

Between Mountains

MAGAZINE

Magical

things can happen
when we **FEEL SAFE**

by Anna Dickson

ART SPARK

VOLUME 1

Spring Sparks

by Amy Guglielmo

Join Up!

Finding **Community**
in the ADIRONDACKS

by Jennifer Giambruno Gordon

THE HERO Who Broke:

Why **FRODO's** Failure is a
Mental Health Masterclass

by Emily Boucher

Tree Medicine

by Lorri Willett-Thatcher

ADIRONDACK

Miracles and Memories

by Brian Giebel



INTO THE GRAY

life isn't black and white.

If you see yourself in these pages, you belong here.
If you don't yet, stay awhile, you might be surprised.

We're really glad you're here!

**THE
GOODS**

The Hero Who Broke: 05
Why Frodo's Failure is a
Mental Health Masterclass
by Emily Boucher

Magical things can 07
happen when we feel safe
by Anna Dickson

Tree Medicine 10
by Lorri Willett-Thatcher

Adirondack Miracles 13
and Memories
by Brian Giebel

Art Spark, Volume 1: 20
Spring Sparks
by Amy Guglielmo

Join Up! 25
Finding Community in
the Adirondacks
by Jennifer Giambruno
Gordon

COVER IMAGE BY
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Middle Pond, Saranac Lake, NY

DISCLAIMER: The content shared in this publication should not be considered a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Mental health is complex and individual, and the opinions expressed here reflect personal experiences, interpretations, and subjective perspectives. We encourage individuals to seek personalized advice and guidance from qualified mental health professionals for their specific needs.

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Mountains**
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EDITOR'S NOTE ISSUE ONE

A heartfelt thank you to Amy Guglielmo for believing in this publication and helping bring this first issue to life. Your willingness to give your time, creativity, and voice so generously has meant more than I can properly put into words. A true artist, an incredible writer, and friend. This would not have come together the same way without you. I promise. - Damian

There's a certain kind of quiet that comes with living in the North Country.

It's not just the absence of noise, it's distance. There's a particular kind of distance that comes with living in the North Country. It's in the miles between towns. The long stretches of road. The winters that linger. The feeling that the rest of the world is happening somewhere else—farther south, faster, louder.

Between Mountains Magazine was born in that space, between connection and distance, between strength and struggle. It exists because in places like this, conversations about mental health don't always come easily. Not because they aren't needed, but because they often go unspoken. Because "getting through it" becomes the norm. Because when everything and everyone feels far away, reaching out for help can feel impossible. This publication is here to help close that distance.

Not with noise, but with honesty. With stories that reflect the real emotional landscape of this region, the kind that doesn't always make it into headlines. We believe that when one person speaks honestly, it gives someone else permission to do the same. That art can say what words sometimes can't. That resilience isn't about pretending everything is okay, it's about continuing, even when it's not.

Our mission is rooted in this place:

- To normalize conversations about mental health in communities where silence can feel easier.
- To highlight resilience without overlooking the weight people carry.
- To connect creativity with healing in a way that feels accessible and real.
- To strengthen community across distances that are both physical and emotional.
- And to support suicide prevention by reminding you that even here—especially here, you are not alone.

TSgt. Damian Battinelli, USAF (Ret.)

We hold
space
for more than
coffee.

We hold
space
for *people.*



In times when things feel overwhelming, community can be a lifeline, and no one should have to navigate that alone.

We are committed to being a safe, welcoming place where you can simply be, without judgment and without pressure. Strength lives in connection, in kindness, and in the courage to reach out or sit beside someone who needs it.

Coffee. **Connection.** Community.

Thank you for being part of our story.



VISIT

You belong here.
Always. ♥



 THE *aligned*
artist
STUDIO

164 Boynton Ave. Suite 205 Plattsburgh, NY



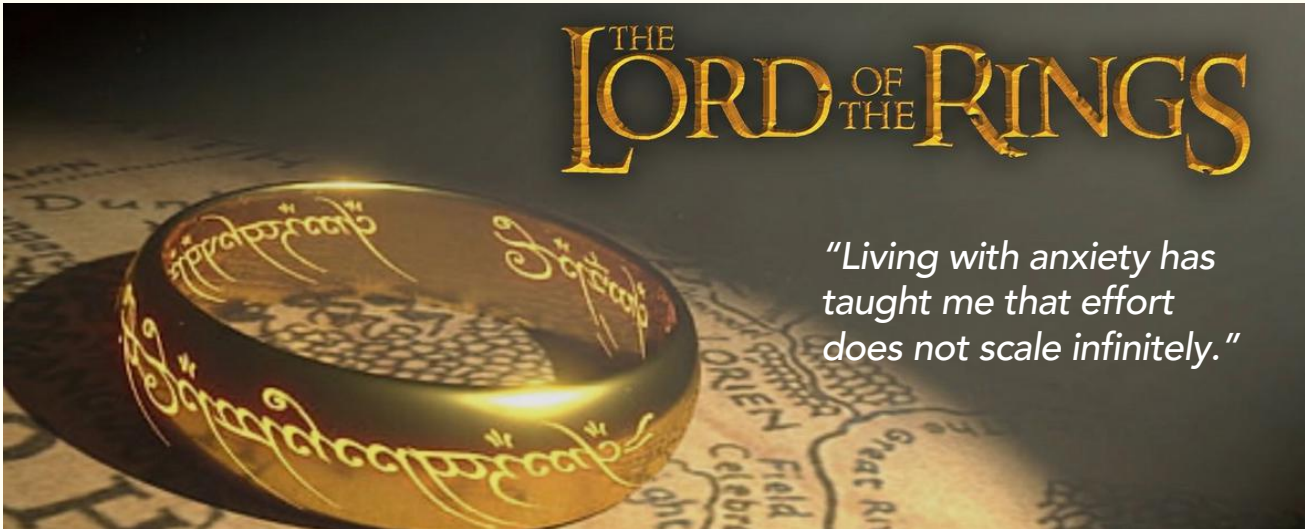
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"Living with anxiety has taught me that effort does not scale infinitely."

