



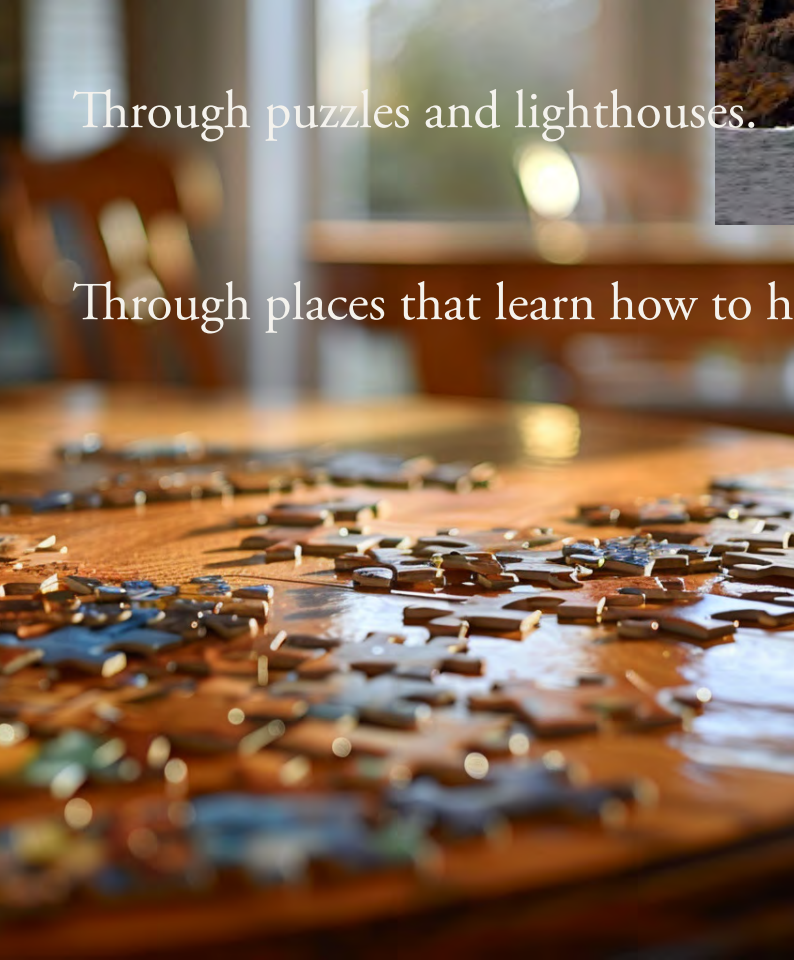
Grassroots Alchemy Letters

February 2026

Barbara — The Steady Work of Belonging. Friendship Cottage.

Story by Lynette Johnson

Stories that support eldercare services at Friendship Cottage.



Some lives unfold quietly.

Through kitchens and conversations.

Through puzzles and lighthouses.

Through places that learn how to hold us.

WHY BARBARA. WHY NOW.

This February, as our community moves closer than ever to securing Friendship Cottage, I wanted you to meet someone whose life helps us understand what this place truly holds.

Barbara's story unfolds the way many meaningful lives do — across seasons of work, in conversations overheard, and in rooms where people gather and return the next day.

