MINNESOTA WOMEN’S PRESS

Greater Minnesota

Grand Marais Fishing

Small Town Bulldozers and Welcoming Tables

Undercover at a Crisis Center

Specialty Guides: Education, Pets, Travel
August 6, 2019: “Transformation”
Carondelet Center, St. Paul
5 - 8:30pm

Join Minnesota Women’s Press readers and storytellers as we continue to discuss ways to strengthen our communities.

Transformative justice strategies are effective alternatives to policing and prison at reducing crime and supporting communities. Why do a growing number of people support transformative justice practices? What action steps are needed in Minnesota?

Limited seating! Register today at tinyurl.com/MWPTransformation
“When I find a man who can chop more wood, portage heavier loads, or catch more fish, I’ll marry him.”
— Dorothy Molter, the “Root Beer Lady” of Ely

WHAT’S INSIDE?

Editor Letter 4
Making Connections

Tapestry 5-7
Voices From Greater Minnesota

Perspective 8-9
Teresa Konechne: Being the Bulldozer

Politics & Policy 10
Alicia Kozlowski: Leading With Heart

GoSeeDo 11-13
Fringe Festival; Gibbs Farm; Greater Minnesota

GREATER MINNESOTA 16-19
• Growing Community
• Taking Action Statewide

In the News 20
Fergus Falls Facts; Health Care Gaps; Bias

Pro-Choice Rights 24-25
Vendela Cavanaugh: Undercover

Grounded 30
Lisa Pugh: Protecting Wilderness

SPECIALTY GUIDES

Pets 14-15
Tammy Thies: My Sanctuary of Wildcats

Travel 21-23
Carah Thomas-Maskell: Big Lake Effect

Education & Lifelong Learning 26-27
Plant-Based

Classified Ads 28-29
Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, in what was then the small town of Prior Lake, I connected with others through lazy summer days of playing tag, learning how to bake lemon meringue pie with a neighborhood mom, jumping in the lake with friends, getting book recommendations every Saturday from the librarian, and being part of a class of 30 at a Catholic elementary school.

We had dogs, cats, ducks, and sometimes rabbits. My brother and I would catch frogs in the nearby pond, and stroll the creek that showed up behind the house after every snow melt. There were wooded walks at the nearby Franciscan Retreat House, and four-wheeling opportunities in the most rural areas. I bought a Kawasaki 100 motorcycle with my babysitting money so I could join friends on dirt trails.

When I was in middle school, my mother went back to college. Her humanities professor at the University of Minnesota was a Holocaust survivor. We were doing a class research project on the Holocaust, and she arranged for him to become the first person I ever interviewed.

The conversation was a profound experience for me. It awakened me to all the stories people had to share, if only I asked questions.

By the time I moved on to college, I was eager to find and absorb those stories.

Since then I’ve written a book about choosing single motherhood that featured hundreds of conversations with women, children, development experts, fertility doctors, and sperm bank directors. I’ve taken notes as young people interviewed 12 people about the life of Paul and Sheila Wellstone, for an 85-page book called “Be the Change.” My storytelling interviewees have included incredibly bright teenage science fair participants, U.S. women’s soccer star Mia Hamm, a 100-year-old man who lost his home due to gentrification, quantum physicists, green architects, sex trafficking and assault survivors, feminist authors, and a few people who literally drilled holes in their heads to achieve enlightenment.

What all of this has afforded me is a glorious career learning from people who have widely different experiences and perspectives than my own.

It is that kind of exposure to varied storytellers that I love about Minnesota Women’s Press.

For this issue, the general call went out in these pages, in our e-newsletter, and on our Facebook page for any Minnesota women who do not live in the Twin Cities metro area to submit their stories for the month’s theme.

This Greater Minnesota theme is partly about recognizing that the ‘urban/rural divide’ is not a line in the sand. Lovers of nature, activists, community builders, and those who invest time in developing skills are everywhere. We all seek healthy connections with others based on shared values, while also figuring out how to disagree and still interact day after day.

Let’s not be strangers to each other.

What’s Next?

Our upcoming themes are designed to bring together not only particular thematic stories, but unique storytelling vantage points. The September issue is led by a team of writers and editors who are under the age of 30. October is a collection of visionary thinkers. November features Native storytellers. There are still writing opportunities if you have a story idea to share for those themes.

December is our biggest reader-led issue of the year. We want your ideas now for the Changemaker edition. Who are the voices that have had the greatest impact in 2019 in shifting narratives to effect change?

Send suggestions to editor@womenspress.com

Visit womenspress.com to subscribe to the magazine and e-news. Find story requests at “For Writers.”
Voices From Greater Minnesota

everyday women respond: “How Do You Engage In Our State?”

Ayan Omar, St. Peter

I moved to St. Peter with my family in 2012, looking to establish our lives as new immigrants. (My parents are from Somalia; I was born in Saudi Arabia.) I graduated from high school, attended Mankato State University, got a job, made friends, and have participated in meaningful volunteer experiences. Thanks to all of that, St. Peter has become my home. I am happy to have found a small, tight-knit community, where everyone is welcome. St. Peter is a beautiful, diverse, accepting community, where everyone knows everyone and cares about the well-being of neighbors.

My passion is to help others succeed. I have been fortunate to put my skills and connections to use on the successful campaign of our city’s representative in the Minnesota House. I serve on a development commission as the Minority Population Commissioner. I am the treasurer at St. Peter Community Child Care Center.

In short, I am simply a 24-year-old Muslim, immigrant, woman of color, who stays connected to what is going on in my local community because I truly enjoy seeing the effects of volunteering first hand.

Mary Ellen Ashcroft, Boundary Waters Canoe Area

We are so fortunate to have a wilderness area like the Boundary Waters on our doorstep. Its scale and beauty and wildness are known all over the country and even the world. Yet it can be hard for people to go into the Boundary Waters.

Some people feel they are too old, or they don’t have the equipment, or they are not fit enough, or their knee bothers them. Those of us who live in Cook County do see many young men coming out of the area. We overhear of some their tales: “That portage with the knee deep mud for quarter of a mile...” “When that wind came up and we were in the middle of that lake...” “That pack must have weighed 60 pounds.” It is understandable that people might think the Boundary Waters is only for the young, fit, and macho.

By definition, wilderness is wild. In some ways it is the opposite of so much in our society that is about control and acquisition.

I know the Boundary Waters as a transformative place — a place of peace, beauty, and life-changing experience. I understand why The Wilderness Act set aside the area as wilderness. It speaks to the importance of a place where people are visitors, not permanent inhabitants.

That’s why I’ve taken groups, mainly of women and youth, into the Boundary Waters for almost 25 years. Points Unknown helps all kinds of people feel safe enough to realize they are strong enough to be here.

I recently joined forces with Linda Newman to take people into the wilderness for shorter trips, of four or six hours. We call this “Mindful Paddles.” It is about being present where you are, when you are, to what is there. Looking at a sphagnum bog with its pitcher plants, sundews, tamaracks and mosses; listening to a breeze in the trees, a winter wren, and toads; swimming or dipping in a pristine lake.