THE HERO Who Broke:

Why Frodo's Failure is a Mental Health Masterclass

by **Emily Boucher**

At the heart of *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien does something almost no modern fantasy story dares to do: he lets the hero fail. Frodo Baggins reaches the Crack of Mount Doom after starvation, terror, and an inhuman burden, and instead of throwing the Ring into the fire, he claims it. The moment that every heroic narrative trains us to expect as triumph becomes a



confession of collapse. Tolkien does not flinch. He allows the hero to break.

And yet the world is saved.

The Ring is destroyed only because Gollum is there—and the only reason Gollum is there at all is because mercy was shown when it seemed reckless. Bilbo spares him first. Gandalf insists that pity still has a role to play. Frodo, even when it endangers the quest, refuses the easy kill. The world is not saved by Frodo's final act of willpower, but by compassion extended long before anyone could know it would matter.



Tolkien uses this moment to quietly dismantle the story many of us were raised inside: that effort guarantees outcome, that endurance always earns reward, that pushing through will inevitably deliver the win. Frodo's collapse at Mount Doom is not a character flaw. It is the realistic endpoint of carrying something no person was ever meant to

withstand. The Ring is not a fair test of strength or discipline. It is a corrosive force that erodes agency the closer one comes to absolute power. Frodo does not fail because he is weak. He fails because no one is built to pass that final test.



This is the part of Tolkien's story that feels most psychologically honest to me. Living with anxiety has taught me that effort does not scale infinitely. There are moments when trying harder does not produce clarity or strength—it produces collapse. Systems that demand sustained perfection eventually overwhelm the nervous system carrying them. Expecting a final burst of moral or emotional precision from someone already exhausted by fear and responsibility is not resilience; it is wishful thinking disguised as virtue.



The real victory in The Lord of the Rings comes from moments of restraint that once looked naïve or inefficient. Mercy and compassion end up holding more power than strength. Tolkien offers an older moral logic, one that refuses to close the future too quickly. Mercy does not guarantee redemption, but it preserves the possibility that evil might one day undo itself. Gollum is not saved in a sentimental sense—he remains who he is—but his presence becomes the unintended consequence of pity, and that is enough.

“ Mercy does not guarantee redemption, but it preserves the possibility that evil might one day undo itself. ”

Tolkien also refuses to give us the fantasy that survival restores what was lost. After the Ring is destroyed, the story does not end in an uncomplicated celebration. The Shire is wounded. Home has been violated. Frodo returns changed in ways that cannot be undone. He cannot sleep without pain. He cannot fully enter the peace he helped secure. Victory does not erase the cost.



This refusal to offer a clean ending may be the most mentally healthy thing Tolkien does. Frodo lives, but he does not return whole. Healing, if it comes at all, is uneven and incomplete. The story does not reward him with restoration because that would diminish what he endured. Tolkien understands something we are often reluctant to accept: some burdens can be survived only with damage.

In a culture that worships performance and visible dominance, Tolkien offers a quieter warning. When power becomes the proof of goodness, goodness collapses. The world is not saved by flawless heroes or perfect execution, but by the accumulated weight of restraint—by mercy that looked wasted at the time, by choices made without any promise of payoff. Sometimes, the thing that looks like weakness is the only reason anything is saved at all. ■

Magical things can happen when we feel safe.

By **Anna Dickson**

Magical things can happen when we feel safe.

I use this statement often, referencing the brain's natural and spontaneous ability to be curious, pliable and optimistic. Those with the darkest trauma still vie for the belief that the world is actually a safe place, that love exists, and they deserve to be a part of it. I witness this phenomenon regularly in my sessions. It is when the healing happens, and it is truly magical.

My name is Anna Dickson, M.Ed. I am a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the State of New York, and an EMDRIA Certified EMDR Therapist. I have practiced in the field of Psychology for over 10 years. I have an innate curiosity for human nature and a high sensitivity to others' emotional experiences; I am inherently comfortable with human suffering and I carry a deep passion for resolving it. These qualities have led me to my work today, and propelled me to practice independently at my private practice in Upstate New York, [EMBER & ROOT modern therapy + counseling](#), established in 2021.

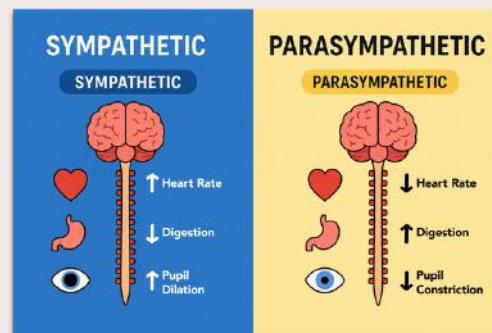
Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is the "gold standard" for trauma resolution. It is used to treat trauma-based disorders, including but not limited to Acute Stress Disorder, PTSD and

Complex PTSD, and Adjustment Disorder. It can also treat mood disorders like Anxiety and Depression, Addictions/Disordered Substance Use, the full spectrum of Dissociation, as well as Personality Disorders, which often possess a complex trauma component dating back to childhood.

“Our brain is not broken, it's been interrupted.”

My definition of trauma is simple: anything (usually an event or relationship) that has forever changed the way we see ourselves, the way we see other people and/or the world around us. As a trauma therapist, I can say one thing is for certain: we have ALL experienced trauma in our lifetime. If human suffering is universal, then trauma is, too. It is natural to experience pivotal moments in which our view of ourselves, others, or the world is deeply altered. The effects of trauma for some can be a temporary experience, and for others it can last many years without proper intervention.

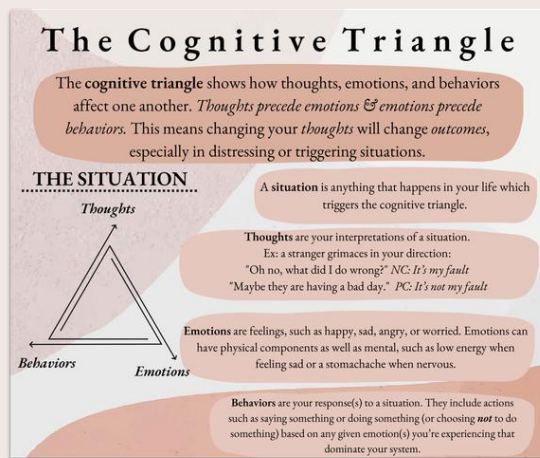
Prolonged, unresolved trauma activates the body's alarm system indefinitely. This alarm system (aptly named the Sympathetic Nervous System) is an innate survival mechanism that allows us to withstand extreme circumstances for short bursts of time. When activated for prolonged periods or at inappropriate times, it can wreak havoc on our health, compromising sleep, our digestion, our hormone production, and our brain development to name a few. Trauma can even alter the very fabric of our being: our DNA.



