meth contamination testing. At-home kits cost as little as \$35, and professional testing can run between \$500 - \$1,500. A small cost that can save thousands.
- Don't assume standard inspections catch everything. Even diligent buyers can miss hazards that aren't part of typical inspections. As far as insurance, don't assume you're covered and ask in writing.
- Document Everything- keep texts, photos, reports, e-mails. Ask for communications in writing or recorded.
- Disclosure laws vary wildly. Only half of U.S. states have any meaningful regulations around meth contamination and disclosure. Even where laws exist, “remediated” doesn't always mean “safe everywhere no matter what”. Test sampling is limited & certain encapsulation methods break down over time.

The old saying “buyer beware” takes on new meaning when the danger is invisible, expensive, and often excluded from insurance coverage.

Closing Thoughts

Buying my first home was supposed to be a milestone of self-sufficiency. Instead, it became a crash course in environmental hazards, legal loopholes, and financial stress.

Sometimes this journey has felt like drowning while others stand by and say, “That's a terrible situation you got yourself into.” Yet I refuse to believe my story ends there.

My hope is that sharing my experience helps even one other homebuyer avoid the same tragedy.

Sidebar: What I Wish Every Buyer Knew (Quick Checklist)

- Ask your agent to include **meth screening** in your inspection plan.
- Verify **state guidelines** (e.g., Michigan: 0.5 µg/100 cm²).
- Get **testing** from an accredited professional if there's any doubt.

BRYGGS' **WISH TO BE A COWBOY**

By Scott Dishong & Sarah Murphy

At just four years old, Bryggs is already a cowboy through and through. He never leaves the house without his cowboy hat perched proudly on his head and his belt buckle gleaming at his waist. His chaps, adorned with a special yellow ribbon, tell a story far deeper than his love for rodeo: they mark a victory over one of life's toughest battles: cancer.



Bryggs' journey to becoming a cowboy didn't begin in the wide-open fields or dusty arenas of the West. It began in a hospital room, surrounded by machines and medical staff, where he spent countless days and nights undergoing treatment for cancer. But even in those moments, Bryggs found joy and inspiration watching bull riding videos with his dad, cheering on JB Mauney, one of the most legendary bull riders in the world. Those videos weren't just entertainment; they were a lifeline, a spark of hope and a wish waiting to be realized.

When Bryggs was referred to Make-A-Wish Colorado to have a wish granted, he didn't hesitate. He knew exactly what he wanted: to be a cowboy. Not just to dress like one, but to step into their world and meet real bull riders who had inspired him during his toughest days.

What Is Make-A-Wish Colorado?

Make-A-Wish Colorado is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating life-changing wishes for children with critical illnesses. Since its founding in 1983, the Colorado chapter has fulfilled thousands of wishes, each one tailored to the child's unique imagination - whether it's traveling to a favorite destination, meeting a hero, or becoming something extraordinary for a day. The organization works closely with families, medical professionals, volunteers and donors to create experiences that bring hope, strength, and joy to children during some of their most challenging times. Bryggs' wish is part of this legacy, showing how a single moment can uplift a child and their entire family.

The Power of a Wish

Bryggs' wish marked a major milestone for Make-A-Wish Colorado: it was the 7,000th wish granted in Colorado since its founding 43 years ago. That number represents thousands of stories like Bryggs', each one filled with courage, hope, and the transformative power of a wish come true.

To grant Bryggs' wish, Make-A-Wish Colorado partnered with Professional Bull Riders (PBR) at the Last Cowboy Standing event at Colorado State University. It was the perfect setting for a young cowboy to step into the boots of his heroes.

"Bryggs embodies everything that makes a wish powerful: his strength, resilience, and boundless imagination are exactly why we do what we do," Make-A-Wish Colorado CEO Scott Dishong said. "As our 7,000th wish, his story is a beautiful reminder of how a single moment can uplift not just a child, but an entire community. Bryggs didn't just wish to be a cowboy- he showed us all what it means to face life's toughest battles with courage and heart."

What Is Make-A-Wish Colorado?

Led by former professional bull rider Colt McCoy, Bryggs received a behind-the-scenes tour of the arena that most fans only dream of. From the locker rooms where riders prepare for their adrenaline-pumping performances to the bull pens where the powerful animals await their turn in the ring, Bryggs saw it all.

The riders welcomed him with open arms, impressed not only by his mutton busting experience, a junior rodeo event where young children ride sheep, but by the strength and grit he had shown in his fight against cancer. They signed his cowboy hat with pride; each autograph a symbol of respect and admiration for a boy who had already conquered the biggest bull of all.



Bryggs beamed with joy as he met his heroes and soaked in the atmosphere of the event. He ended the day in the stands, cheering on his new friends as they faced down bulls in thrilling 8-second rides. The roar of the crowd, the pounding hooves, and the electric energy of the arena made it a day he'll never forget.

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More Than a Wish

Bryggs' story is a testament to the power of imagination and resilience. His wish wasn't just about meeting cowboys - it was about reclaiming his childhood, celebrating survival and stepping into a future filled with possibility.

For his family, the experience was deeply emotional. Watching Bryggs light up with excitement, seeing him interact with the riders, and witnessing his wish come true was a moment of healing and celebration. It was a reminder of how far he had come and how much strength he carried within him.

"There was a day in the hospital where he almost gave up - and we wouldn't let him. We said we've got to keep going. And now, we're here, having his wish come true," Bryggs mom said during the PBR event. "We did it. He did it."

Make-A-Wish Colorado believes that a wish is more than a moment; it's a catalyst for hope. Studies have shown that wishes can improve a child's emotional and physical health, giving them strength to fight, confidence to dream of a world beyond their illness, and memories that last a lifetime. Bryggs' wish is a shining example of that impact.

The Legacy of 7,000 Wishes

Since its founding in 1983, Make-A-Wish Colorado has been a beacon of hope for children and families across the state. From trips to Walt Disney World Resorts to meeting celebrities, from building backyard playhouses to becoming superheroes for a day, each wish is tailored to the child's unique passions and imagination.