My hope is that those who experience this taste of wilderness for a few hours on its own terms will want to come back. The best thing is, this is our wilderness. We have this glimpse of heaven right here.
Hudda Ibrahim, St. Cloud

After graduating from the University of Notre Dame in 2015, I chose to come back to Minnesota to give back to my community. Having seen how Minnesota is facing a worker shortage — as many employees retire and employers falter in hiring and retaining their replacements — I founded Filsan Talent Partners. We connect potential employees and employers, taking the concept of diversity and moving it to action. Filsan’s mission is to build leadership ability in management in order to create a diverse and inclusive workplace. I train employers, human resources staff, and supervisors to better understand the immigrant workforce, the Somali culture, issues of diversity and inclusion, and how to manage conflicts. We also help translate company policies, handbooks, and other printed materials into Somali. We train immigrant and refugee employees to understand American work ethics, punctuality, and how to follow company policies and procedures.

My passion has always been to bridge cultural gaps and integrate minority populations into businesses and organizations in the greater central Minnesota area. I am driven to see local companies find a pool of diverse employees and enjoy economic growth, driven by the benefits of an inclusive workplace.

Andrea Duarte, Worthington

In May, I graduated from St. Catherine University with a degree in political science, women’s studies, and English. Immediately after graduation, I went to Washington, D.C. to intern at the Obama Foundation. As a college senior, I spent months figuring out what I wanted to do post-graduation. All my plans changed after Benya Kraus, a co-founder of Lead for America, contacted me. She had learned about my storytelling and organizing work in Southwest Minnesota, and believed I could be a Lead for America fellow. The new organization offers two-year local government fellowships for recent graduates to serve in communities that are struggling to attract and retain talent.

I was accepted as a Hometown Fellow. After months of searching for a placement, I found a non-profit organization, the Southwest Initiative Foundation, that would support my work not only in Worthington, but around the region. For the next two years, I’ll be working closely with people whose identities have been marginalized. I look forward to supporting these communities by helping them further engage with opportunities their homes have to offer.
Ann Rozzell Hartmann, Gibbon

I moved to Gibbon two years ago from Texas. Always a big city girl, this small town life was unfamiliar to me. Gibbon, once considered the capital of polka music, had its days of glory more than 40 years ago. News articles spoke of the thousands of people who traveled to Gibbon for the polka festival every year.

Fast forward four decades. Gibbon is still filled with wonderful, family-oriented, hardworking people, but the town is now quiet. The music is gone, along with the grandeur and, frankly, the majority of businesses. For many years, the majority of storefronts on Main Street have been used for storage.

I’m writing, however, to share a story of often unnoticed resilience, led by women entrepreneurs. In Gibbon, women are running banks, selling antiques, offering hair styles, taking photographs, selling local arts and crafts, providing watering holes and Bingo nights, and leading our family care facility. Five women serve on the volunteer fire department. The City Administrator is a woman who addresses the big issues and even larger opinions.

Sit down with a coffee and you will hear stories from women of all ages; about their eight kids, their acres of land, their trials and tribulations, their stories of love and survival. After living in the big city my entire life, and believing that it was the only life a person could choose to find success, I can tell you what I have learned. The women of Gibbon are leaders.

Arlene Roth, Red Wing

I was staffing a fruit and vegetable stand when I was five years old. Customers would challenge my math and change-making skills, but I was always accurate.

I tried to do my first button hole after watching a TV program that same summer. It took my mother’s skill to repair the hole I made in my overalls. But it wasn’t long after that I began sewing lessons with her on the old treadle sewing machine that I still own.

By the time I reached the age of eight, I was developing my culinary skills. I loved to bake. My biggest thrill in baking came when I was in my teens and began making bread. I loved the smell of the yeast as it was proofing. I watched the bubbles form as the yeast and a tiny bit of sugar interacted. After forming the dough into loaves, letting it rise, and placing it in the oven to bake, I thrilled to the aroma that filled our small house.

I take advantage of our organic garden to prepare and freeze foods that are healthier for us than most store-bought canned items. Our freezers are full of tomato sauce, salsa, corn, peas, beets, peppers, carrots and butternut squash soup.

When we purchased and developed our 29-acre farm, we planted a variety of apple trees in the first several years. The house holds the smell of apples for days after they are pureed and put in freezer containers.

After years of making clothes for myself and my children, I’m concentrating on creating quilts. I love to balance colors and patterns to the recipient’s personality and style.

I am a multitasker!

Tara Brandl, Tracy

“You don’t know me, but I know you.” This phrase was the introduction spoken by many of our area residents when we took over the newspaper in Tracy. It embodies small-town Minnesota at its finest — everyone knows everyone.

Tracy is not a huge city (population 2,056). We don’t have the daily crime logs you might find other newspapers covering in the metro area. The community residents include the many farmers that expand our horizon and the smaller communities that dot the landscape around us. For the local paper, every one of them is important.

The sense of community is strong in rural Minnesota. Each town is proud of their community and their history. The residents want you to know their stories. And everyone has one.

Residents are not afraid to approach and tell me what they think we should be covering, what we should be doing, or what they think we didn’t do right. The best part of that is they feel the local newspaper is their newspaper.

A church dinner that has happened annually for years might not have the same attendance as it did in 1970, but for the residents who have grown up with it, the dinner carries the same value. Many of our story ideas come from covering events like pie and ice cream socials and local concerts. Our area is proud of its history, of its events, and of its future opportunities. It is our job to make sure we continue to use that pride to cover all aspects of small-town Minnesota.
At a recent Minnesota Farmers Union Women’s Conference, guest speaker Karen Clark asked each woman to name how she leads. Some spoke about being behind the scenes, others about collaboration and listening. When it was my turn, I said, “To be a woman leader, you have to be a badass. It is also good to have diplomacy skills, though I was born without the diplomacy gene.”

The next day, at a monthly women’s circle in southern Minnesota, I spoke about an epiphany I had that morning. My realization was that I wasn’t so much a leader, but the person in front of the leader: a bulldozer.

One of my colleagues gleefully added “trailblazer” to my description. But that didn’t feel quite right. The idea of a trailblazer, for me, has sparkle, swiftness, fire — maybe a machete or two — and an idea of where one is blazing the trail to.

The difference between that and a bulldozer is the sheer physicality of it: strength of will, determination, willingness to be out front, clearing, speaking truths others do not dare, shielding, sledging the earth, pushing boulders and boundaries aside, making roads slowly, monotonously, grindingly.

Bulldozers are extremely important. Yet we are not impenetrable, indestructible, or infallible. We are human. We pave a way for others to be their best selves, and are often the ones taking hits. We need to be supported physically, spiritually, economically and, especially, emotionally.

We’ve all seen it. Maybe even done it. Walked away from the bulldozers as they are destroying, making mistakes and enemies, while laying out bare hard truths. Destruction, however, is often what enables something new and beautiful to grow.

We have many women who push against patriarchy, fight for change, and speak their truth. They all need our support, protection, and encouragement as they break down barriers, prejudices, and oppression.

The Making of a Bulldozer

How does one become a bulldozer? In my case, I think it was an independent spirit, stubbornness, and sense of adventure. My mother told me that when I was two, as the rest of the family was painting the barn on our new farm, I walked up the winding quarter-mile-long driveway and across the road to my neighbors. This was the first of many adventures I would have, including a one-way ticket to Europe, the Beijing Women’s Conference in 1995, and living in Cuba.