EMDR uses bilateral stimulation (BLS) to reduce distress and install new thoughts about the traumatic event and our relationship to it. BLS is a tactile, visual or auditory stimulant that alternates across the body's midline.

Throughout this process, we go from a deep sense of unsafety and unworthiness, to a belief that we are safe and secure, and we are worthy of healthy experiences and relationships. This is a BIG jump. It takes significant time and skill-building by the client to get there. And it actually works.

It is a fundamental belief in Psychology that experiences shape our thoughts, our thoughts shape our emotions, and our emotions shape our responses (our behaviors). If our experiences are traumatic, it is safe to say that our thoughts will turn negative, and consequently our emotions and responses will as well. For those in it, it is described as a vicious and complicated cycle that can feel impossible to break. EMDR shifts our cognitions from negative to neutral or positive, and by doing so, shifts our emotional state and our behaviors in ways that positively reinforce healthy and adaptive thought processes. The cycle inherently turns positive, like a feedback loop that consistently nourishes healthy brain development. EMDR breaks the cycle.



Process Questions

Which area of the triangle is most triggering to you? Are you noticing any patterns?

Are there any underlying beliefs about yourself that impact these patterns or modes of operating?

What has worked in the past? What hasn't?

What feels safe to try, now? With whom?

adapted from therapistaid.com

"What has happened to you?" is a question I ask every client that enters my office. Immediately, there is visceral relief I witness when they realize it isn't them, but rather a culmination of experiences leading to their internal distress. If we can fix the perception of our experiences from our past, then we can alter our present and future perceptions. Our brain is not broken, it's been interrupted. It can be cured, therefore WE can be cured.

Having negative thoughts? The short answer should be "yes," because we all have them! If you would like some interventions I use daily with my own clients, please continue reading after this article concludes.

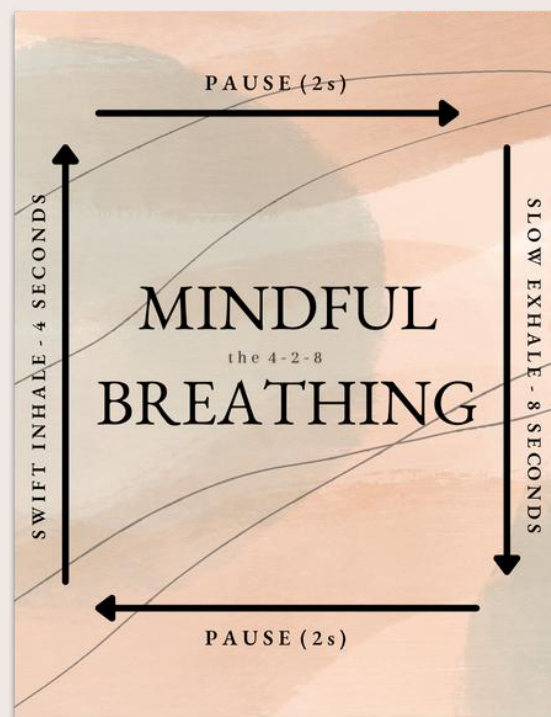
After many years of practice, I can say this with a great deal of certainty: it is not the severity of the trauma that defines prognosis or outcomes, but rather it is the level of support before, during and following the traumatic event(s). This is why some individuals do not need therapeutic intervention or EMDR to reprocess their trauma, because their brain automatically does it (this is called adaptive information processing in EMDR therapy). Others do need treatment, because the level of support received before (childhood/adolescents), during, or immediately following the event (I assess the first 4-8 weeks) was insufficient, or perhaps nonexistent. For these clients, I am creating a foundation of support in treatment even before EMDR therapy starts, to bolster their internal resources to effectively resolve their distress permanently.

Want to avoid the lasting effects of trauma? Love yourself through it. Be the support you never had. Identify your stressors, access your coping skills, know what you need and ask for help. Therapy can be preventative, too, by installing these tools for when suffering strikes again.

Magical things can happen when we feel safe. The brain can transform, evolve and heal. It literally regrows in a way that kickstarts a sense of curiosity and flexibility for the world around it. The brain is resilient, and therefore you are, too. So realistically speaking, is this magic? Or is this an untapped survival mechanism that EMDR unlocks? Is this just the REAL YOU, uncovered? As a trauma therapist, I don't just think so...I know so. ■

Anna's In-Session TIPS & TRICKS

Negative thoughts, aka negative cognitions (NCs) are sticky. They hold experiences hostage, leading to a negative self-image, a skewed perception of ourselves and our friendships, even our worldview. They take up a lot of space and make bad experiences feel exponentially worse, and the good ones disproportionately small. Examples include I'm not good enough, I'm unworthy, I'm unlovable; It's my fault, I should have done something; I'm not in control, I am weak; I'm unsafe. If your negative thoughts are overwhelming,



I invite you to try the below:

1

Take some DEEP breaths. Studies have shown that elongating your exhale can create a sense of calm inside the body. Try the 4-2-8: inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds. Do this 5-10 times. Check in with your body and identify the areas that are releasing tension. This is GOOD neurofeedback for your brain to notice a positive shift occurring.

2

Next, try containing these thoughts. Visualize a container in your mind's eye and gently place them in it. Try containing the ugliest or most triggering parts about them. Close the lid and set it aside; walk away. This exercise will take another 10+ breaths to complete.