Bryggs' wish, the 7,000th granted by the chapter, is a milestone that reflects the dedication of volunteers, donors, medical professionals and community partners who make these dreams possible. It's a celebration of every child who has faced unimaginable challenges and found joy through the power of a wish.

Looking Ahead

Bryggs may be just four years old, but his story has already touched hearts across Colorado and beyond. He's a symbol of courage, determination, and the magic that happens when communities come together to support children in need.

Bryggs is already talking about coming back to the PBR event one day - not just as a spectator, but as one of the guys on the back of the bull. Whether he's cheering from the stands or riding in the arena, one thing is certain: Bryggs will always carry the spirit of a cowboy.

And for Make-A-Wish Colorado, his story is a reminder of why they do what they do. Every wish granted is a step toward healing, a moment of joy and a spark of hope. As they look ahead to the next 7,000 wishes, they carry Bryggs' story with them.

"Bryggs reminded us all why we believe in the power of a wish," said Scott Dishong. "He captured all our hearts and showed us the impact that one wish can have on a child, their family and the entire community."

Learn more about Make-A-Wish Colorado at wish.org/Colorado or @WishColorado on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Watch Bryggs' wish come true at vimeo.com/wishcolorado/7000wish



**Scott Dishong, CEO &
Sarah Murphy, Sr. Mgr of Strategic
Communications**

Make-A-Wish Colorado

Scott Dishong is the CEO of Make-A-Wish Colorado, where he leads efforts to create life-changing wishes for children with critical illnesses across the state. Since joining the organization as the second-ever CEO in 2019, he has focused on expanding its reach, innovating fundraising strategies and building a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Photo credit for Bryggs photos: Expo Productions

WHEN LIFE CHANGES IN AN INSTANT: WHY LIVING BENEFITS MATTER MORE THAN YOU THINK

By Dannelle Stratton



One ordinary workday in 1980, my father was welding, elevated in an open basket when tragedy struck. At just **39 years old**, he fell five and a half stories, suffering catastrophic injuries that altered our family's course forever.

He spent five grueling months in the hospital, undergoing so many surgeries he eventually lost count. Though the surgical hardware saved his life, it came with lasting complications. Decades later, he still requires occasional surgeries as that hardware begins to fail.

My mom, who had always focused on raising our family, suddenly had to work full-time just to keep the bills paid. She wanted to be by my father's side during his rehabilitation, but financial pressures forced her into a caregiver and breadwinner role.

Back then, living benefits weren't an option. Had my parents had access to this kind of financial safety net, my mom could have spent more time where she was needed most, beside my dad without the crushing weight of financial stress. That experience has shaped how I see financial preparedness, and it continues to influence the work I do today.

What Are Living Benefits?

When most people think of life insurance, they picture something that pays out after death. But modern policies are designed to do more. Many include living benefits a feature that allows policyholders to access a portion of their benefit while still alive if they experience a qualifying event.

This could mean help during:

- A critical illness like cancer, heart attack, or stroke
- A chronic illness requiring long-term care
- A terminal diagnosis

In these moments, living benefits provide more than money. They offer breathing room—helping cover medical expenses, caregiving costs, or simply replacing lost income so that families can focus on healing and time together.

Hard Facts: Why It Matters

When my dad fell at age 39, no one imagined the impact would last decades. But the truth is, serious illness or injury at any age can reshape a family's future. And the numbers show just how common these events are.

The CDC reports that 129 million Americans live with at least one major chronic illness, that's nearly half the population. For those who make it to retirement age, the Department of Health and Human Services estimates that 70% will need long-term care at some point in their lives. And even earlier in life, the risks are real: nearly 40% of men and women will face a cancer diagnosis, while heart disease and stroke remain among the leading causes of disability and death.

These aren't abstract figures. They're reminders that life can change without warning—at 39, at 59, or at 79. Living benefits ensure that when it does, families have options.

Misconceptions That Hold People Back

Despite the evidence, many people put off planning. The reasons are familiar:

- "I'm too young." But accidents and illnesses don't wait for retirement. My father was only 39 years old when his fall changed everything. Younger, healthier people often have the best access to affordable coverage, yet they're also the most likely to believe they won't need it.
- "I'll never need it." My dad probably thought the same. The truth is, no one expects tragedy, but it happens every day.
- "I have savings." Even strong savings can disappear quickly under the weight of medical bills, lost wages, and everyday household expenses. Living benefits are not about replacing savings but protecting them.

These misconceptions leave families exposed to risks that can be mitigated with a little foresight.

The Human Side of Protection

It's easy to get caught up in policies, riders, and percentages. But at its heart, this isn't about financial jargon, it's about people.

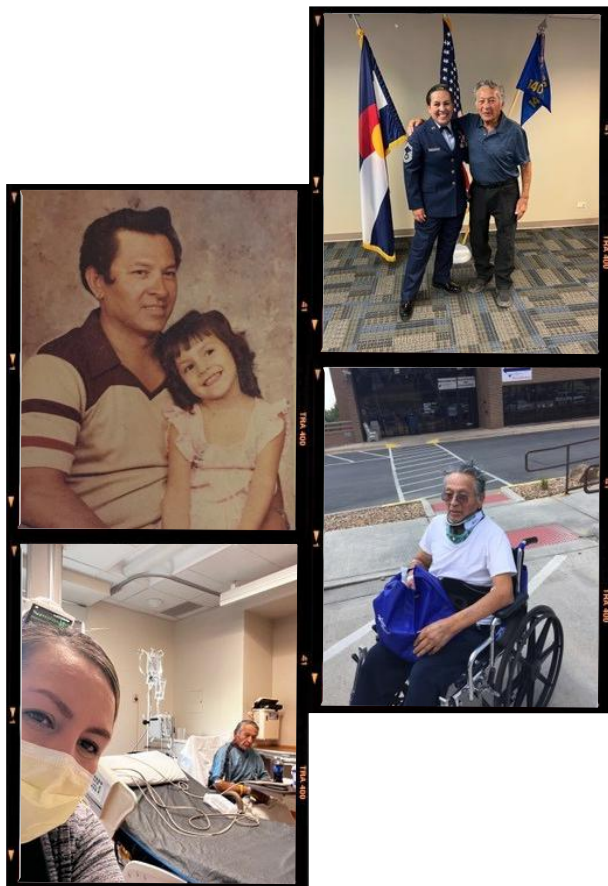
I think of my mom, torn between caregiving and working to keep food on the table. I think of families I've met who faced cancer, strokes, or accidents with no backup plan and were left scrambling. And I think of the contrast—those who did have coverage and could put their energy where it belonged: on each other.