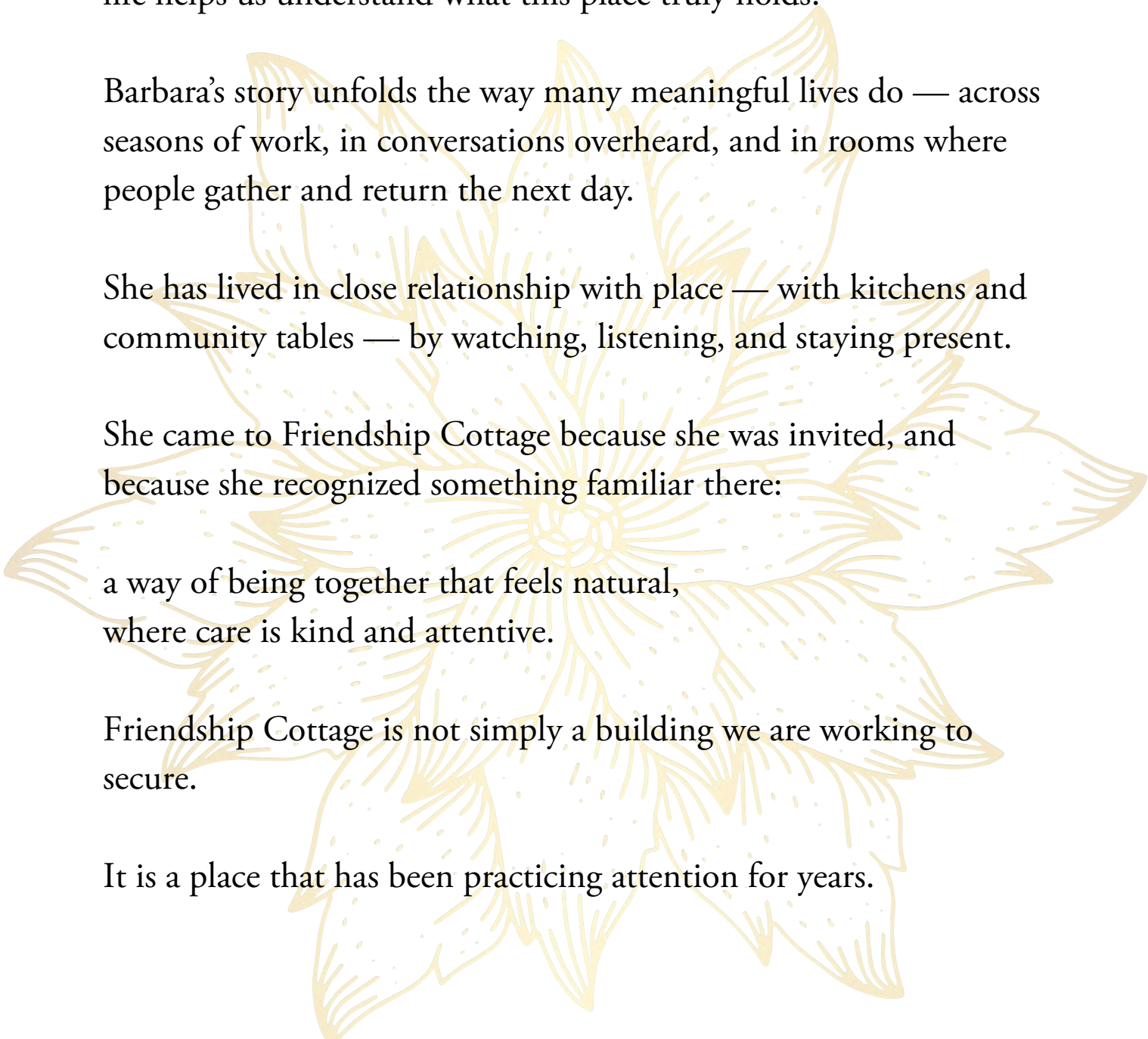
She has lived in close relationship with place — with kitchens and community tables — by watching, listening, and staying present.

She came to Friendship Cottage because she was invited, and because she recognized something familiar there:

a way of being together that feels natural,
where care is kind and attentive.

Friendship Cottage is not simply a building we are working to secure.

It is a place that has been practicing attention for years.



WHERE BELONGING BEGINS

Place remembered long before it was named

Hi, I am Barbara. I was born in Natick, Massachusetts.

But Maine has always lived inside me.

I spent my summers in Cape Neddick at my grandparents' small cottage — a place our family returned to, year after year, beginning in the 1920s. It was modest and familiar. Nothing fancy. Just steady.

Days slowed there and time felt less managed. No one asked much of you beyond showing up.

It was a place where everyone belonged.

You didn't question it.

You simply knew where you were.

Looking back, I understand that something took root in those summers — an understanding that belonging is felt.

Some places hold a family so steadily, you don't realize they are shaping you until much later.

THE STORY WE BELIEVE FIRST

How imagination becomes belonging

My brother Nick was nine years older than I was. One summer, he told me that the Nubble Lighthouse belonged to our family.

For a few years, I believed him completely.

That lighthouse was ours.

A childhood truth held without question. A kind of ownership that required nothing but imagination and trust.

It still makes me smile when I think about it.

What I understand now is sometimes we claim a place long before it claims us back.

Some stories stay with us because they made us feel we belonged.

And often, that feeling is what shapes us most.

WHERE I STAYED

When a place becomes yours

Later, I moved to Maine with a friend and her family, settling in Blue Hill.

I never left.

At first, I didn't think of it as a decision. I simply stayed. One season became the next. The town became familiar. The roads stopped needing directions.

Over time, I realized I had lived here longer than anywhere else. Longer than any other address, or any chapter that came before.

This is my home.

It isn't something I chose all at once.

But it's something I've always known.

Sometimes you recognize home before you call it that.

You begin to understand that place and person grow alongside one another.

And over time, both learn how to hold what matters.

BEFORE IT WAS FRIENDSHIP COTTAGE

A place that already knew how to nourish

I live just down the street from Friendship Cottage.

Many years before it carried that name, the building was renovated into a bakery and restaurant called: The Left Bank.

I watched it change, day by day, as walls opened and rooms took shape. It was clear the building was becoming something meant to gather people.

When it finally opened, I walked over and asked if they needed help.

They did.

I didn't overthink it. One shift led to another. Days found their rhythm.

I stayed for ten years.

Looking back, I can see that the building and I were learning something similar — how to nourish and make space for others, and how to keep showing up.

Some places discover their purpose over time.

So do people.

WHAT I LEARNED IN THE KITCHEN

Attention expands a life

I did nearly every job at The Left Bank, except waiting tables.

Eventually, I became a seasoned baker — working with bread in enormous proportions, chopping loaves, baking in heat and quiet.

Recently, I found an old handwritten recipe from those days — Sour Cream Chocolate Cake. When I saw it, memories came rushing back. A piece of my own history returned to my hands.