3

Still feeling tension? Literally write down your thoughts and put them in a drawer or somewhere out of sight (contain them). Several hours later and with a calm body, read them aloud and challenge their credibility. NCs are often polarizing, meaning, they are extreme and therefore untrue (no extreme thought is true 100% of the time). Next, replace it! What is a more honest and moderate thought that feels less triggering and more accurate? Ingest this new thought with a slow, calm breath. Notice any shifts in your body.



photos & story by
Lorri Willett-Thatcher

It's a short hike. Just over 2 miles. Easily accessible and user friendly. I have hiked this trail many times, mostly when my children were little. It boasts a lovely boardwalk through the woods and bog for about a mile. There are wonderful spots to stop and observe the habitat — the sphagnum moss, pitcher plants, toads, and other visual treasures. It is quiet, except for the rhythmic sound of boots on board and birdsong. It smells of evergreen and peat and marsh. Clean, refreshing, and welcome scents. I follow this part of the path expectantly and reverently.

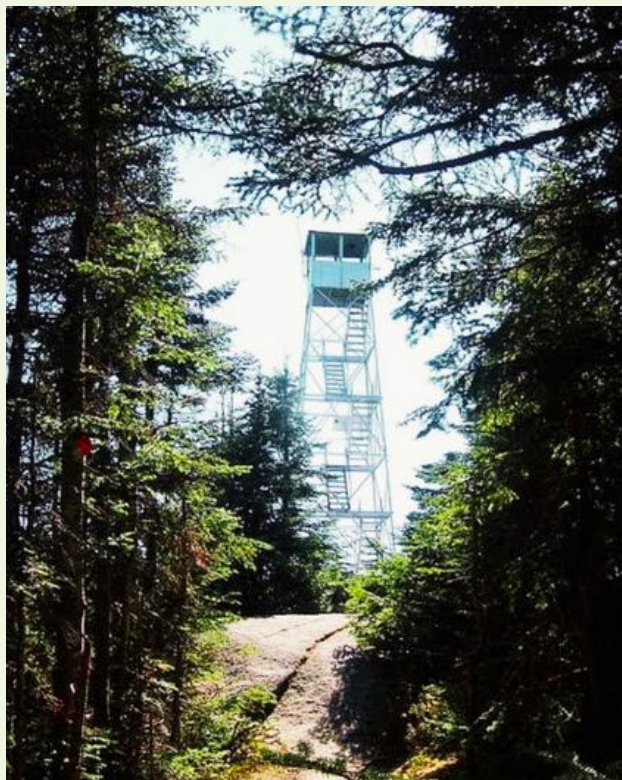
**“ The creaks of the branches,
the soft shaking sway of the
leaves and needles feed
directly into my body... ”**

The trail will then gradually wend its way through the forest and lead to an outcropping of rock. That is where we will stop and take pictures of Silver Lake and enjoy some trail mix. I anticipate that I will be winded, and that my hips will burn. But I will stay quiet about my maladies and continue on, because that is what I do in life. I put one foot in front of the other. Whether it is a 2-mile hike, or 14 miles.



Whether I am pulling myself from the trenches of grief or one of life's other many setbacks, that's what I do — Put one foot. In front. Of the other. Hiking and the trees are the medicine that I seek out when I need to feed my soul.

Hiking is my panacea and I am most at home in the trees. They are my people. Strong, gentle, keepers of the forest. They speak to me in a way that humans cannot. I am at peace when I am among the trees. Their fragrances lull me into relaxation; their trunks rough and textured, I read like braille to understand the secrets they keep. And their sound... there is nothing like it.



The creaks of the branches, the soft shaking sway of the leaves and needles feed directly into my body, easing all stress, and eliminating extraneous thought. I breathe in the sound and it travels like a healing balm through me. I swallow the scent and it nourishes the deepest parts of me.

Reaching the peak of a climb is almost a religious experience. The views suck my breath; the panorama steals my speech and stills my body. I am an explorer seeing the view before me with fresh eyes even if I have climbed these trails many times. It is in these moments that I feel the presence of something greater and know that I am part of a network of worldly goings on. I understand then, that I am one of many, and at the same time, unequivocally all my own. I am humbled by the minutiae of every detail before me and my eyes sting with the power of all that I feel. This is church. And the trees and I are the congregants. ■

YOU MATTER



Clinton County, NY Coalition to Prevent Suicide

An open coalition, serving Clinton County, that provides education and resources to prevent every possible suicide.

The goal being ZERO suicides.

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Our mission is to enrich the lives of individuals and families in the autism community by providing resources, creating opportunities for connection, and advocating for an inclusive world where everyone can thrive.

How We Help:

- Connect people with autism and their families to local resources
- Offer educational workshops and conferences on autism and related topics
- Host community events to promote inclusion and socialization
- Provide small grants to local individuals and organizations
- Partner with local organizations to increase our impact



Champlain Valley Family Center

518-561-8480

20 Ampersand Drive
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Hours:
Monday-Thursday 8:00am-8:00pm
Friday 8:00am-5:00pm

At **Champlain Valley Family Center (CVFC)**, we're dedicated to reducing the stigma around mental health and addiction. By fostering education, open dialogue, and outreach through community events, we create an environment in all of our locations where everyone feels empowered to seek help without fear of judgment. Together, we're building understanding, challenging stereotypes, and promoting healing for all.

CVFC is a private, non-profit, community-based organization. We are dedicated to providing behavioral health treatment, prevention, education, and related support programs to promote the well-being and quality of life for the residents of Clinton County, NY.

[VISIT](#)

ADIRONDACK

MIRACLES AND MEMORIES

Paddleboard photos by Rick LaRocca
photos and story by Brian Giebel



I am standing
atop a long flight of stadium-steep stairs,
overlooking the stage
of the most storied sporting event
of the previous century.

Herb Brooks Arena is named for the coach
who coaxed a confirmed miracle
out of an overmatched team of amateurs,
who defeated the unbeatable Soviets
to win Olympic ice hockey gold in 1980.

Today, I am the coach,
in charge of strength and conditioning,
for USA Luge's development teams.
It's 2016.

My lips are wrapped around a whistle,
there to identify or pacify me.
When I blow it,
teenage athletes scurry beneath,
ambitious ants building a dream.

Returning to this rink is emotionally confusing for me.
It has an unmistakable odor, an echo, an aura.
And the familiar scents and sounds scare up distant
memories:

Delusions of grandeur.
Desire for glory.
Physical sadness for a loss,
and for lost opportunities.
Inspiration, devastation, gratitude, and grief.