Living benefits are about dignity, choice, and presence. They allow families to face hardship without being forced apart by financial stress.

From Service to Financial Education

My own path reflects this lesson. I enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1997 and retired in 2022 after 25 years of service. The military taught me preparation, resilience, and the value of protecting others.

In 2020, I began working in financial services, eventually founding Stratton Financial Solutions. My focus has been helping families and communities, especially veterans and women entrepreneurs—shift how they think about money. Too often, financial literacy feels out of reach or overly complicated. I believe everyone deserves to understand the tools available to them, including living benefits.



This isn't about selling policies. It's about ensuring people don't have to go through what my family endured without options.

A Call to Consider

We can't control when tragedy strikes. But we can choose to be prepared for it. Living benefits offer families the chance to focus on what truly matters; healing, caregiving, and togetherness without being overwhelmed by financial pressure.

If you've ever thought, "It won't happen to me," remember my dad's story. None of us expect these things, but they happen. And when they do, being prepared makes all the difference.

Closing Reflection

When I look back on my father's accident, I see both hardship and strength. At just 39 years old, he went from being a healthy, capable welder to spending five months in a hospital bed and enduring a lifetime of surgeries. His fall changed our family forever, but it also taught me something I carry into every part of my work today: financial preparation isn't about money, it's about freedom.

The freedom for a spouse to be present at the hospital instead of tied to a job just to make ends meet. The freedom for children to feel supported instead of watching their parents' struggle. The freedom to face the unexpected without fear of financial collapse.

Living benefits can't prevent tragedy, but they can protect families from being torn apart by the financial aftermath. And that, at any age, is one of the most valuable gifts we can give the people we love.

About Dannelle Stratton

Dannelle Stratton is the founder of Stratton Financial Solutions and a licensed associate with Five Rings Financial. Following a 25-year career in the United States Air Force, where she served from 1997 until her retirement in 2022, she began her transition into financial services in 2020. She specializes in helping families, veterans, and entrepreneurs build lasting security by shifting mindsets around money, removing barriers to financial literacy, and providing access to strategies and living benefits solutions.

An advocate for veteran organizations and women-owned businesses, Dannelle combines military discipline with a passion for service and education. She and her husband, a small business owner, are raising three children and enjoy spending time together outdoors, camping and relaxing at the lake. Her work is dedicated to empowering others to prepare wisely, live fully, and create enduring legacies.

MY FAMILY'S FIGHT FOR SAFE HOUSING IN COLORADO

BY PAMELA GOOD

Home should be the place where children are safe to laugh, play, and dream. For my family, however, our own walls made us sick—not once, but twice. Meth contamination in two separate apartments forced us to uproot our lives, leaving my children and I exposed to toxins, facing serious health issues, and struggling to feel safe in the very place that should have been their sanctuary.

Meth contamination doesn't stay in one apartment—it travels through walls, vents, and floors, putting innocent families at risk. I never wanted my children's story to be one of illness caused by their own home, and if sharing our experience can help even one family avoid the same fate, it is more than worth speaking out. Families deserve more than empty promises from management—they deserve safety, dignity, and a place they can truly call home.

These experiences are what drive my advocacy. I am determined to make sure no family has to endure what we went through—to fight for stronger protections, accountability, and transparency in housing. The challenges we face are overwhelming, but they also taught us that real change is possible when we turn lived experience into action.

When the Home Meant Harm

A debilitating accident requiring surgery and rehabilitation with the Colorado Department of Labor. We struggled with housing insecurity. I was grateful to secure an apartment in December 2022 through assistance programs and community support. Finally, I thought, we would have a stable home. But shortly after moving in, my children and I began experiencing alarming health issues. Headaches, nosebleeds, and nausea that sent us to the emergency room late at night into the morning. Cognitive difficulties and respiratory problems became our daily reality. The source was clear: chemical exposure from meth contamination within the building.

Even when you follow every rule, live responsibly, and care deeply for your home, the toxins from previous or ongoing drug activity can seep through walls, vents, and plumbing. Families living next door—completely innocent—can still suffer the effects. After months of enduring these symptoms, we had no choice but to leave the apartment for our safety.

But that was not the end. Even after relocating to another apartment that cost six hundred dollars per month more in Salida, the nightmare repeated itself. I woke up choking to the smell of acetone. Similar health symptoms and unsafe conditions followed, demonstrating that this issue is not limited to a single building—it is a systemic problem in multi-unit housing where cross-contamination can silently harm residents.

Unsafe Conditions Beyond Contamination

Chemical exposure was only one layer of danger. Both apartments were plagued with unsafe activity and poor management. Unauthorized guests frequented the buildings, some exhibiting aggressive and threatening behavior. Children could not play outside without fear, and families were intimidated simply for speaking out.

In one alarming instance, a man followed a young girl to her apartment and later banged on her door when she was home alone during a snowstorm. These incidents were reported to management and police, but little was done to prevent recurrence. Residents who attempted to document events or advocate for their safety were often dismissed or criticized. Management suggested we could break our lease if we were unhappy—a solution that placed the burden on victims rather than addressing the perpetrators of unsafe behavior.

The Emotional Toll

The emotional strain was constant. Caring for children already carries immense responsibility, but adding the fear of contamination, aggressive neighbors, and an indifferent management team was exhausting. My children's health, their education, and our emotional well-being were at stake every day. Housing, meant to heal and protect, became a source of trauma.