I think being a bulldozer is also about the ability to push on boundaries and expectations. At age 10, I decided to play the drums. A small thing, but it was 1972 and we lived in central South Dakota. Perhaps I wanted to play drums because my oldest brother did, or more likely it was because I was driven
to do something girls didn't normally do. I've been banging a drum in some way ever since.

On our farm, gender roles were sometimes blurred, sometimes non-existent, sometimes oppressive. We all hauled bales, pitched hay, cleaned the hog barn, and picked rock. The women also did the laundry, cooked, gardened, and butchered chickens.

Our farm was amidst the beautiful, stark, open, wind-swept prairie. It is a landscape that forces exposed inhabitants to turn vulnerability into strength. A daily confrontation with weather, perpetual wind, prices, accidents, life/death, or any myriad happenstance can be a rough reality. Facing that reality creates people who are brutally honest.

Rural life can be like that. There is no place to hide. It also can be somewhat of a romanticized bubble. It is easy to get lost in the minutia of small-town living — the things that teach rural people how to be a community.

It is where one learns what it means to be a neighbor, to close ranks, to build a wall — and to come to the aid, feed, and in other ways be a community. One of the women in a film I made spoke about urbanites moving to the Black Hills area. She said, "We need to give them 'leaning-up-against-the-truck-and-talking' lessons."

A bulldozer is more conspicuous on a country road than in the middle of a traffic jam. My bulldozing is aimed at climate change, white supremacy, patriarchy, racism, sexism, and indifference.

Someone once told me that research shows the people most likely to be fierce supporters and activists are women from lower incomes, women of color, and rural women.

It is imperative to learn from rural communities, immigrants, communities of color, and others who have fought oppression. We must build supportive structures around bulldozers — a wall that doesn't separate us, but holds us.

How do we do that? Ask a bulldozer what she needs.

Teresa Konechne makes art, film, rituals, and trouble. Learn more at workinghandsproductions.com
Growing up, Alicia Kozlowski was exposed to sicknesses including racism, violence, depression, and substance abuse. She also saw her grandmother overcome addiction and become a powerful advocate for change. These experiences shaped her path and continue to inform the way she lives and works.

Ever mindful of who and where she came from, Kozlowski introduces herself as Ozaawaa Anakwaadookwe (Yellow Cloud Woman) of the migizi (eagle) clan. Her mother is Anishinaabe-Ojibwe and her father is Mexican-American. She was raised in Duluth’s West End by her mother’s family, who hail from the Grand Portage and Fond du lac Reservations.

“I would say being raised and mentored by super fierce women who just figured out a way to adapt and thrive despite some pretty serious, challenging barriers is what helped me to get to where I’m at today,” says Kozlowski, who became the City of Duluth’s Community Relations Officer in February 2019.

Kozlowski points out that Ojibwe women are matriarchs who have always held leadership roles in their communities. She was primarily raised by her grandmother, Clara Kozlowski, who was part of a group of esteemed women (including Nora Hakala, Geraldine Kozlowski, and Ruth Meyers) known as the “Big 4” in Indian Country and American Indian Education for their advocacy efforts.

These women would show up at meetings concerning community issues to ensure Native voices were being represented. This helped teach Kozlowski the importance of having a seat at the table and using her voice.

A first-generation college graduate, Kozlowski completed her bachelor’s degree at the University of Minnesota Duluth. She then went on to obtain an MBA at the College of St. Scholastica focused on leadership and change.

After serving on committees related to strategic planning and community development for the City of Duluth, Kozlowski felt particularly compelled to have a career in public service. “I didn’t even know you could get paid to do this kind of a thing,” she marvels.

Kozlowski considers her position in the mayor’s office a dream job. She takes pride in advocating for people and working to empower community members to speak up for themselves. “My heart beats strongly for the people that are walking through disparities and barriers so that there’s equity, access and success for each person,” she says.

With this role, Kozlowski says she has an opportunity and a responsibility to use the gifts she’s been given. She likens herself to a quilt maker who has a vision of the completed project in mind. Her task is to work through the intricate details, stitching people and resources together — cutting away barriers for a beautifully cohesive result.

Under Mayor Emily Larson’s administration, the city is prioritizing affordable housing, the opioid epidemic, and creating a healthier city, which are “completely heart issues” for Kozlowski. “As Anishinaabe people, we talk about living our heart way. We are the people of the heart way,” she explains. “It means living in a way that is good for ourselves, that is good for the community and good for the next seven generations.”

Kozlowski admits the position has had a steep learning curve, but she feels supported and encouraged. The women who have modeled leadership for Kozlowski, in her life and at City Hall, have demonstrated “you can be gentle and soft — and also fierce and strong — all at the same time,” she says.

This is a way of leading that uplifts, rather than diminishes, multiple voices and experiences, which is central to Kozlowski’s goal of helping bring the community’s vision, hopes, and dreams to life.

“To me, success is creating an environment where I’m not the only one,” Kozlowski says. “Creating an environment where I’m not the only woman. Creating an environment where I’m not the only Latina or Anishinaabe person at the table. That to me is tremendous victory.”

Her advice to every woman: “Be brave, be bold, do not let anyone make you invisible. We belong in every space and every place.”
Minnesota Fringe Festival Sampler

The festival runs Aug. 1 - 11. $14 adult, $6 child, $3 passholder. Times and dates vary. Details: minnesotafringe.org

#FirstDate
Directed by Molly Ritchie, “#FirstDate” is a comedy improv show about swiping right for what could be the best — or worst — date ever. Strike Theater, 824 18th Ave. N.E., Mpls.

Aileen
Inspired by a true story, this show follows Aileen Wuornos, a convicted serial killer in Florida facing death row. Southern Theater, 1420 S. Washington Ave., Mpls.

Beat.
W.A.R. Theater presents “Beat.” an adaptation of a true story about a murder that influenced some of America’s most prolific writers, with historical and LGBTQ+ content. Crane Theater, 2302 Kennedy St. N.E. #120, Mpls.

I K(no)W
Created by Kellita Maloof, this is a personal story of how she found herself in burlesque, made her way through autoimmune recovery, and what she learned in places from a New Orleans nightclub to an airline toilet. Augsburg Studio, 625 22nd Ave. S., Mpls.

Magic Girl
Emily Michaels King will perform a one-woman show with themes of self-love and nostalgia using sound and movement. Crane Theater, 2302 Kennedy St. N.E. #120, Mpls.

Measure4Measure
Directed and performed by women, this show is a feminist take on a classic Shakespearean play. Six actresses tell the tale of the intersections of sex, spirituality, and corruption. Southern Theater, 1420 S. Washington Ave., Mpls.

Post-It Baby!
Lauren Drasler shares her journey through postpartum depression and anxiety, a potential divorce, and suicidal thoughts. Strike Theater, 824 18th Ave. N.E., Mpls.

R Culture
Written by Cecilia Copeland and directed by Casey Marie Holmes, this show unmasks deeply embedded rape culture in the American subconscious. Strike Theater, 824 18th Ave. N.E., Mpls.

