For 35 years we have been paying attention to the stories that Minnesota women care about. Support community journalism and get a great gift for yourself and others with our limited edition book.

“I remember a fellow in Washington who told me, ‘You women are going to have to do it. Because we’re all captured by our institutions, and we don’t dare.’”

— Arvonne Fraser, 1986

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In some ways, 2020 was about stillness—we have not been able to move and interact in the same ways. Paradoxically, it also has been about upending inertia. In this special double issue of Minnesota Women’s Press, we blend the concepts of reflection and change. Our annual Changemaker issue recognizes the individuals and organizations that work to overhaul systems and lift up experiences that need to be heard. Our Legacy stories start off a year-long retrospective, inspired by the publishing of our “35 Years of Minnesota Women’s Press” book, designed to help us see patterns from our past.

We take our mission seriously, as the longest continuously run feminist monthly publication in the U.S., to share stories that tend not to be visible. The publication began in 1985 when our co-founders saw the need to move women from the lifestyle pages of mainstream media and into the center of news and issues. We have not deviated from that mission, offering diverse voices in every magazine.

Our readers and community-based writers are integral to what we do. This month’s Changemaker nominations came from reader submissions and conversations with people in the community, before being culled down to 10 amazing individuals and groups.

Many heroic efforts have sustained Minnesotans this long year: healthcare professionals, domestic violence responders, people serving the unhoused, distance-learning teachers, childcare providers, nursing home attendants, face mask crafters, and public servants helping society function during this stressful time. We continue to celebrate the collective action involved in mutual aid donations, healthy food delivered to families in need, community artists, and more.

This has been a year of extremes—filled with some of the toughest challenges and most remarkable Changemakers. In the words of our vision statement:

“We are all parts of a greater whole. Our stronger future will be built from the collective energy of people who shift narratives to effect change.”

2021: The Year of Regeneration

As Minnesotans recover and rebuild from the pandemic, our emphasis in 2021 will be on telling the stories of regeneration—how is our state transforming as a result of reinvigorated energy surrounding anti-racism and anti-poverty work?

One of the ways we will do that is by reaching into some of the stories and commentaries we found when we dug into boxes of archival newspapers and magazines for our 35th anniversary book. There have been calls for equity and justice in our pages for decades. In 1992, Linda Hopkins, cofounder of TeamWomenMN, responded to the nationwide uprisings that erupted when the Los Angeles police who attacked Rodney King were found not guilty. She wrote, “By endangering, impoverishing, and abusing the wives and mothers of our children, we endanger the basic providers of future generations. The only response to continual abuse is either rage or withdrawal.”

Our 35th anniversary book reveals anguish, anger, sorrow, frustration—as well as vision, persistence, progress, and hope. Environmental action, responses to gender-based violence, the growing numbers of women in politics, and the strength of feminist voices with solutions are some of the ways our pages have reflected the power of Minnesota women.

We take sustenance in the words of author Robin...
Kimmerer: “What will endure through almost any kind of change? The regenerative capacity of the earth. We help create conditions for renewal.”

Supporting the Legacy

We are not immune to the losses that threaten the survival of community journalism. City Pages, an alternative newspaper in the Twin Cities for 41 years, is the most recent publication to announce its closure in our Twin Cities media community. We are working hard to continue to be able to provide our unique stories.

There are several ways you can support our ability to persevere in these challenging times.

We invite readers — long-term and newcomers, of all backgrounds and identities — to join us in focus group sessions to discuss the values, vision, and mission we represent as a community-based publication. Reach out to editor@womenspress.com with “focus group” in the subject line.

Other ways to help:
- Contribute to our reporters and columnists fund (womenspress.com/donate)
- Become an advertiser or content sponsor (ads@womenspress.com)
- Sign up for our weekly newsletters
- Visit @mnwomenspress on social media
- Share our stories with others

If you or others need assistance, here are a few new pandemic-related resources:
- Legal support if facing eviction: homelinemn.org, mylegalaid.org
- Mental health support: namimn.org

AT WOMENSPRESS.COM

- Ecolution #2: Collectives: Video Q&A with Angela Dawson of 40 Acre Co-op (above)
- Legacy: “1992: The Supreme Court ruling on abortion,” commentary by Judy Corrao
- News Bites: “Hennepin County Action on Unsheltered”
- Transforming Justice: Nicole Archbold, Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Health: Community mental health, by Carol Koepp
- Education: Distance learning, Q&A with Acooa Ellis
- Ecolution #3: Air quality with Monika Vadali
- Policy & Politics: Q&A with Rep.-elect Esther Agbaje