First Responders: A Ray of Hope

Throughout this crisis, one group consistently showed up: Doctors, Nurses, and first responders. Firefighters, and Chaffee Health provided guidance, emotional support, and immediate assistance when emergencies arose. Their dedication gave my family some measure of relief, but even they could not fix the systemic failures in property management and oversight that left us exposed in the first place.

From Survivor to Advocate

It was my lived experience that propelled me to action. I applied for a position on the **Chaffee Housing Authority Board of Directors**, determined to use my story to prevent other families from suffering the same way.

I have seen firsthand how housing insecurity impacts families and communities. I know the stress of rising rents, limited options, and navigating programs designed to help. I've experienced the relief of support from organizations like Salida Human Services and Chaffee Hospitality—and I've felt the despair of being displaced due to chemical contamination.

Through these experiences, I proposed the "Pathways to Housing Stability & Self-Sufficiency" Initiative. This program aims to provide comprehensive support for families facing housing instability, including transitional housing solutions, education on self-advocacy, and resources to secure permanent, safe homes. My goal is to ensure that families can live without fear, that children can thrive, and that communities retain essential workers, from teachers to healthcare providers, who are vital to a thriving local economy.

What Must Change

My story underscores several urgent needs in Colorado housing:

- Stronger remediation standards for meth contamination in rental housing, especially in multi-unit buildings where toxins can migrate between units.
- Clear tenant protections, ensuring families can report unsafe conditions without fear of retaliation.
- Accountability for property management, with consequences for ignoring safety and health violations.
- Transparency for residents, including disclosure of past contamination or ongoing risks.
- Community-driven solutions, recognizing that housing is about people, dignity, and opportunity—not just roofs and walls.

These steps are not optional. They are essential to protect families, preserve public health, and maintain trust in housing systems.

Looking Ahead

I never wanted my children's story to be defined by illness caused by their own home. But if sharing our experience prevents even one other family from enduring what we have, then speaking out is more than worth it.

Home should be a sanctuary—a place of safety, hope, and opportunity. Every child deserves a place to laugh, play, and dream without fear. Every family deserves housing that protects them, not poisons them. And every community deserves accountability, transparency, and action when the system fails.

I am committed to being part of that change—for my children, the children in my care, our neighbors, and every family still searching for a home where safety and dignity are not negotiable. Our fight for safe housing is far from over, but I refuse to remain silent while preventable harm continues.

Pam's Tips for Staying Safe in Multi-Unit Housing

As someone who has lived through meth contamination in two separate apartments, I want other families to know what to watch for and how to protect themselves:

1. Watch for Health Warning Signs: Frequent nosebleeds, headaches, respiratory issues, or cognitive changes can signal chemical exposure. If symptoms appear, seek medical attention and document everything.
2. Document Unsafe Conditions: Keep a detailed record of disturbances, unauthorized guests, or suspicious activity. Photos, videos, and written notes can be critical if you need to report incidents to authorities or management.
3. Know Your Rights: Tenants have a right to safe housing. Familiarize yourself with local housing codes, Section 8 protections, and tenant advocacy resources. You should not be forced out for reporting hazards.
4. Advocate for Testing and Remediation: Request formal testing if you suspect meth contamination. In multi-unit buildings, contamination can travel through walls and ventilation, so professional remediation is essential.
5. Lean on Community Resources: First responders, local health departments, and organizations like Chaffee Hospitality or Salida Human Services can provide support, guidance, and assistance in emergencies.
6. Speak Out for Change: Your experience can help prevent harm for other families. Share your story with housing authorities, boards, or advocacy groups. Change often begins with one voice refusing to stay silent.



Pamela Good
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Facials, Rejuvenate Head to Toe
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THE DANGERS OF DRAIN CLEANING *AND BEST PRACTICES*

By Kris Jordan

Today I wanted to address a couple Frequently Asked Questions we get about drain cleaning. There is a lot of misinformation out there because drains are hidden, making the understanding of them more limited by a homeowner. Plumbing is also a licensed and therefore regulated field, which means homeowners aren't encouraged to do their own plumbing work, any more than they would do their own dental work. I wanted to give more information about the dangers of drain cleaning to help homeowners, property managers and the like, better understand the process and impacts of drain cleaning.

How is Drain Cleaning Performed?

At Garvin's Plumbing and Sewer, we use a machine that consists of a cable with sharp blades on the end. For decades this style of machine was the industry standard. It took decades for a competitor to come up with an alternative, because it works so well. Still today, we use this machine as we feel others don't have the quality.

The blades on the end of the machine have a slight inward bend to them and do exactly what you'd expect – they cut debris out of the line. These blades spin through the full circumference of the pipe and are designed to scrape the edges of the pipe clean.

On a main sewer line, a heavy-duty machine is used with 4" blades, which matches the circumference of the sewer line. On inside lines, the blades range from 1 ½" to 3" to match the circumference of those lines and a smaller machine is used.



When the machine is plugged into a power source, the technician uses a pedal to control the power as he guides the cable through the pipe. This is done "blind" in that the technician can't see the machine cutting the roots out of the line, instead they rely on experience, pressure, the movement of the cable, and other clues they've been taught.

On average, we clean over 10,000 drains per year, and have for over 85 years. We aren't the only one. Hundreds of thousands of drains are cleaned every year by thousands of plumbing and drain-cleaning companies across the country.

In addition to this machine, often referred to as a snake or roto-rooter, there is something called a jetter or hydojet. This type of drain cleaning machine uses high powered water pressure to blast through clogs.

We believe blades and knives on a cable are the most effective against root intrusion in the sewer line. We also believe these snakes are best at clearing clogs – whether hair, food, scale or toilet paper. We use a jetter for jobs we think it is best for. In our experience, that is grease, core, mud, and sand.

There are some specialty machines used as well such as descalers (that do just that) and different attachments that can be used such as chains, cones and more.



Why Do Drain Lines Break?