My whistle tweets.
Future Olympians are bounding toward me.
Their desire inspires
and reminds me.
Tears are coming.
I realize in this moment,
how much my teachers and coaches loved me.
I understand how they benefited from proximity
to my youthful energy,
untapped potential,
and yet-to-be-limited possibilities.

The last time I was here
was the first time.
It was the summer of 1989.
I was barely 17.
Listening to Def Leppard, NWA, and Tom Petty.

For the second straight summer,
I'd been invited by USA Hockey
to play and compete,
at an Olympic training facility,
with 64 of the top 16-17-year-old hockey athletes in the country.
Another 64 were in Michigan.
The top 128 players went to Colorado Springs
to fight for spots on junior national teams.

Lake Placid is hallowed ground for a Cold War kid who loved hockey.
The 'Miracle on Ice' was THE event
that informed my goals and dreams.
It made me feel more secure somehow.
Perhaps it was the first moment I felt pride in my country.
As a 7-year-old suburbanite with a bowl haircut,
I could name every player on the team.

As a skinny 17-year-old with acne,
the opportunity to compete on the same ice
where my childhood heroes overcame impossible odds
allowed me to believe,
for the first time,
that my own implausible dreams
may actually be within reach.

I hadn't healed completely
from a fractured wrist
and subsequent surgery.
My nose was broken.
I was out of shape and weak.
And my vision was mysteriously faltering,
due to an undiagnosed eye condition
called Stargardt's Disease.

But I had a lot going for me.
My braces were finally off after five crooked years.
Following an adequate performance in Michigan the previous summer,
college coaches compelled me to leave Colorado.
I'd find better competition and scholarship offers
if I attended prep school out east, they told me.

**" I could see myself
shutting down,
surrendering,
shrinking. The costs
of abuse were
escalating. I had to
leave. "**



I'd repeat my junior year. Grow a bit. Get a great education, and escape a dysfunctional family. After my alcoholic father suckerpunched an older parent, some longtime friends started distancing themselves from me. I could see myself shutting down, surrendering, shrinking. The costs of abuse were escalating. I had to leave.

Playing in Lake Placid was just the beginning. I was excited. Almost free. And I wouldn't be alone. There were several other players from Colorado coming, including my friend and teammate Jeremy. We knew each other from state all-star teams and our juggernaut high school squad, ranked by USA Today as one of the country's top twenty. I played center. Jeremy, a year younger, was my right wing.

He had white hair and bright eyes and laughed easily. No one disliked him. He was wise or kind like one who'd learned from loss, and had the confidence of someone who'd accomplished something, even though he'd only recently started driving.



I think of him whenever I visit Lake Placid. Because of the news I heard upon arriving in the northeast, my first glimpses of the Adirondack Mountains and Lake Champlain are forever linked to his memory. So are my first proud strides in the legendary 1980 rink.

The night before we left, as he drove to visit the girlfriend he loved, a large truck collided with his car, killing Jeremy instantly.

Whenever I return to Herb Brooks Arena, a mix of images and emotions return. I can hear the historic roar of national pride and longing from the spectators pleading for victory in 1980. I see the faces of athletes celebrating in joyful disbelief. A sense of personal accomplishment and nostalgia mixes with profound sadness.

Back in '89, I performed horribly. I missed my friend and his 'celebration of life' ceremony. The coaches and scouts weren't impressed. By the end of the week, I was a late-blooming athlete who had somehow peaked early. Hockey became less important to me. The spaces and practices that had, until then, provided an outlet for my anger and allowed me to express myself creatively no longer moved me. I wanted to flee, never return, and erase the memory.

" Looking at water and exercising outside made me feel more complete, more connected, and competent, in mind and body. "

A decade later, I was invited to visit the North Country by my Colorado College classmate Amy. Still confused by East Coast geography, being close to Lake Placid couldn't concern me. But a place called Plattsburgh didn't sound appetizing. I hoped it wasn't like Watertown or Poughkeepsie. Car-less and living in New York City, I accepted, reluctantly.

Two college friends came along. One was our lone witness when, fifteen months later, we secretly married at City Hall during a long Tuesday lunch hour, before I returned to work at 60 Wall Street.



I tell people I fell in love with Amy and Lake Champlain simultaneously, as if they are separate, disparate entities. But it is actually impossible to love Amy without also falling for the place she loves so deeply, because her essence is inseparable from these natural surroundings. This place made her. Amy was born on Plattsburgh Air Force Base after the Vietnam War brought her parents north from Queens. She was raised in the Lake City by lake people doing lake things. Establishing a more permanent life in the region became increasingly more appealing. But how would we make a living? We were handcuffed to Manhattan by Morgan Stanley. I'd been promoted, and the future seemed promising, but I was sleep-deprived, depressive, and unhealthy. I had headaches and difficulty reading.

In 2006, my ophthalmologist insisted I see a specialist immediately. When I guessed it was a brain tumor, he refused to remark. So when I was diagnosed with genetic macular degeneration and told I could be blind within 18 months, I was actually relieved.

Meanwhile, every visit to the Adirondacks reminded me of Jeremy, reinforcing my belief that life is brief, health cannot be bought, and nothing is guaranteed. Doctors eventually predicted my sight might last long enough to be productive at work until forty. But then what?

When Amy asked, "What do you want to do now that might not be possible later?" An eye disease allowed me an excuse to answer honestly. art and history. The Hermitage Museum in St.



My mind raced, and my body ached from sitting at a desk 70 hours per week. My brain wasn't working properly. I knew instinctively that moving my body and playing outside would make me healthy and happy. And I still thought of myself as an athlete.

So I quit.

I took writing classes while Amy finished some books. Then we set out to see. First, Mexico and Costa Rica, to learn to surf. Next, Utah for films and skiing. We drove the Pacific Coast Highway and visited friends and family. Then, Europe for Petersburg was a highlight, but nothing compared to a full summer on the shore of Lake Champlain.

We inhabited a haunted cabin for four months. Golf and watersports were invigorating. Looking at water and exercising outside made me feel more complete, more connected, and competent, in mind and body. And athletic exploration of the Adirondack Coast, all of our sporting places and opportunities, made me excited about the people possibilities. We met kind folks, and flourished creatively. I sold some stories to magazines.