SIZE
Created by Colleen Somerville, these songs, sketches, and stories are a love letter to everybody — because “nothing tastes as good as rejecting bullshit societal standards.” Theatre in the Round, 245 Cedar Ave. S., Mpls.

— compiled by Kassidy Tarala
8/3 and 8/7 — Gibbs Farm, Falcon Heights

Summer programs introduce visitors to Native Dakota culture, as well as the heritage of pioneers who farmed the area. A Prairie Festival on Aug. 3 celebrates Minnesota’s First People; 10am-2pm. Good Acre offers cooking demonstration and meal on Aug. 7. See website for registration and time. 2097 W. Larpenteur Ave., Falcon Heights. Details: 651-646-8629, rchs.com

8/8 — Women’s Suffrage, Shakopee

A group of South St. Paul women were the first in Minnesota to vote after the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Lois Glewwe — whose three aunts were among them — will share the story of 21-year-old Marguerite Newburgh, a stenographer who was identified as the very first woman to vote at 6am when the polls opened. $5. 6:30pm. Scott County Historical Society, 235 Fuller St. S., Shakopee. Details: 952-445-0378, scottcounty.org

8/15 — Muslim Women in Minnesota, Rochester

Siham Abdi, Ashalul Aden, and Fardousa Jama are among those who will speak about the challenges of being Muslim women in southern Minnesota. Community discussion and Q&A facilitated by Regina Mustafa, founder of Community Interfaith Dialogue on Islam. Free. 6-7:30pm. Rochester Area Foundation, 12 Elton Hills Drive N.W., Rochester. Details: cidimn.org

8/17-18 Music in the Trees, Afton

Musicians will perform from five tree hunting stands within Belwin’s dying four-acre, red pine grove at a two-day festival. Special performance 1pm on Aug. 18 features the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (CHAT). Free. 11am-3pm. Belwin Conservancy Education Center, 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton. Details: 651-436-5189, belwin.org

8/24 — Historic Forestville

By 1860, 150 residents lived in Forestville, setting up wheat farms, a school, two sawmills, a blacksmith shop, two hotels, and a distillery. When the railroad bypassed the southeastern Minnesota town in 1868, the town began a decline. By 1880, the population was down to 55. The last pioneering business closed in 1910. A new historic tour in this ghost town explores the history of women in the area. $6-8. 11am-2pm. Historic Forestville, 21899 County Road 118, Preston. Details: 507-765-2785, mnhs.org/Forestville

8/24 — Historic Forestville

Marguerite Newburgh casts her vote on Aug. 27, 1920, in a special election to build a South St. Paul water tower.

SeVy Gospel Quartet will perform on Saturday, Aug. 17 and Sunday, Aug. 18.

SeVy Gospel Quartet will perform on Saturday, Aug. 17 and Sunday, Aug. 18.
Listen to reggae/funk/jazz band Ipso Facto at a family-friendly concert series held at an amphitheater set within Franconia’s 43-acre outdoor exhibition of more than 120 sculptures. Bring a chair or blanket, visit on-site food trucks, and take guided exhibition tours to meet artists-in-residence. Free. 2-6pm. Franconia Sculpture Park, 29836 St. Croix Trail N., Shafer. Details: 651-257-6668, franconia.org

Look for the Women’s Press magazine here:
- Women & Non-Binary Folks in CDFIs Happy Hour by Propel Non-Profits, Aug 1
- SE MN Women Veterans Outdoor Retreat, Aug 2 -4
- Great River Shakespeare Festival Front Porch Event: Shakespeare and the Alchemy of Gender, Aug 3
- 19th Annual Communities Collaborative Brain Development Conference, Aug 7 - 8
- LinkedIn for Creative Minds, Aug 8
- Public Speaking Boot Camp for Women, presented by Michelle Perdue, Aug 10
- FEW St. Cloud August Mtg: Inside the MN Correctional Facility, St. Cloud, Aug 14
- Grown-Up Women’s Camp Lottery: Chillout to Grillout, Aug 15
- Muslim Women in Leadership: A Community Event, Aug 15
- 25th Annual NAWIC Golf Event 2019, Aug 16
- Blooms & Bubbles Bridal Showcase, by the Party Girl, LLC., Aug 17
- Growth & Justice Summer Breakfast Conversation Series, Aug 21
- Historic Forestville presents Women of Forestville Tour, Aug 24
- Yoga One Events - Alexandria
- Women on Wednesdays - Women’s Center St. Cloud State University
- Marriage Geek Workshops
- Art of Counseling Workshops
- Irene Greene, MSED Workshops & Events
- Women's Environmental Institute (WEI) Events
- Minnesota Peacebuilding Leadership Institute Film Series
- Women Leading in Technology Events
- Second Saturday Divorce Workshop for Women
- PACER Center Workshops and Events
- NAWBO-MN Events
- League of Women Voters -South Tonka Events
- Women Entrepreneurs of Minnesota Events
- TeamWomenMN Events
- Business Development Mastermind Group Events by Rich Chicks

Find out more about these and other events on our website: womenspress.com
Twenty years ago my goal was to be a top executive at an advertising agency, raising a family in a traditional setting. Life has an interesting habit of twisting in new ways.

Today I am the CEO of my own company. It is, however, a small non-profit, with no view of downtown skyscrapers. My family consists of more than 100 wildcats, a handful of domestic ones, and my husband and extended relatives.

It has been 20 years since my life path took a 90-degree turn, taking me deep into the pine trees of northern Minnesota.

It began in Georgia. I was a marketing executive at Coca-Cola — the youngest executive in that department. Eventually I also worked for other international, high-profile companies.

I volunteered for an animal organization on the side. Being naïve, I also volunteered for groups I later found out were breeding and selling exotic cats I helped care for. I learned quickly how harmful it is for the wild animals who are sold to private owners as pets. Most are declawed, do not receive a proper diet, and often do not live on grass.

While juggling the demands of my career, I started a small non-profit to care for 10 exotic cats on a few acres in Georgia that had been former exhibit animals or were sold as “pets.” For the first several years, I received no salary, and invested tens of thousands of dollars of my money to build habitats and care for the animals.

Eventually I decided to return to my home in Minnesota, where I could be supported by family and friends as I began a full-time life, saving exotic cats’ lives. The Wildcat Sanctuary is now a premiere refuge in Sandstone.

We are home to more than 100 rescued tigers, cougars, lions, and more. The animals are not on exhibit and have spacious habitats, where — often for the first time in their life — they get to choose what path to walk down or where to sleep. They have temperature-controlled buildings to escape the winter, plenty of fun things to do, and first-rate veterinary care.

Our advocacy work is “to keep the wild in your heart, not in your home.” Our educational message is spread through our internship programs, outreach events, and to almost 3 million people on social media.

It is rewarding to have an impact on each animal and watch them heal physically and emotionally. Compassionate and talented board members, staff, interns, volunteers, and supporters, make a difference every day. It only takes one person to harm an animal, but it takes a community to do the right thing and help rescue that animal.

Yes, this life is an emotional roller coaster of many highs and many lows. How many people get to discover and realize a life passion? I’m lucky to say that I can.