Water is one of the most powerful forces on Earth, and the minerals in the water can and does cause corrosion in your pipes. Typically, we see drain lines fail when:

- They have corroded from age (this is why cast iron pipes need to be replaced)
- They have corroded from chemicals (use of chemical drain cleaners etc.)
- They have been impacted by root growth
- They have been impacted by earth settling
- They have been damaged by equipment such as from boring or trenching



Does a Drain Cleaning Machine Break Pipes?

The quick answer is no. Because the knives spin through the circumference of a pipe, the only way they can break a line is because:

- The line is damaged and the machine catches that bad spot and makes it worse
- The line is damaged and the machine scrapes off the buildup that is holding things together
- The line is improperly plumbed, causing the machine to turn back on itself or go the wrong direction

When a drain is cleaned, there is a chance that pre-existing conditions can be exposed, causing leaking and water damage. If a chemical drain cleaning product is used, such as those sold over the counter, like Drain-O or Liquid Plmbr, those can sit in the line and cause corrosion. Furthermore, high pressure water jetting or other drain cleaning methods can cause flooding if the lines are in poor condition.

We consider the following to be “poor condition”:

- Leaking water pipes
- Broken or damaged drain pipes
- Plumbing code violations/outdated plumbing
- Lead, cast iron or galvanized piping
- Fixture damage such as cracks in toilets, tanks, supply lines or sinks
- Hidden pipes such as bathtub p-traps and drum traps

What are The Benefits of Chemical Free Drain Cleaning?

The benefits of cleaning drains on a regular routine are significant. Left untreated, uncleaned drains can:

- Cause sewage backups that negatively impact property and the health of the home’s occupants
- The inability to use the plumbing including not having running water
- Sewage and sanitary issues
- Complete blockage of the sewer or drain line which requires emergency repairs – failure to do so can make the home uninhabitable

Many homeowners simply don’t understand how drain cleaning or plumbing works, and therefore don’t understand the importance of preventive maintenance to reduce the chances of broken lines, either exposed through the drain cleaning process, or those that reveal themselves and require an emergency plumber.

Preventative maintenance is the key! Preventative maintenance not only keeps roots at bay to prevent bigger problems, but also allows a review of your current plumbing systems to support repairs rather than replacement. Cleaning a drain line is ALWAYS less expensive than replacing the line and can be done in almost all cases of blockages/ clogs.

How Often Do I Need My Drains Cleaned?

Most of the time inside drains (sinks, tubs/showers, toilets) only need to be cleaned when a clog is experienced. When it comes to a sewer line however, that’s a different story. For that frequency it will depend on a few factors including how often roots get in your line, how many people live in your home, the length of your line, the material your sewer line is made of, the age of your home and plumbing system.

For most people, an annual or every other year sewer cleaning cadence is recommended if you know you have root growth in your line. Without root growth, cleaning it every 3-5 years is recommended, or if you have recurring issues.



Kris Jordan Garvin’s Plumbing & Sewer

Kris Jordan is the General Manager for Garvin’s Plumbing and Sewer. She is third generation in her family’s company, founded by her great-uncle in 1940. They are proud to be family owned and operated.

The Architecture of Age:

Transforming Your Body from a House into a Home

By Robin Salls



I want you to think about the difference between a house and a home.

A house is a tangible asset. It's a piece of property, a structure of wood, brick, and glass that one can own or rent. Its primary purpose is pragmatic: to protect us from the elements, provide shelter, and serve as a base of operations. It is defined by its architectural blueprints, its zip code, and its assessed value. Without inhabitants, it is merely a functional vessel, a cold, empty box.

A home, however, is something entirely different. A home is what a house becomes when you fill it with life, laughter, and the precious treasures that speak to the unique story of who you are. A home is a quilt handed down by a grandmother, the scuff marks on the floor from a child's first bicycle ride, the worn groove on the sofa where you read your favorite books, and the smell of the last three decades of shared meals. A home is defined by belonging, security, and identity. It is the vessel of memory, infused with the intangible warmth of lived experience.

I'm Robin Salls, and as the founder of Tangled Silver Magazine and host of The Ageless Lounge, I've spent years exploring this concept of transformation. I've realized that this very distinction—between the structure and the soul, between the functional asset and the beloved space—is the perfect metaphor for how we approach aging.

For me, this realization hit in my late 40s. I was running a successful business, had a beautiful family, and by all external measures, my life was built on a solid foundation. Yet, I felt restless. I looked in the mirror one morning, seeing the subtle changes that time had wrought, and I felt a moment of profound weariness—the kind that comes from constantly upholding a facade, like a homeowner who suddenly realizes their property insurance is about to lapse. I was so focused on maintaining the facade that I had forgotten to live inside the walls. I was a tenant in my own life, never truly settled. It was in that moment of weary recognition that I decided to stop renting my experience and start owning my age as my home within my body.



I'd like to challenge you, the reader, to start thinking of that shift for yourself.

The Blueprint of the "House of Age"

When we talk about aging, most of us default to thinking about the physical "house." This is the cold, objective blueprint: the biological structure we inhabit.

The House of Age is the number on your driver's license, the grey in your hair, the subtle lines around your eyes. It is the quantifiable reality of time passing, measured in birthdays and doctor appointments. For too long, society has trained us to view this House of Age as a property that is constantly depreciating. We see the aging body only through the lens of maintenance, repair, and eventual decline.

This external perspective turns our existence into an exercise in anxiety. We focus obsessively on the structural integrity—trying to fill every crack, hide every weathered detail, and paint over the history. I know this feeling well. I remember standing in a dressing room once, staring at a new dress, and all I could see were the parts that didn't fit the cultural ideal—the softness that wasn't there 20 years ago, the lines that spoke of a thousand expressions. I felt like the house inspector, circling the flaws on the report, convinced the property was losing value with every passing season.

When we live in this "House" mindset, we are living life as a tenant in our own body, never truly feeling settled or secure, always bracing for the next mandatory inspection or costly renovation.

But what if we shifted our focus from the external structure to the internal design? What if we stopped inspecting the foundation for weaknesses and started appreciating the beauty of the life unfolding within the space?

Designing the Interior: Filling Your Home with Wisdom

The beautiful, intentional shift from House to Home begins when we realize that our worth is not in the material, but in the meaning we place within the walls.