Most Read in 2020
- Financial Trauma, by Tess Montgomery
- 2020-21 Women’s Directory
- Confronting Racism, by Chris Stark
- Winona LaDuke: The Green Revolution
- Native Foodways, by Dana Thompson

Coming Up
We are deepening online content, including additional Perspectives columnists and our ongoing Ecolution series. We are expanding Transforming Justice coverage, thanks in part to funding by the Minneapolis Foundation.

Submit to February Issue: Isolation
How have you found joy and inspiration during the winter months? Send up to 250 words by January 10 to editor@womenspress.com
December 3 — Descent Online Film Premiere

Choreographers and disability activists Alice Sheppard and Laurel Lawson perform a duet that re-centers ideas of physicality, weaving choreography, video projections, and soundscape to enact a queer interracial love story. The performers will conduct a post-show artist conversation. $18.50. 8pm. walkerart.org

December 3-12 — Good Medicine Festival

Writer Yvette Nolan describes the importance of medicine in Native theater: “Medicine is about connection, about health” and “good medicine makes community.” New Native Theatre presents a festival showcasing the work of Native American, Alaska Native, Hawaiian, and First Nations playwrights. The festival will usher in a time of connection, community, and ceremony. $60 or pay-what-you-can (suggested $20). newnativetheatre.org

December 5 — Franconia Frost Fest

Guests at Franconia Sculpture Park's holiday market and bazaar will find unique gifts by local artisans and vendors and spend time skating the new free artist-designed ice rink. Reservations required. Free. 12-4pm. Franconia Sculpture Park, Shafer. francoonia.org

December 7 — Cultivating Creativity

Ragamala Artistic Directors Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy and Choreographic Associate Ashwini Ramaswamy share their decades of experience building an arts nonprofit. Registration required. Free. 7pm. Northrup, Mpls. Livestream available. northrup.umn.edu

December 30-31 — Connie Evingson and Joyann Parker

Local jazz and pop musician Connie Evingson and blues musician Joyann Parker headline alternating shows to ring in 2021. Mandatory COVID-19 precautions are in place. $40-50. 5:30pm. Crooner’s Supper Club, Mpls. croonersloungemn.com

Through January 10 — An Extra/ordinary Holiday in Extraordinary Times

American Swedish Institute invites guests to an immersive indoor and outdoor experience. Wander the merrily decorated Turnblad Mansion and explore an outdoor story trail based on traditional folk tales throughout ASI's grounds. Mandatory COVID-19 precautions. $6-12. Thursday through Sunday, 10 am to 4 pm. American Swedish Institute, Mpls. asimn.org

Find more at womenspress.com/events
When Minnesota Women’s Press transitioned from a newspaper format to a monthly magazine in 2009, the publication began showcasing Minnesota women artists on the cover each month. They worked in many mediums, and were at various stages of their careers.

In our “35 Years of Minnesota Women’s Press” book, former publishers Norma Smith Olson and Kathy Magnuson write, “We looked for artwork that made a strong statement about being a woman, and often artwork that represented the theme of the monthly issue — from women’s bodies, homes and environments, spiritualities, politics, fitness and health, and what nourishes women.”

For this issue, we reconnected with a few past cover artists and asked them to share an update on their lives and art.

**LESLIE BARLOW,**
**COVER ARTIST JUNE 2016**

I am an artist living and working on occupied Očeti Šakówin and Wahpekute land now known as Minneapolis. I am interested in examining and reimagining our relationships to our racial identities through decolonizing and healing our collective understanding of belonging and what it means to be family.

My oil paintings and mixed material pieces share stories through figure and portraiture, exploring issues of multiculturalism, identity, representation, trauma, and race. I investigate these through the use of the personal — often creating works depicting family, friends, people in my community, and experiences, to reflect the integrations of these issues into individual lives and relationships.

The collaborative work I do with other artists and people in the community is just as important to me as my studio practice. I am currently teaching courses at the University of Minnesota. I occasionally teach community classes and workshops and hold public lectures. In 2017, I joined a team of organizers and artists to plan the first-ever MidWest Mixed Conference, which has added programming that works to heal racial trauma and build community solidarity.