Tammy Thies is the founder and executive director of The Wildcat Sanctuary. She has a passion for saving animals and mentoring other non-profits with the same goal.

According to the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), more tigers live in cages in the U.S. than exist in all the wild. Texas is estimated to have one of the world’s largest tiger populations, due to private citizens’ propensity for keeping these big cats as pets. A largely unregulated trend is the hybrid breeding of wild cats with house cats.

Few federal laws protect wild animals, who may be forced to perform or kept confined in small cages with little to keep their minds occupied and bodies well. State laws vary considerably, with some states banning the ownership of wild and exotic animals, while others have virtually no regulation whatsoever. Minnesota ranks 21st by the ALDF for its level of animal protection laws.

It is expensive and difficult to keep wild animals in captivity. These animals often live in inhumane conditions, and pose a serious threat to public safety.

Details: aldf.org

Never patronize traveling exhibits of wild animals or get your photo taken with a cub.

Donate your time and talents to accredited sanctuaries. Contact your federal representatives and let them know you support the Big Cat Public Safety Act.
Minnesotans find themselves living in this state for a variety of reasons. For example, Khou Lor moved in 2012 from Wisconsin to Tracy — a town of 2,000 in the southwestern corner of Minnesota — because of love. She is passionate about making connections with people. That’s why Lor is part of an effort to create a Hmong Community Center in Tracy.

**Hmong in Southwest**

Laos and the Vietnamese city formerly called Saigon fell to Communist government in 1975. Hmong immigrants to the U.S. began to arrive in large numbers. Because many Hmong people had aided the U.S. during the Vietnam War, they sought to escape violence and retaliation by moving to refugee camps in Thailand or immigrating to U.S. cities. In the 1990s, many Hmong families moved into the Midwest and South, with Minneapolis and St. Paul becoming the primary destination. Many have since settled in Greater Minnesota towns, as entrepreneurs and farmers. There are about 220 Hmong families in southwest Minnesota, near Tracy.

Says Lor, who leads the Project United Southwest Hmong (PUSH): “My partner and I enjoy creating spaces for people to gather. We enjoy the social aspect of it.” Eventually their efforts led them to a partnership with others around the state, including University of Minnesota designers, to work toward creating a regional space for education, entertainment, after-school activities, and Hmong farming. The center also is intended to be a space for all community members to learn about each other.

Lor enjoys the networking that has happened around building a community center. She notes, however, that the connections can feel one-way.

“It’s awesome to have curious individuals come out to learn about my culture, but it doesn’t always make the impact I hope for. You can only teach and learn so much. I’m at a point where I crave deeper, meaningful conversations and relationships. What can be done to create a lasting impact?”

She adds that many who attend cultural conferences already enjoy learning about other cultures and are used to being around people of color.

“How do we get those in roles of impact, those who make decisions, to attend and care about all the people who make up their community? Not just in words, but in real action? Perhaps that starts off by showing up to ask questions, to challenge, and to grow together.”

Lor adds, “How [can we] be more intentional with the work that we do? People don’t all feel the same way we do. Instead of saying ‘this is going to be awesome,’ the idea is to maneuver space to allow for conversations to happen, to share ideas, to allow people to disagree or question.”

**Welcoming Tables in Southeast**

Fatima Said, a non-profit leader in the southeastern border town of Winona, found her way to Rochester after being forced from her home in Bosnia more than 25 years ago. She is executive director of Project FINE, which is focused on integrating newcomers — offering educational programs, language and advocacy services, and building connections across cultures.

As a refugee to this state, Said understands the three stages many immigrants make when acclimating to a new home. First it is about survival, she says — having fled war, poverty, and unsafe environments, the priority is to find security, access to food, and a roof over the heads of friends and family.
Second is building capacity—learning the systems for education, finding work, seeking service providers for health and finance, and bridging cultures.

The third stage is being able to create stability—by buying a vehicle and a home, finding ways to access lifelong learning, and becoming engaged citizens. “This is my favorite stage,” says Said. “It’s about being contributing members of society, supporting and starting a business, becoming cultural consultants, giving back to the community.”

In 2017, Project FINE held listening sessions as part of a project funded by the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. They talked to 93 local people from 23 countries and a range of backgrounds. Some had lived in the area three months, others had been there 40 years. Some had no formal education, others had doctorates. Many reported feeling unsure of how to connect in community, being isolated, and not knowing who to trust, or how to extend beyond cultural boundaries. “It is hard to get to know people,” says Said.

Without exception, each focus group included a discussion of how people had experienced racism since moving to the U.S. Many also reported being unsure about how to get legal status to make voting and driving accessible.

In response, Project FINE and a group of community members rolled up their sleeves to find solutions. They created the Welcoming Table, a monthly gathering for people of all cultures to mix and share stories with a meal. Community partners and residents help newcomers navigate pathways to business ownership, and work collectively to promote inclusion and equity in policies and practices. “It has been powerful for me to see all these leaders willing to make change,” says Said. “I see this as my way to serve my country and community.”

Said sees her work as paying it forward to honor those who helped her when she came as a refugee in 1993. She has immense gratitude for all those who sponsored and mentored her after she arrived at the Rochester airport with two children, two bags, and hope for a better life. “I am so grateful to those who helped me, and I am glad I now get to help others and make our community a better place,” Said says.

Details:
• “Hmong Culture in Walnut Grove,” mnvietnam.org
• projectfine.org
For more than a year, communities have met as part of the Thriving by Design Network, organized by Growth & Justice and OneMN.org, to help inform statewide public policy. Results of those conversations are now rolling out in a series of research reports that make up the Minnesota Equity Blueprint, described as “a comprehensive, non-partisan, long-term plan for shared prosperity in a healthier environment.” The reports aim to show the “interconnectedness of the state’s people” as well as the “challenges that cloud our future.”

One participant at a discussion in Granite Falls/Upper Sioux Community put it this way: “I want to better understand — how do we move beyond left versus right?”

The first section of the Blueprint was published in April 2019 and is focused on Human Capital. Future sections focus on Economic Development, Infrastructure, Climate Action & Natural Resources, and Democracy & Fiscal Sustainability. The full report is expected to be complete in early 2020.

**Demographic Realities**

According to census data, over the last 50 years, Minnesotans of color have grown from 2 percent to 20 percent of the state’s total population. The 10 counties with the highest gains in racial diversity are in Greater Minnesota, particularly in southwestern and central Minnesota. Between 2014 and 2016, Minnesota’s crucial growth in labor force was almost entirely dependent on communities of color and immigrants.

Yet, national data from 2017 shows that Minnesota has the 11th highest poverty rate among African Americans (28 percent) and the 9th highest poverty rate among Native Americans (29 percent). A family of four is living in poverty, by 2017 census standards, if the annual income is below $24,858; an MIT Living Wage Calculator indicates the average family of four needs pre-tax income of $68,948 to have an adequate standard of living.

According to the 2017 American Community Survey, Minnesota was tied with New Hampshire as having the nation’s highest rate of people with high school diplomas or higher (93.1 percent). However, when looking closer at the data, divided by people of color, the state ranks 48th for African-Americans who graduate from high school, and is tied for 37th in percentage of Hispanic students who earn diplomas.