In the context of aging, this means embracing the reality that your life is not a countdown of years; it is a profound collection of wisdom and treasures.

The wrinkles around your eyes are not structural flaws; they are the gallery of your life's laughter and tears. They are the precious artifacts that define the spirit of the space. The collective wisdom you have earned—through career triumphs, personal heartbreaks, and the sheer persistence of showing up every day—is the rich, warm patina of cherished antique furniture.

At Tangled Silver, we celebrate this transition. We recognize that the most compelling and authentic beauty is not flawless; it is richly inhabited. Our mission is to provide the interior design magazine for this stage of life, filled with stories that inspire you to arrange your furniture, hang your art, and simply sit down and be comfortable.

To transform your Age into a Home, you must intentionally fill it with:

Treasures of Purpose: Identifying and pursuing the things that make you feel alive, whether it's a late-in-life business venture, mastering a new hobby, or dedicating time to service. These are the works of art that hang on the walls. For me, that treasure was founding Tangled Silver Magazine itself—a purpose-driven renovation of my own professional life. It was about creating something that mattered, not just maintaining what I had.

Laughter of Loved Ones: Cultivating the relationships—family, friends, community—that are the very definition of warmth. These are the souls who sit at your hearth. They are the ones who appreciate the home, not the house. Their presence is the security system of the heart.

Patina of Self-Acceptance: Recognizing that the journey has left its marks—and those marks are proof of a life fully lived, not a life failing to be perfect. This is the worn, comfortable carpet underfoot. I will never forget the relief I felt the day I truly let go of comparing my reflection to my younger self. The freedom of just saying, "This is the current floor plan, and it's perfect for the life I'm living," was revolutionary.

This is the essence of my show, *The Ageless Lounge*: creating a space where we share stories and wisdom, effectively designing the floor plan for a life that is truly, deeply comfortable.

Protecting the Foundation: Clearing the Societal Toxins

Kathi McCarty's important work with Home Zone Magazine and the Meth Toxins Alliance focuses on a crucial aspect of property ownership: protecting the physical structure from harmful, unseen toxins. This dedication to creating safe, healthy living environments is something I deeply admire, and it offers an essential parallel to the journey of aging.

Just as we must vigilantly protect our houses from external contaminants, we must actively protect our internal homes—our minds and hearts—from the societal toxins of ageism and limiting beliefs.

Ageism is a toxic pollutant that seeps into our subconscious, telling us we are less valuable, less visible, or less capable simply because of the number of years we've been here. It is the insidious, invisible mold that threatens to rot the foundation of our self-worth.

We must actively detox our mindset.

This involves:

Removing the Tarnish: Rejecting the narrative that age equals decline. Instead, embracing the concept that age equals refinement and integration. Not everyone has the privilege of aging and it should be celebrated. We choose to see the passage of time as a gift, not a burden, and we treat our bodies with respect for carrying us this far.

Insulating the Walls: Building strong boundaries against unsolicited, negative commentary about appearance or capability. I encourage you to define beauty and aging for yourself, rather than outdated societal norms. Don't let someone else's narrow definition of "new" or "youthful" determine the value of your vintage masterpiece.

Cleaning the Windows: Ensuring we seek out mirrors (people and content) that reflect the possibility and excitement of later life, rather than the doom-and-gloom projections of the media. My grandmother, affectionately known as Newmommy, was the epitome of joyful living into her late 90's. She didn't chase youth; she simply inhabited her age with gusto, instilling in me that

Cleaning the Windows: Ensuring we seek out mirrors (people and content) that reflect the possibility and excitement of later life, rather than the doom-and-gloom projections of the media. My grandmother, affectionately known as Newmommy, was the epitome of joyful living into her late 90's. She didn't chase youth; she simply inhabited her age with gusto, instilling in me that age is what you choose to make of it. She was the one who taught me to see my body not as a temporary shelter, but as the permanent, cherished residence of my soul. Her legacy is why I fight so hard against the idea that the later decades are about shrinking your world.

By consciously clearing out these damaging societal narratives, we create a safe, stable, and empowering environment within which our genuine self can flourish. We are not just maintaining the structure; we are safeguarding the sacred space where our spirit resides.

The Joy of Full Inhabitation

The final act of transforming your age from a House into a Home is achieving full habitation.

Full habitation means you are not living out of packed boxes, waiting for a better time or a different body. You are not waiting until you lose ten pounds, start a new job, or retire. It means you are present, settled, and completely at ease in the skin you are in, right now.

The goal is not simply longevity; it is comfort, joy, and utility. We want our home to be the most comfortable, beautiful, and authentic place we know—and that is exactly how we should feel about our age. The best part of a truly lived-in home is that it functions perfectly for the people who live there. Your life should function perfectly for you.

The architecture of your life is stunning. It has been built to withstand storms and celebrates sunny days. It has seen countless moments of quiet grace and roaring celebration. It's time to stop looking at the blueprint for flaws and start walking through the rooms, appreciating the richness, the history, and the profound, beautiful comfort of the Home you have spent your entire life building.

Welcome home.

ABOUT ROBIN SALLS

Robin Salls is the Founder of Tangled Silver Magazine, the first publication for and by silvering haired women dedicated to celebrating the authentic lives of women 45+, and the host of The Ageless Lounge podcast.

Robin Salls is a leading beauty culture disruptor and champion of Audacious Aging. As the Founder and Publisher of Tangled Silver Magazine and host of The Ageless Lounge, she empowers women to define beauty and aging on their own terms. She is a dedicated Silver Hair Enthusiast, speaker, and the ultimate advocate for stepping into your most authentic, ageless self.

Or longer, but feel free to tweak as you see fit:

Robin Salls is a recognized beauty culture disruptor and the entrepreneurial force behind the movement for Audacious Aging. As the Founder, Publisher, and Speaker of the globally celebrated Tangled Silver Magazine, she leads a dynamic community dedicated to redefining midlife beauty and the silver lifestyle. She is also the host of The Ageless Lounge, where she invites women into powerful conversations about connection, style, and empowerment. Driven by the mission to champion women's authentic journeys, she provides a platform where silver is not just a hair color—it's a mindset. She inspires women to embrace their true selves, drop the dye, and courageously claim their most vibrant, ageless, and timeless chapter.