College students home for the summer worked alongside me — kids from Cornell, Harvard, Dartmouth. While I baked, I listened to their conversations drifting through the room.

I became a seasoned eavesdropper.

You learn a lot when you're quiet and no one realizes you're listening.

Their stories widened my world far beyond that small bakery in Blue Hill.

Paying attention does that.

It stretches the edges of your life without you even noticing.

A WIDER WORLD ARRIVES

Listening as participation

The Left Bank was never just a bakery. It was a gathering place.

There was a small stage inside the café that welcomed musicians — from Arlo Guthrie to The Persuasions. I liked to call it my free music theater.

Music has a way of closing the distance between people. You hear someone else's story and, for a moment, it feels like your own.

I worked.

I listened.

I paid attention.

The kitchen taught me how to notice what was happening around me — not just the bread rising in the ovens, but the conversations drifting through the room, the energy of a crowd, the way people gather when they feel at ease.

It wasn't only about baking.

It was about being present in the middle of something alive.

WHAT SCALE TAUGHT ME

When the work grows larger

After ten years at The Left Bank, I moved to Shaw's grocery store, where I worked nearly twenty years — again as a baker.

The work was different there. Faster and more structured. The goal was consistency and volume — making sure there was enough for everyone.

I learned how systems operate. How timing matters and how many people depend on the work being done reliably, day after day.

Scale feeds people. And it does that well.

But over time, I began to notice something else.

The larger the operation, the harder it becomes to notice small shifts — how someone is feeling, how they walk into a room compared to yesterday.

It isn't because people don't care.

It's because attention has limits.

And that distinction matters.

FRIENDSHIP COTTAGE ARRIVES

When scale allows for attention

After The Left Bank closed, the building wasn't finished with its work.

I watched from down the street as it changed again — this time with care and intention.

When Friendship Cottage took shape there, it felt familiar. As if the building already understood what it meant to hold people.

And this time, the scale was different.

Small enough to notice and to pause. Small enough to pay attention.

Eventually, a close friend of mine became a daily visitor at Friendship Cottage. At a time when companionship and support were deeply needed, this place offered both.

My friend spent several years there, playing her favorite game of cribbage. I was never especially drawn to cribbage myself. I preferred watching it.

What mattered most was being together.
Here, attention wasn't limited by volume.
It was practiced, person by person.

SAYING YES

Belonging, chosen

After my friend passed away, Anne, the Director of Friendship Cottage, continued to invite me to gatherings and activities — to simply come and be.

She was persistent in the best way.

Sometimes I would walk down the street and join in.
Sometimes I would hesitate.

At some point, I realized I didn't want to miss it.

I had spent years noticing from a distance.
Now I wanted to sit at the table.

I wanted to be there.

So I said yes.

Belonging often begins with an invitation.

It deepens with each return.

BELONGING, LIVED

Company without demand

I love the Friday cookouts at Friendship Cottage, when the grill is going and people gather outside. The food is good.

Even though, officially, my favorite food is cookies.

There is something easy about those afternoons — conversations moving in and out, chairs pulled a little closer, someone always keeping an eye on who needs what.

Friendship Cottage takes care of people in ways that matter. They offer support when someone needs help walking or sitting. They help with bathing and medication. They notice when something feels different.

And they respond before you have to ask.

It is comprehensive care, but it never feels overwhelming.

You can arrive as you are.

And someone will be paying attention.

Sometimes that is all a person needs.

WHAT PUZZLES HAVE TAUGHT ME

Patience, humor, and release

I love doing puzzles, especially with other people.

Over the years, puzzles have taught me a lot about how we share space.

Some people fit pieces together quickly, confident they've found the right place.

Some hold onto their pieces, certain they belong only to them.

And sometimes, after hours of careful work, someone decides to take the whole puzzle apart.

Now *that* is a test.

You learn patience.

You learn flexibility.

You learn that being right isn't always the point.

Mostly, you learn that finishing isn't the only measure of success.

Being together is.

BEFORE YOU KNOW YOU NEED IT

How community returns us to ourselves

The people I meet at Friendship Cottage feel familiar in a particular way.

Some you see every day.

Some you're not quite sure you're ready to see again — which still makes me smile.

But most are people you care about.

Community isn't always something you realize you're missing.

Sometimes it simply returns you to yourself.

Belonging travels beyond the walls of any building.
It lives in the choice to show up.

In closing, I want people to know if you choose to stand with Friendship Cottage, you already have your first friend here.

And that friend is me.



Barbara's story is not only hers.

It belongs to Blue Hill. To Hancock County. To every family who may one day need a place where attention is practiced with care.

Because of this community, as of February 27th, we have now secured \$519,000 toward purchasing Friendship Cottage.

Our mission is to protect the kind of place Barbara described — one where scale allows for attention and belonging deepens with each return.

The work continues: sustaining daily operations, supporting families, and ensuring that Friendship Cottage remains a place where people can arrive as they are.

If you feel moved to stand with us, you are already part of this living story.

Places like this endure in the hands of many.
And for that, we are deeply grateful.

Thank you.