The Equity Blueprint report concludes: “Minnesotans of color, women, and people with disabilities have been denied full and equal access to opportunity, resulting in highly disparate rates of educational attainment, employment, health outcomes, incarceration, and homelessness.” This is not only costing taxpayers, but has “been a significant limiting factor on the state's economy.”

**Geographic Disparities**

From taconite processing in the north, to bio-medical advances at the Mayo Clinic in the southeast, the state has historically invested in its diverse regions and biomes. However, with population shifts from rural to urban and suburban areas, income inequality has grown.

Says the Equity Blueprint report: “State policymakers have been under-responsive to the economic needs and potential of areas outside the cities by failing to adequately invest in human capital development and needed business infrastructure (such
as roads, childcare, and affordable housing) outside the Twin Cities 7-County Metro area. Like the impact of racial disparities, regional disparities in public investment have constrained the entire state's economic engine.

**Solutions**

The report offers examples of initiatives that are having an impact. For example, several state groups have worked together on the Heading Home Minnesota program, which has reduced the numbers of veterans experiencing homelessness.

More than 15 years ago, community leaders and residents in Northfield teamed to improve the college enrollment rates of its people of color — particularly from its growing Latinx population — in a program called TORCH (Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes). They offered social support services for every student, including early childhood development, individual tutoring and mentoring, and navigation through early college credit programs. In 2017, 97 percent of TORCH participants graduated on time, and 90 percent of graduating seniors applied to college.

A similar collaboration in southwestern Minnesota, called Grow Our Own, is aimed at closing opportunity gaps for youth. One in six children in the region live in poverty. The effort is led by Southwest Initiative Foundation, whose president, Diana Anderson, explained: “The vitality of our region and the strength of our rural economy depends on everyone being able to contribute, and it starts before birth. We need to ensure ALL our kids — our indigenous children, our seventh-generation immigrant children, and our first-generation immigrant children — get the best possible start.”

In another unique program, police officers in about 20 Minnesota departments have the option to offer $50 coupons to help car owners pay for auto repairs, instead of writing tickets after stopping them for minor equipment problems. This Lights On program, believed to be the first of its kind in the country, is sponsored by the non-profit Microgrants.

Central Minnesota’s Morrison County has tackled the opioid epidemic by spending money on basic public health measures: limiting prescription refills, increasing access to addiction medications, and putting drug users in treatment programs instead of jail. Obtaining painkillers used to be the top reason for emergency room visits. Within six months, it was not even among the top 20 reasons.

One woman who was a former addict told a Buzzfeed reporter, “My hometown of 8,000 people was one place in the state that [did something about it]. Think of all the people like me who don’t have that hometown.”

Inspired by this county effort, the Minnesota Department of Health launched an Opioid Prevention Pilot Project in seven other communities, including Alexandria, Redwood Falls, Montevideo, Hibbing, Mora, Fergus Falls, and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. These communities are projected to cut pill use by 765,000 pills per year and authorize 21 new providers of medication-assisted treatment.

Details: thrivingbydesignmn.org, tinyurl.com/MWPopioid

**Minnesotans by the Numbers**

According to the 2017 American Community Survey, the Minnesota population lineage breaks down as: German (33.8%), Norwegian (15.3%), Irish (10.5%), Swedish (8.1%), and English (5.4%), Hispanic or Latinx origin (5.1%, predominately Mexican at 3.5%).

Minnesota has America’s largest Somali population, with an estimated 57,000 people. Hmong are the largest Asian group in Minnesota, followed by Asian Indian, Chinese and other Asian Pacific groups. The Council of Asian Pacific Minnesotans, drawing from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2011-2015 American Community Survey, reports that around 75,422 Hmong people live in Minnesota.
Fergus Falls

Fergus Falls was the focus of a story published in Spring 2017 by Der Spiegel, a German-based magazine, about the state of rural America after the 2016 election. The journalist, Claas Relotius, was fired in December 2018 after being exposed for fabricating many of his articles, including the one loosely based on Fergus Falls. Fergus Falls writer Michele Anderson wrote about the fabrications in an essay on Medium titled “Der Spiegel Journalist Messed With the Wrong Small Town.”

She wrote: “As a resident that moved here seven years ago, I would have happily taken him to my favorite coffee shop, where they serve locally crafted Stumbeanos coffee and a cappuccino as good as any coastal city. Or to my office at Springboard for the Arts, where we provide programs that help artists in the region make a living, and directly address the future of rural communities and culture. Maybe if he gained my trust I would share with him what I had learned since starting “Open Hearts,” an online forum that was quickly joined by over 200 local residents, and provides a supportive space to talk and organize around social justice and equity issues in Fergus Falls.

Anderson added: “Readers might appreciate knowing that small American towns are more complex than they imagine — that die-hard liberals like me can still magically live alongside conservative Republicans — that sometimes we even find some common ground and share a meal together, and take the time to try to understand each other’s viewpoints.”

Details: tinyurl.com/MWPDerSpiegel

Rural Health Care Gaps

According to the state of Minnesota, 28 counties are without in-hospital obstetrics services. Southeastern Minnesota’s Freeborn County will lose its in-hospital obstetrics service in 2020.

Source: Minnesota Department of Health, Health Economics Program Analysis of Hospital Annual Reports

When Not Everyone Is Welcoming

A Faribault man was charged for a hate crime when he allegedly used a pressure-washing hose against a 15-year-old Somali-American Muslim girl and her siblings while yelling racial slurs. The director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) believes many bias incidents are not reported by the victims. “Hijacked by Hate: American Philanthropy and the Islamophobia Network” is a CAIR report that lists the foundations used by anonymous special interest donors to funnel almost $125 million to anti-Muslim hate groups. A CAIR app has been created that shares “know your rights” information, and simplifies the process to report hate crimes and bias incidents. The national CAIR office has a civil rights department that takes a limited number of cases.

Details: cair.com

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I grew up in a small northern Minnesota town that was rough around the edges. Even in the 1960s, in my earliest memories, the town had a frontier feel about it. Loggers and fishermen, trappers and Native Indians, and the descendants of Scandinavian immigrants were part of its colorful fabric.

I’m talking about Grand Marais — a harbor town on the shore of Lake Superior in far northeastern Minnesota. French voyageurs named the place, back in the 1600s when it was a fur trading post in the wilderness.

My parents moved to Grand Marais in 1958, along with my two older siblings. They came because my Dad was hired to coach basketball and teach history at the high school. They were charmed by the town, rough edges and all, and thought it would be a great place to raise a family. I was born a few years later.

I have to say, Grand Marais was a child’s paradise back then. We played outside most days for hours — running, riding bikes, inventing games. We knew the best apple trees, and where the fattest, ripest raspberries hung over the backyard fences in certain alleyways. We knew secret trails through patches of woods that dotted the town. We knew about Lake Superior: beautiful, cold, and dangerous.

Respect for the Big Lake

Most kids in Grand Marais grow up with a healthy respect for the Big Lake. You just don’t play around on Lake Superior. My dad wasn’t a boater (or a hunter or fisherman), so we admired Lake Superior from the shore. Some of my fondest recollections are of beach and river outings with my family: cold water numbing my skin, lying face down on sun-warmed rocks, the whispering waves, snow white gulls bobbing in the water with a backdrop of eternal blue.