SILVERHOOD EXPERIENCE 2025

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When Home Heals:

A Movement for Safe, Healthy Housing

What began as my own shocking discovery has grown into a national call for education, prevention, and advocacy to ensure everyone has a safe place to live, work, and thrive.

Seven years ago this month, my life changed forever. After renting out my beloved Evergreen, Colorado cabin during a very serious health event, I discovered it had been turned into a meth lab. The contamination levels were 239 times above Colorado's legal limit. My only remediation option was "encapsulation," a method with no proven safety data. I could not trust it for my family, friends, guests, or myself.

I lost my sacred space and equity too as property insurance does rarely cover meth toxins. The tenant walked away after arrest, and I was left with heartbreak, trauma, and a toxic property I could never live in again. But that loss became the spark of something bigger.

I realized meth contamination wasn't just my story. It was and is a silent, invisible crisis affecting families, neighbors, and communities everywhere. Out of that devastation, I founded Meth Toxins Awareness Alliance (MTAA) with one purpose: to prevent others from going through a similar experience.

Turning Pain Into Purpose

What began as my mission for prevention has grown into a movement. MTAA has become a trusted voice for education, advocacy, and resources.

- **Education & Resources:** We have delivered 42 continuing education classes across Colorado, both online and in person along with countless workshops, presentations, and media appearances. Including expert professionals who provide valuable insights and solutions has been a tremendous addition. The feedback from real estate related professionals, civic leaders, and property owners of all types has been humbling and motivating. Every "thank you" fuels my determination to keep going.
- **Advocacy:** Together with legislative leaders, we have improved legislation, motivated enhancement of Colorado's now public-facing meth contamination database, strengthened tenant rights, and activated real estate leaders to add protections to contracts. These wins prove what persistence and grit can accomplish. We know there is more work to be done, especially requiring disclosure of previous contamination in a real estate transaction similar to other contaminants and material findings already required.
- **Outreaching** through Home Zone Magazine, media features, and shared personal stories, we are finally bringing meth contamination into the conversations where it matters most including policymakers, property owners, buyers, tenants, and families.



By Kathi McCarty

Looking Ahead

Our next chapter is about scale and accessibility. In 2026, we will launch a digital training platform, expanding our Meth Toxins in Real Estate course nationwide, and eventually globally. Realtors, property managers, property professionals of all types, community leaders, buyers, investors, and property owners will be able to access training anytime, gaining the tools to recognize risks, protect clients and owners, and safeguard both residential and commercial properties.

But here's the truth: I can not do it alone. Growth requires partnership, sponsorship, and collaboration.

A Call to Action

If this mission resonates with you, I invite you to join us:

- Host a class for your team or clients or sponsor one of my classes.
- Host a workshop to educate your civic and professional communities.
- Support the digital launch and share your company product(s) and service(s).
- Or simply make an introduction to a civic leader, a policymaker, or a potential partner who cares about safe properties

Every partnership puts us one step closer to a future where we all do not have to fear the walls around them today and for our future generations. This is truly legacy work, helping to maintain generational health and wealth we all worked so hard for.

Gratitude + Hope

To everyone who has walked with me, attended a class, shared their own story, offered encouragement, or opened doors, THANK YOU!. You are proof that from heartbreak can come healing, and from healing can come hope and change.

I never wanted my story to be defined by the loss of a home. But if sharing my experience prevents even one other individual or family from facing a similar fate, then it is worth every moment.

Together, we can turn awareness into action and ensure everyone has what they deserve: a safe, healthy place to live, work, and play

✨ Want to learn more, sponsor, or connect? Email info@methtoxinsalliance.com



DETOXING YOUR INNER HOME: LEADING THE TEAM WITHIN

By Kerry Borcharding

When we think of toxins, most of us picture harmful chemicals, polluted air, or dangerous substances like meth. We understand that these external toxins can harm our health, damage our homes, and tear communities apart if they're allowed in.

But there's another kind of toxicity that's just as real, though harder to see. It doesn't live in the air, the soil, or in households. It lives inside of us.

I know this from personal experience.

For years, I built a life that appeared successful on the outside. I was driven, ambitious, and accomplished. But behind the polished exterior, my body was breaking down. I developed several autoimmune conditions. Fatigue and pain became constant companions. I searched for answers in the external world to fix my problem, but no matter what treatment I tried, nothing seemed to address the root cause.

What I eventually discovered was eye-opening: the greatest toxins in my life weren't external—they were internal.

The persistent stress from overwork. The overwhelming pressure to perform. The negative self-talk whispering that I wasn't enough. The belief that my worth depended on my accomplishments. These internal toxins were quietly harming my health, happiness, and leadership.

That collapse was my wake-up call.

It taught me that detoxing isn't just about the food we eat or the air we breathe — it's also about the inner environment we foster. At Evolve Institute, we call this leading the team within.

The Inner Home

Your inner world creates your outer reality, 100%. That is one of our mantra's at Evolve Institute.

Each of us leads our own "inner world team," and just like there are people in the external world operating at different levels of consciousness, so does your team.

Zone 1 Team: The Troublemakers

They tend to get in your way, like the not good enough one, the people pleaser, the overwhelmed one, and the fearful one. If left unchecked, Zone 1 fills your inner home with toxicity.

Zone 2 Team: The Problem-Solvers

Your Zone 2 team is intelligent, hardworking, and resourceful—the organizer, the productive one, the problem solver. They jump in to fix issues, hustle, and push through. However, they don't know how to rest. If you rely solely on Zone 2, burnout is unavoidable—like a motor running on fumes.

Zone 3 Team: The Higher Self

Your Zone 3 team, also known as your Zen Zone Team, is the voice of wisdom, clarity, and love. It's where creativity flows, your nervous system relaxes, and you remember what truly matters. It includes your soul, physical body, energetic body, and emotional body. When your Zone 3 team leads, you feel peaceful.