In September 2008, after seven months traveling, we drove back to New York City. I had interviews on the books the following week. But Lehman Brothers went bankrupt as we approached Albany. By the time we returned to our apartment on 17th Street, the financial crisis was exploding. The city was more noticeably loud and filthy, and there was an indefinite hiring freeze on Wall Street.



“ And now, 37 years after praying to avoid this place and the painful memories forever, there is nowhere I’d rather be. ”

Within months, we abandoned Manhattan for life on Lake Champlain, seasonally, but permanently.

I am still in awe of the geographical beauty of the North Country. And I’m grateful for the vast opportunities to explore this place, to refresh my perspective, and challenge my potential, athletically and artistically.

The Adirondack Coast moves me, both literally and figuratively. There is always a new season or a new sport for discovery. There are new people to meet and communities that form around activity.

I wrote an article for Adirondack Life that introduced some neighbors to stand-up paddling. We were among the first to wake surf on Lake Champlain, after experimenting on a neighbor’s old surfboard.

Thanks to technology and a growing roster of adventurous artist/athletes, there are always new chances to play and grow. Windsurfing became kiteboarding, which spawned wingfoiling and downwinding. I’ve seen this region by hiking, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, surfing, skiing, and even bobsledding!

And now, 37 years after praying to avoid this place and the painful memories forever, there is nowhere I’d rather be. Waking up in awe is always life-affirming. The Adirondacks inspire the practices I pursue, the art and athletics that make me whole and happy. I reconnected with Jeremy’s stepfather. Amy and I are part of an active and creative community. And revisiting these places and memories is now a good thing. That is the new miracle in the Adirondacks, for me.

So, I’m writing a series of features to celebrate some local artist/athletes I find inspiring. I’ll be exploring the art of sport and how places inspire our athletic practices in the North Country. The subjects include an Olympic bobsled pilot, a high-flying retired vice-principal, and many more. Stay tuned, please. ■

988
SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE

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HALF PAGE

Art Spark, Volume 1

Spring Sparks

with Amy Guglielmo

Dear Reader,

I'm an artist. That means I make stuff. I'm an art educator. I teach children and adults how to use their imagination to express themselves creatively. I'm a public arts advocate. I create murals and share news about artists and art happenings in my community. I hope the things and people I talk about will inspire you to go out and participate in the arts.

Just looking at art offers mental, emotional, and cognitive benefits, including stress relief, increased pleasure, and enhanced brain activity. Engaging with art can alleviate anxiety, improve mood, and foster feelings of satisfaction, calmness, and joy. Activities and opportunities are all around you. Go see a show, doodle, paint, write a poem, or craft with clay.

I'm writing this column to give everyone permission to use their hands, to go outside and play and explore, to make messes and mistakes, and to use art as a tool to voice their feelings. In each article, I will share the story of a local artist or artisan and an "art spark" to encourage you to practice art in some way every day.



***"All children are born artists.
The problem is to remain an
artist as we grow up."
— Pablo Picasso***



Lizzie Girard



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*"To practice any art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake. So do it."
— Kurt Vonnegut.*

photos provided by Lizzie Girard
story by **Amy Guglielmo**



For spring, I chose an artist who celebrates nature in her work. My first “star” artist is a friend and a good human who inspires me to grow through art and connection with nature. Lizzie Girard’s work is fascinating. I started watching videos of her work during the pandemic, when she began making natural dyes from plants and flowers in her garden in Morrisonville, New York . I watched in awe as she used her dyes to create botanical fabric art, including tea towels, bags, quilts, and clothing. As Lizzie grew and harvested colors to make her art, she shared her experiments like a mad scientist, testing everything from avocado pits to indigo to find new hues. Lizzie’s process eventually evolved into printmaking and more incredible palettes, patterns, and projects. She sparked my imagination and my curiosity.

This is my conversation with Lizzie about her art story.





Where did art start for you?

I did not grow up around artists. I was always a creative kid. I always loved to draw. I always loved to color, but I didn't have another artist in my house. Art was encouraged; that's something that was lucky for me, my parents always encouraged creativity and saw it as a worthwhile thing to pursue. I know that I have creative people in my extended family. My dad was very creative. He was a photographer, but he died when I was little, so I didn't really know his art. But my grandfather was very artistic, and my grandmother was a wonderful seamstress, and so I had creation around me.

You use fabrics, and you do a lot of sewing and stitching, and that's a real part of your practice. Did you sew with your grandmother? Or was it something that you witnessed?

She made us a lot of clothing. She was alive until I was about 13, and my brothers and I would spend a week at their house every summer, and she would always have us pick up knitting needles or let us learn how to cross-stitch to keep us busy. And then she also made a little sampler quilt with me, and she always wanted us to learn the basics of sewing and

be comfortable with that. So that's kind of a fond memory of her. I always laughed because she was really perfect with everything she could. And I always think, oh, man, Grandma would roll over in her grave if she saw my stitches and seams.

How does nature inspire your art? Can you talk about the connection to natural dyeing?

Nature is just a huge part of my life. I've just always been an outdoor person who feels my super best, sitting in the sun, gardening. Natural dyeing has been a great gardening inspiration, because now that I'm more familiar with what plants give different colors, I've been able to grow them in my own garden and be a part of the whole process where I save the seeds, and then I plant them, and they grow, and I process them, and then make something with it. It's a beautiful process, but what I also love about natural dyeing is that it can capture the essence of a landscape. Each area has its own colors. My parents moved a couple of years ago, so the property that I grew up on, I like gathered barks and pine needles and roses and things that grew on that property. And then I made up fabric swatches with those colors, and then made a wall hanging that represents that place.



Do you think that being in the Adirondacks creates a palette for you?

Yeah, definitely. We're so lucky that we can just access nature so quickly and we have the lake and I can take a hike and have it be special, but I'm also looking around in a different way to see, oh, maybe

I'll cook these pine cones or, oh, I wonder what these mushrooms would do, and it's just really accessible where we live to be in that natural world.

Tell me how you got into natural dying?