When I was 15, a friend said I could earn money on weekends working for a local commercial fisherman during the smelt run. I’d be part of a crew, boxing up fish at his warehouse, possibly late at night, whenever the truck came in. As a teenager, the late night part of it really appealed to me. “Going to work, Mom! Not sure when I’ll be home! Don’t wait up!”

I became aware of commercial fishing on the North Shore of Lake Superior. I started to learn about the traditions and history. I’d been eating herring and lake trout from the Big Lake all my life, but previously I had never thought about who caught it, or how.

Introduction to Fishing

Tommy Eckel was about 50 — a second-generation North Shore commercial fisherman with an infectious grin. It was in his warehouse on the edge of town that I found myself boxing up fish at 3am with a crew of friends. I remember Linda Ronstadt’s “Heart Like a Wheel” blaring from car speakers.

I asked if I could go out on the lake with him sometime. He said sure, but I think was surprised when he found me at the fish house — a 15-year-old girl waiting there early on a chilly, dark Saturday morning.

At first, I just went along for the ride. He didn’t need help. He had me dress in rubber clothes, like him, with boots, overalls, raincoat, and rubber gloves to keep me dry and warm.
Initially, I was an observer, and that was great. I remember thinking that I was getting to experience something very special. It felt like I was taking part in a living history exhibit. There weren't many fishermen left on the North Shore. It is a tough life, and you don't make much money at it.

It might sound odd, but from that very first morning, it felt like I belonged there. I have Swedish ancestry on my mother’s side, and it was as if my DNA remembered. It felt good standing in the boat as we motored past the lighthouses, the outboard motor humming, the boat picking up speed, the sun peeking over the horizon, and the gulls screeching overhead.

I kept showing up at the fish house at the crack of dawn, on weekends, during school vacations, whenever I could. Little by little, I began taking on some of the work. We would pull the nets together. I helped clean fish when we got off the lake.

One morning the weather was rough. Really windy, with heavy seas crashing over the harbor break walls. We went to the west side of the harbor where you can look out at the lake and see what is happening. We stood there in the half light, peering out at the churning waves. Tommy turned to me and asked what I thought. Should we go out? Is it too rough? What do you think? I remember laughing, thinking to myself, “What do I know? I’m just a kid.” I said, “You are the expert.” He said, “No, we both decide. What do you think?”

I vividly remember that moment now, decades later. I looked out at the lake again, and said, “I’m game if you are.” He nodded, and we headed back to the fish house. We put on our gear, got in the boat, and motored into open water. It was bumpy, to put it mildly, but we got the nets picked.

I remember coming back feeling totally exhilarated. I had a feeling of empowerment. I saw myself as strong, capable, brave, and even daring. I believed that. At 15.

I continued tagging along with Tommy, helping him on the lake whenever I could, until I graduated from high school and headed to Alaska for a gap year. I worked that summer at a cannery. In the fall, I signed on as a crew member on a national weather ship. The ship was soon bound for Hawaii, via Seattle, to survey the coastal waters of the big island.

Bring it on, I thought. I’m ready. I’m strong, capable, brave, and daring. I knew that. At 18.

Carah Thomas-Maskell moved back to Grand Marais in 2004, following many years on sailing cruise ships in the Bahamas and Caribbean, and after a career as a photojournalist in Florida. She worked on Lake Superior alongside fisherman Tommy Eckel until his death in 2006. She plays and sings in the dance band Cook County’s Most Wanted, and is a jazz vocalist in the North Shore Swing Band. This is excerpted from an essay she wrote at blog.visitcookcounty.com
There are more than 90 pregnancy crisis centers in Minnesota. They receive state funding. This essay was submitted by a woman who decided to find out what happens at a state-funded resource center, compared to at a Planned Parenthood clinic.

The Pregnancy Resource Center of St. Cloud sits in a grey slab between a Pizza Hut and a Firehouse Subs shop. By the door is a chalkboard sign advertising free tests for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The website says they offer free testing, counseling, limited obstetrical ultrasounds, PAP smears, and HIV screenings. “Abortion, Adoption, or Parenting. Get the facts to make the decision best for you. We can help. And we do it for free. #YouMatter,” the site boasts, and warns they will not provide or make referrals for abortions.

“Hi,” two women say at the same time behind a small, rounded desk. The waiting area is no bigger than my dorm room. There is a screen displaying in vibrant blue letters how men in their 20’s and 30’s suffer from erectile dysfunction due to the use of porn. They hand me a yellow sheet attached to a clipboard to fill out. It asks for the date of my last period. I put down two months ago — a lie, according to the tampon in my bag.

In a scattered pile lay magazines with cherub-faced babies dressed in spring colors, one like a fluffy white bunny, and pregnant bodies with glowing women. The receptionist calls my name and leads me to a room. A bible verse, John 1:12, is inscribed on the pillows. “Yet to all who receive him to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to be become children of God.” The door opens. A lady walks in wearing a grey sweater with “Pregnancy Resource Center” stitched to the breast pocket and glasses that dangle on a beaded thread.

She’s got an arm full of pamphlets, papers, and a black iPad. We discuss my medical history, her brow furrowing when I say I am in for a pregnancy test. On a notepad she writes whatever I say without looking up at me.

“How old is your boyfriend? Would he be prepared to be a father? Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?” The questions fly off her tongue before she even asks my name.

“He’s…older. I don’t really know; we’ve only been together about a year. My goals for a year from now? I’d just like to still be alive,” I answer.

“So you don’t have any career goals? A year is a long time, I’d assume you might want to start thinking about your kids soon.” Her voice is soft and calm, like every element in the room.

She takes the iPad from under a magazine. “We’re going to watch these two videos and then get that test done.”

The first video is titled “Abortion or Baby,” following a woman down two roads. The video illustrates the types of abortions, and how they terminate “the baby,” with a red glowing heart beating in her orange uterus. From an abortion pill, the baby falls out. The video indicates the risks with this abortion are heavy bleeding, infection, failure to abort, and death. “When you kill the baby, you also risk killing yourself.”

Another early term option is a “miniature suction device” that removes the baby from the uterus down the
suction tube. The second trimester abortion uses a tweezer-like clip to rip the baby's limbs off. The latest term abortion device is an injection that stops the baby's heart. Again, the baby is depicted as detached limb from limb, but the head gets caught going down the vaginal canal as the video warns the baby might not fit.

The video changes to upbeat music and baby giggles as the mother goes down the “Baby” path. “Pregnancies may come with challenges, but in the end, you're met with an adorable baby you get to name!” the narrator exclaims as a baby girl coos at her smiling mom and dad.

Adoption is the next option. The baby is handed to a heterosexual couple. “There's always a family in need,” the narrator says.

“A happy ending,” the nurse beside me says. She plays another video. A fleshy, white blob pops up on the screen, red vessels protruding, oddly webbed hands that look like fins flailing around in a clear bubble. Two black dots take up most of the screen, looking at the screen before suddenly, in a single beat, flickering to stare straight at me.

I gasp, “Oh my god what is that?”