Just as harmful chemicals can seep into a home and make it unlivable, Zones 1 and 2 can take over our inner home until we feel anxious, depleted, and disconnected. When that happens, our health suffers, our relationships strain, and our leadership loses its strength.

Detoxing From Within

My healing started when I understood I had a choice.

I didn't need to let my Zone 1 and Zone 2 teams take charge. Instead, I could step into the role of CEO for my inner world teams and focus on developing Zone 3. I could detox my inner home by clearing out the fear, stress, and pressure that had taken hold.

That shift didn't happen overnight. It resulted from consistent practice: slowing down, listening, breathing deeply, and consistently asking the question:

What Zone am I in right now?

This question gave me access to two things:

1. The awareness of who is leading my team at that moment.
2. The choice to shift.

Over time, something extraordinary happened: my autoimmune symptoms began to diminish, my energy returned, and my leadership evolved. Not because of an external remedy, but because I learned how to guide my inner team from a higher state of consciousness.

Practices to Shift Zones

Detoxing your inner home doesn't require a dramatic life overhaul. It starts with small, intentional practices that you can use every day. Here are a few we teach at Evolve Institute:

1. The Breath Reset

When you find yourself in Zone 1 (fear, self-doubt, overwhelm), pause and acknowledge it. Take three slow, deep breaths, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. This simple reset breaks the cycle of stress and helps you move into Zone 3, where your nervous system can relax and peace returns.

2. The Body Scan

Stress often manifests physically before the mind becomes aware of it. Do a quick scan: are your shoulders tense? Is your breathing shallow? Is your chest tight? By relaxing these physical tensions, you clear out the inner environment and create room for expansion.

3. The Zone Audit

Throughout your day, ask yourself: Who on my team is leading, right now? Over time, this practice strengthens your ability to intentionally shift into Zone 3 when necessary.

4. The Love Reframe

When you feel stuck in fear or overwork, ask yourself: What would love choose right now? This question cuts through the noise of Zones 1 and 2, connecting you directly to your Higher Self in Zone 3.

A Healthy Home—Inside and Out

The mission of living toxic-free extends far beyond what we filter out of our air or remove from our diets. Yes, our physical homes matter deeply—but so do our inner homes.

Every day, we face a choice: will we allow fear and stress to pollute our inner environment, or will we clear space for peace, love, and creativity?

When we lead from our Higher Self, we not only detoxify our own lives. We ripple that health outward. Our families feel it. Our communities feel it. Our businesses feel it.

Imagine a world where homes are safe from meth toxins and inner homes are free from fear. Envision communities where both the outer and inner environments are clean, clear, and life-affirming.

That's the vision we promote and share at Evolve Institute.

Because when our outer homes are free of toxins and our inner homes are guided by love, we create the wholeness that allows us—and everyone around us—to truly thrive.

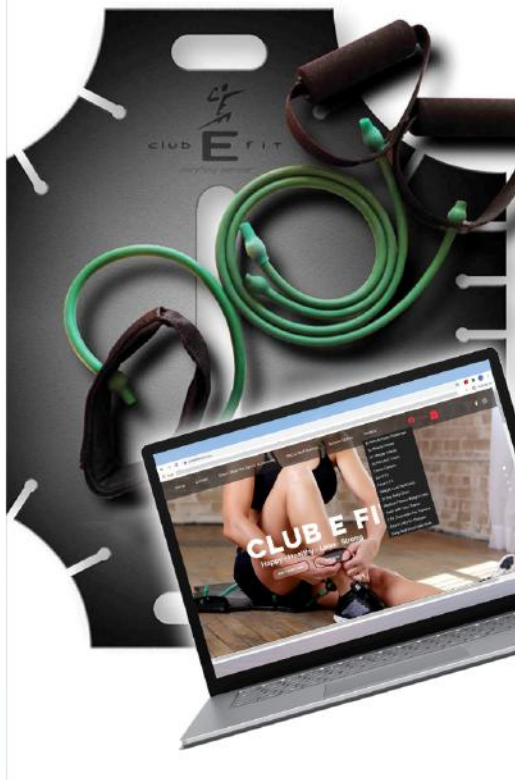
For more information on our programs, please visit Evolve.Institute



Kerry Borcharding Evolve Institute

Kerry Borcharding is a visionary leader guiding entrepreneurs and change-makers into the 5D paradigm of leadership. With 20+ years in psychology, behavioral science, and energetic intelligence, she helps leaders unlock hidden potential, align purpose with prosperity, and create meaningful impact. A master's graduate from Naropa University and animal whisperer, Kerry blends science, spirit, and nature's wisdom to inspire transformation and freedom.

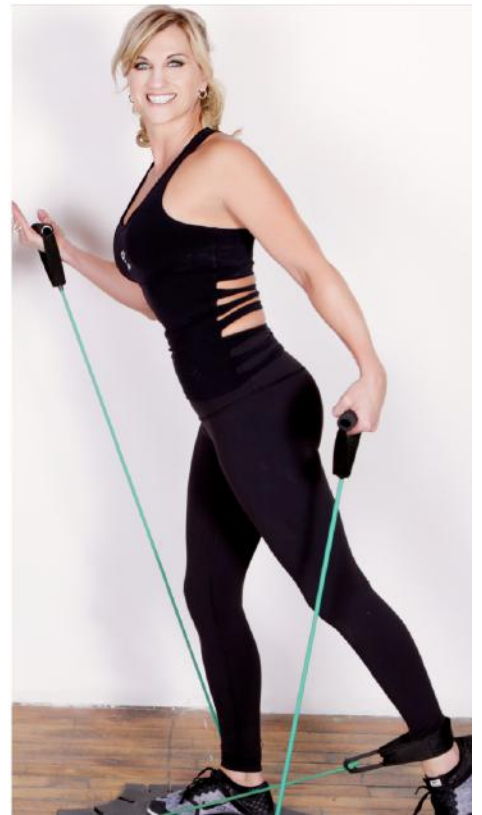
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