When I first learned about natural dying, I also kind of latched onto it during the pandemic because it was kind of a nice time to find resources online. I joined Instagram at this amazing time, where people were really friendly to me, and I could just ask a lot of questions, and they would point me towards books that they really liked. Most of my learning came from books from the library, but then there were also a lot of free classes during the pandemic. And I did all these free natural dye workshops that people just offered, and it created this whole community of people that then started sharing their artwork, and you made a lot of connections and learned a lot because we were all just kind of home and trying to make each other feel good and destressed. And I learned a lot that way.

I remember seeing pictures of colorful pots boiling in your kitchen. Do you ever feel like a mad scientist making experiments?

Yeah, I felt a little bit like a mad scientist when I started, because it'd be like, well, what does this plant do? I would find anything and just throw it in a pot and see what happens. When I first learned about natural dye, I read an article about how you can dye with avocado pits and skins. I collected a bunch, put them all in a pot, and made this lovely coral, girly pink. I've never been a person who loves pink, but I love avocado pink.

How did your current process for making prints happen?



What I'm doing now probably started during the pandemic, when we were all home and had more time. I picked up block printing because it was really affordable and easy, and something I could just do in a corner of my basement. But then I just immediately fell in love with it. I had done a little bit of printmaking in college, but more like etching metal plates. I hadn't really done a lot of carving. And also, the pandemic was super stressful, right? So sitting down and carving was extremely therapeutic. It's such a slow, fantastic, satisfying process.

How do you deal with something coming out a little off or imperfect?

Most of the time, I find ways to make something out of a mistake or to just be okay with it. Like, this isn't perfect, it's fine. If it's something that I want to sell and, like, the zipper is a little bit crooked, I wouldn't sell it. So there is a level of perfection when you're



trying to sell something. I feel like it does have to be a little more perfect, but overall, I'm pretty comfortable when things are messy and askew and don't go quite right. And I kind of like the beauty of that.

All artists have creative struggles, but you're an artist who's also battling some health issues. How does art help you?

I've been thinking a lot about how art is therapeutic, but it also kind of brings me back to myself. And you kind of lose your sense of self and purpose when you can't work, or you can't do activities you usually do, but then, my mom asked me to make her a wall hanging,

and it just was like, yeah, I can't do that. And then I started with a print, and then I put it on fabric, and then I colored with the natural dyes, and those moments bring me back to myself, that excitement of making something, putting it together. And you're like, oh, yeah, this is who you are, Lizzie. You're coming back to yourself. It really pulls me into a better mindset in a better direction. If I can find something I can do, I'm thankful that I have art in my life; it kind of pulls you out of those dark spots.

Any advice for people who want to try to experiment with natural dyes or art in general?

There's a book called *Make Ink: A Forager's Guide to Natural Inkmaking* by Jason Logan. He's really inspiring to me because he just walks around industrial places picking up rust or goes in the orchard and picks leaves, and then he makes ink out of those.

I want people to feel like art is accessible. It doesn't have to be hard. You can start with small things that don't have to be intricate and complicated to be beautiful. Natural dyeing can be as easy as just finding a natural thing, taking some bark, throwing it in a pot with water, and seeing what happens. ■



Now you try!

How to grow through art and connect with nature...

- Step 1:** Turn off your phone.
- Step 2:** Go outside! Find a path in the woods or space in your backyard.
- Step 3:** Notice the smells, colors, and sounds.
- Step 4:** Collect a few objects. Find a rainbow of colors.
- Step 5:** Sketch your items or make a sculpture.
- Step 6:** Spend some time with your creation. (You can snap a photo!)
- Step 7:** Return your objects to nature.
- Step 8:** Repeat as needed.

Join Up!

Finding Community in the ADIRONDACKS

photos and story by [Jennifer Giambruno Gordon](#)

It's a beautiful early spring evening in the Adirondacks, and I'm singing at the weekly music jam session at Whitcomb's Arts. Everyone else in the room is singing too. Whatever your instrument or skill level, this is a wonderful group to get involved with.

In fact, the Adirondacks region has many of these local options to connect with others with similar interests. After visiting and talking with many people who are a part of this, I am impressed with the availability of these opportunities.

The Whitcomb Arts building is right next to the Whallonsburg Grange, in Essex County, NY. Driving down from Plattsburgh, I figured that I would quietly observe and take notes. When I first walk into the room, the regular members greet me warmly and immediately make a space for me in the circle. Once everyone is seated and set up, they pass around a copy of their regular playlist and invite me to join in the music-making, or I can just sit and enjoy.

Most of the members play the



guitar. One guitarist also has a pocket trumpet. One musician primarily plays the electronic keyboard, as well as a flute. They all have different levels of experience and abilities, but they welcome everyone. The very first jam session was organized by Cheryl Blanchard at the Paine Memorial Library in Willsboro. Then, Barry Goldstein and Mary-Nell Bachman brought the sessions to the Whallonsburg Grange during the Covid lockdown. They've been jamming at the Whitcomb's Arts building since its renovation a few years ago.

Barry has enjoyed developing the skill of playing by ear and harmonizing with the other musicians. Singer Thistle Tulla

Carson, who has been coming for the past few months, also loves the harmonies and the feeling of community that this group gives her.

Tom Duca, a guitarist who has been coming to the jam session for a couple of years, says that playing with other people is "magic." Everyone has a chance to pick a song to play. Most choose a song from the regular playlist, but a few have some different songs, and everyone is happy to accommodate each other's choice. I even get a chance to pick a song, and go with "Wagon Wheel." Tom Duca, who kindly turns his stand with the stack of sheet music and lyrics towards me so I can sing the entire song. I end up

singing along with most of the other songs as well, notably,

“Let it Be,” which, according to jammer Heather Maxey, “the whole world heard.” I nod in agreement when she says that, because I could definitely hear everyone’s heart in their instruments and their voices. The very next choice is almost completely the opposite, “Bad Moon Rising.” I am inspired by the way the group seamlessly adjusts to each song, and I definitely feel the magic that Tom was describing.



The joy from that session stays with me all the way back to Plattsburgh, and I marvel that this is not the only jam session in the area. The Jay Entertainment and Music Society, JEMS, has a jam session that has been going on for roughly fifteen years. Both have a warm and supportive environment, and both meet on Thursdays: JEMS from 7 pm-9 pm and Whitcomb’s Arts from 6:30 pm-8:30 pm

Normally, the JEMS jam session meets at the Amos and Julia Ward Theater in Jay, NY, but tonight, due to a repair project, they have had to temporarily move their weekly sessions to the Wells Memorial Library.