The nurse chuckles. “This is your baby at seven weeks, almost fully developed! The baby's legs are just about to start growing, along with a louder heartbeat. Let me show you what they look like by the time you'd be due.” The baby grows larger on the screen.

Eventually, she stands. “Okay, let's get your urine sample.”

I am, of course, not surprised that the test comes back negative. “Be safe dear!” the receptionist calls out as I pass through the doors to the outside world.

Experience #2

Planned Parenthood hides in a packed but silent parking lot, taking up just a small square corner of a business complex. Opening the door, I'm greeted by a blonde-haired lady behind a glass screen. A song by Cardi B plays as she hands me a clipboard. Atop the ceiling, tiny security cameras at each corner of the room track everyone's moves.

My name is called, and I exchange the forms for a plastic sealed cup. “We just need a urine sample before the exam.” Eventually I am led to an examination room that smells of antibacterial sanitizer. Again, my test results come back negative, and I explain my school writing project.

“How many women do you usually get for annual exams?” I ask.

“You're about the third or so today, and it's only past lunch. We mostly get women needing pregnancy tests or STI treatments.” I ask about other services. “We provide screenings for HIV, birth control services, emergency contraception, abortion services and referrals, even sexual health education and health services for men and women.”

Leaving Planned Parenthood, the parking lot is peaceful and emptying. A girl no older than me gets out from a beat-up car and walks quickly to the clinic door. I hope, like me, she will find people who ask what she wants, tend to her health, and send her on her way.

Details: tinyurl.com/pregnancycrisiscenter Guttmacher.org, UnrestrictMN.org

This essay was written as part of a college assignment, inspired by another writer's undercover story.
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Allison Austin grew up in a rural environment near Dayton, Minnesota. As a 7-year-old, she spent hours crushing herbs and making potions for fun. By fourth grade she knew she wanted to work with plants as a profession.

Jaime Brennan grew up in a farming family in western New York State. She enjoyed being among the rows of fruits and vegetables, but her favorite activity was walking in the forested property between crop fields. At age six she asked her mother to tell her the name of every plant she saw. Her mother gave her “The Golden Guide to Wildflowers” as a Valentine's Day gift.

Austin and Brennan both studied botany and horticulture in college, but academics didn’t answer the questions that most interested them. They sought teachers whose hands were dirty from digging and harvesting, whose lessons involved more plants than books, whose classrooms were meadows, wetlands, woods, and kitchens.

They began to understand that the plants are teachers; the human instructors only guides.

Brennan completed an apprenticeship with renowned herbalist Rosemary Gladstar at Sage Mountain in Vermont. Austin spent three years learning from a Mayan herbalist who practiced traditional uses of medicinal plants.

Now, the women both teach the benefits of plant healing. They teach which leaves and flowers can be added to salads, or eaten after steaming or sautéing. They teach that to extract the medicinal components, it is sometimes necessary to break down the cell walls. This can be done by heat, as in making a tea or infusion, or by soaking the plant in alcohol or vinegar to make a tincture. Poultices and salves can be made for topical applications.

Yarrow is a favorite of both Austin and Brennan. Its fern-like leaves can be crushed and applied directly to bruises, bug bites, rashes, and everyday scrapes and cuts. In a tea or tincture, yarrow has traditionally been used to reduce fever and stop internal bleeding.

Plantain, sometimes called “nature’s band-aid,” has similar qualities for addressing wounds and bug bites, and has been used to draw out slivers. Plantain tea or tincture is reputed to be good for the urinary tract.

Austin uses red clover leaves and flowers, and red raspberry leaves harvested just before the plant sets berries, in order to make herbal preparations for maintaining health of the female system, balancing hormones, and as a source of minerals and vitamins. Both are cleansing herbs, safe for children, and can be combined to increase their benefits. She suggests drinking a daily cup of tea made from steeping the herbal parts in hot water for ten minutes.

Brennan has worked with cleavers (of the genus Galium) for breast health and the lymph system. She uses it to make tea during the summer, or as a tincture that can be used all year. It can be infused in olive oil and used for massage, or as a poultice on congested lymph areas. The plants are edible when young.

Many of the most beneficial plants are often considered weeds. Even if you weren’t a plant-lover in elementary school, like Austin and Brennan, you can take classes from herbalists and begin to reap the health benefits.

Jaime Brennan and Allison Austin teach classes at the Ely Folk School. Details: elyfolkschool.org
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Protecting Wilderness
submitted by Lisa Pugh, Ely

As a professional expedition leader, I have spent the better part of the last decade in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. I have experienced its clean, remote lakes and forests across every Minnesota season, from frozen to mosquito and back to frozen again. I have loved it, I have hated it, and I would never trade it. I certainly would never risk losing it.

I started my expedition career with Voyageur Outward Bound School. The organization introduces teens and adults to the Boundary Waters and facilitates self-discovery through the unmatched challenge, teamwork, and self-reflection opportunities of wilderness exploration.

Imagine billions of stars shining into the eyes of a girl who had never before left her city home. Imagine feeling the empowerment of a combat veteran — who is struggling to transition from military to civilian life — as she successfully navigates a 500-pound sled through a pinball-machine-like portage trail with a team of huskies and fellow service members.

The Boundary Waters is dear to me for the worlds of possibility that have opened to me and countless students who have ventured there on such personal, profound, and fun-filled journeys.

Being an expedition leader has been a hard career for me to leave. As the threat of copper-nickel mining on the Boundary Waters edge looms, however, I have transitioned to work full-time in science and policy for the non-profit Save the Boundary Waters. According to what I have learned from scientific and economic analysis, all sulfide-ore copper-nickel mines pollute surrounding water. The Boundary Waters is a vast, interconnected system of waterways, with no capacity to buffer acids, heavy metals, and sulfates — all signatures of copper-nickel mine waste.

Peer-reviewed science published in the “Journal of Hydrology” has shown that pollution from copper-nickel mining upstream of the wilderness would flow into the Boundary Waters. Minnesota’s environmental standards were not designed to regulate this type of mining on the edge of such a sensitive, water-rich environment.

Analysis by a Harvard economist shows that in all but the least likely scenarios, the local economy in 20 years will be worse with a copper-nickel mine near the Boundary Waters than without one, in part due to the impact on the recreation industry.

Having lived and worked in extreme conditions with people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs, I respect the differences of opinion and experience we have as citizens in a democratic country. That said, we need to decide as Minnesotans and U.S. citizens: Is copper-nickel mining right for this unique and vulnerable wilderness? Scientists, economists, and the record of the copper-nickel mining industry tell what we need to know: absolutely not.

Lisa Pugh earned a bachelor of science degree at the University of Minnesota, and is the Science & Policy Analyst for Save the Boundary Waters. As an explorer, she was the first woman to canoe the world’s fourth longest river, has spent more than 600 days in the Boundary Waters backcountry, and is a Division I, award-winning rower from the University of Minnesota.

To learn more and get involved, visit savetheboundarywaters.org

Resources
• earthworks.org
• “Why mining issues aren’t really up for discussion at the Minnesota legislature this year,” April 2018, MinnPost.com
• timberjay.com
• See the Minnesota Women’s Press stories on this subject in the August 2018 issue.
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