The JEMS group also has a regular playlist and starts the evening with an energizing rendition of “Folsom Prison Blues.” I sit next to Connie Miller, a guitarist and former board member. She has been a part of the sessions for about twelve years and started by simply sitting in and listening. She then explains how, in addition to forming friendships, she has learned so much from the other musicians over the years.

Fifteen years of regular meetings is pretty impressive, and Connie

ascribes the success of this community to everyone deciding to make the dates and times of the meetings structured and consistent. Guitarist Jim Gordon, who has been attending for the past couple of years, says that this group is the most tolerant group that he has ever been a part of. Several other members praise Connie for always being encouraging.

Both groups are well into the groove of people who have played together for a while, but they always have room for more. Members of both groups voiced the hope that I would attend the sessions regularly in the future.

The music community is not the only thriving community in the area. Artist Mac MacDevitt started the SpeakEazy storytelling events at Whitcomb’s Arts a few years ago. Mac became involved in the art of storytelling while living in Chicago, and he wanted to continue telling stories when he and his wife moved to Essex County, NY.

After some time at Whitcomb’s Arts, the event moved to Snowfort Books in Westport. Mac’s friend, Loree Burns, facilitated Silent Reading events at Snowfort, so it was an obvious choice for Mac to move the event there.

Adam Robinson, along with his wife, Amy, established the bookstore in 2025. They love that the group meets regularly in their space; it is one of their most popular regular events. Adam is full of praise for how easy it is for them to host. He says that Mac takes care of it all by providing both the sound equipment and a positive environment. Many people who have attended the SpeakEazy events have attended other events at Snowfort and have become regular customers.

“ The joy from that session stays with me all the way back to Plattsburgh...”

Moreover, Adam emphasizes how Mac lives his motto of being “obnoxiously supportive.” There is no obligation to perform, but Adam has witnessed what happens when people feel really good about sharing their story. “It’s been great for us,” he says.

It's great for everyone, because as Mac points out, "Every story is a perfect story."

The SpeakEasy events happen on the fourth Wednesday of the month at Snowfort Books, but they also occur on the second Wednesday of the month at Old Soul in Plattsburgh, NY. Alex Clark met Mac at an event in Jay and subsequently attended one of Mac's storytelling events. Alex wanted to establish a regular SpeakEasy event in Plattsburgh and found a home for it at Old Soul Design Shop and Bar on Margaret Street.



I arrive at Old Soul for a SpeakEasy event before the start time of 7 pm. There is a small crowd milling around, and Alex takes to the stage to remind people to put their names on the list if they want to share. There is no experience necessary, and both Alex and Mac restate how "obnoxiously supportive" this space is. To keep the momentum, there is a time limit, and Mac rings a bell to let the storytellers know when their time is coming to an end.

The audience is as important as the storytellers because, as Mac explains, people adjust their stories in real time according to the audience's reactions. Alex loves the events because he likes to "make people laugh," but at the same time, he knows how "therapeutic" sharing stories can be. Most likely because Mac is committed to ensuring that the events are always a "safe space" for the storytellers. Mac characterizes the story as a "gift" that people give the audience. And

even though the two groups are completely different, I hear Mac echo what Barry Goldstein said: that people who regularly attend these groups refine their skills, in storytelling and in music-making, respectively.

Old Soul owner Kt Teaney has really enjoyed providing the space for the event. She has learned so much about the local community members from the stories that they have told. These are "real people with real stories," she says, and "through their stories, everyone learns how to share themselves and express themselves, and make themselves vulnerable." Best of all, though, is how easy it is to access these events in both Westport and Plattsburgh: just show up, and as Mac reiterates, "no judgment."

Not only are there open and welcoming events for music and storytelling in the Adirondacks, events that use the arts to connect people and uplift people, but there are also spaces to use the body to support overall well-being. Since January of this year, Nicole Emmons has been generously volunteering her time to teach yoga at the rotunda on the top floor of Plattsburgh's city hall.

Originally from Albany, Nicole lived for ten years in New York City, working in film. She began her yoga studies at Baby Cobra. She moved to Plattsburgh in 2025 to start her Master's in counseling and wanted to create a community both to meet new people and to explore the benefits of movement-knowledge that she could use to help her future clients.

" For anyone looking to meet new people, develop their skills, or just feel better in general, these events are a great way to do so. "

Nicole is especially interested in the idea of accessibility of third spaces, places outside of work and home where people gather. Third spaces have been diminishing in recent history, especially since the Covid pandemic lockdown.

Nicole offers two classes on Wednesdays: 12 pm to 12:45 pm is chair yoga, and 1 pm to 1:45 pm is the regular session. It was important to Nicole to offer chair yoga as it provides people with limited or different mobilities an opportunity for movement.



As I am waiting for the regular yoga session to begin, Nicole sets up the meditation music and chats with the attendees. We begin the class, and Nicole guides us through the poses at a calm and measured pace. By the end of the class, I feel relaxed and centered, both in body and mind.

Julia Roth, who has been attending regularly since January, put to words what I was thinking about Nicole’s easy, pressure-free pace. Lynn Johnson, who has a summer home in Willsboro, has not been able to attend all of the classes but makes it a point to come when she can, as she loves the beautiful space where the class is held.

To get the classes started, Nicole reached out to Bianca Lynch at the city’s community development office. As part of community development, Bianca is eager to increase recreation activities and opportunities in the city, so she was more than happy to partner with Nicole to offer the yoga classes. Bianca prioritizes accessibility. To register for the yoga class, there is a simple Google form to fill out on the city’s Facebook page.

Bianca hopes to see the classes offered for the foreseeable future. She says it has been “nice to see people show up consistently,” and she says that’s because of the atmosphere that Nicole has established, how people chat before and after, and how Nicole has created a class that is both consistent and sustainable. “People crave connection,” Bianca says, and “having people around” all participating together makes us all more likely to keep coming routinely.

Connection, community, accessibility, and safety—these are the goals for all of the volunteers who run these events throughout the North Country. For anyone looking to meet new people, develop their skills, or just feel better in general, these events are a great way to do so. ■

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