In response to the killing of George Floyd, I became a part of the collective Creatives After Curfew, creating street art with community in solidarity with the uprising, calls for police abolition, and #AllBlackLivesMatter.

**Details:** lesliebarlowartist.com, midwestmixed.com, creativesaftercurfew.com
Victoria McWane-Creek sat in a victim advocacy conference in 2010 with 500 women in Black and brown bodies. They were involved in a struggle to eliminate violence in their communities in all its shapes: domestic abuse, substance abuse, sexual violence, poverty, and homelessness. In the final session on the final day during a question-and-answer session, a woman approached one of the microphones positioned around the room and asked, “What about me?”

She recounted an experience of same-gender domestic violence and how it felt to lie in an emergency room hospital bed, bandaged and bruised, and watch her abuser being permitted to visit because there was no concept of a female domestic violence perpetrator. The woman said the experience made her feel invisible.

McWane-Creek has a master's degree in Instructional Design and Human Performance Improvement from the University of North Dakota. She describes this moment as one that forever altered her approach to her work. “It completely changed how I choose to show up,” she says.

Since then, whether it is adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral disorders or her anti-poverty work with Otter Tail Wadena Community Action, McWane-Creek endeavored to make visible the invisible and to amplify the voices of the unheard. She aims to “help people close the gap between where they are and where they want to be.”

An Awakening

The middle child of three, McWane-Creek grew up in Chicago in the 1980s with her dad, brothers, and an extended family of grandparents and aunts. Her father relocated with her and her two brothers to Ironton, near Brainerd. She experienced overt racism there for the first time as an 8-year-old when a classmate called her the n-word.

In 2006, after getting a college degree and launching a
professional career, McWane-Creek moved back to Minnesota so that her two children could know their grandfather. For nearly three years, she worked with Americorp Vista around anti-poverty issues. “Poverty looks different in rural communities,” she says. “Someone can own a home and have no food in their pantry.”

In 2009, she and her partner lived for a few months in Fergus Falls, where they both experienced profiling incidents. Her partner, for example, faced police for “suspicious behavior” while entering their home. The family moved to Underwood, 20 minutes away, in search of a safer environment to raise their children, and returned to Fergus Falls in 2017 after their youngest daughter graduated from high school.

With continued experiences of racism, McWane-Creek decided to put her training into action.

A Pivot Point

McWane-Creek is a facilitator with the Minnesota Campus Compact Communities of Practice and the Minnesota Council of Churches Respectful Conversations Project. The programs offer a framework to share knowledge, strategize for improvement, and hold one another accountable to grow. In short, she facilitates “depolarizing dialogue.”

During a family gathering in a park, she and her family faced a car full of raucous young men shouting racial slurs. Concerned about the Black and brown students she served in the community, she felt obligated to do something.

She wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, which sparked a public gathering to discuss the growing racially motivated abuse that was happening in Fergus Falls.

A group was formed that met regularly to “do the work.”

Their year-long awareness-building campaign culminated in the “Rural Racial Equity Summit,” held in January 2020. Among the speakers in Fergus Falls was Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison.

Making a Difference

McWane-Creek believes that recognizing and engaging with differences — instead of minimizing or ignoring them — is important. Classism, income inequality, educational access, or learning styles are all differences that tend to impact people with Black and brown bodies. If we don’t acknowledge those differences, she says, nothing changes.

People in white bodies need to use their privilege and power to create systemic change, McWane-Creek says.

She says the challenge that comes when people want to broaden their understanding of structural inequities should not be underestimated. “It can be uncomfortable,” she explained. “The work is often more internal than people want to believe.”

To drive change, McWane-Creek ran for City Council in Fergus Falls in 2020, losing to the incumbent by a few hundred votes. Her reason for running was to be able to “stand up and say, ‘this isn’t quite working for everybody and, until it does, [that means] it doesn’t work.’”

Victoria McWane-Creek says skills can be learned in raising awareness, group facilitation, and conflict resolution policy review. She designed Communities of Practice to guide progress for participants to talk about what they are learning. For information about how to launch a Communities of Practice where you live, contact Victoria at victoria@victoriamc.org.

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When the COVID-19 pandemic forced Jackpot Junction Casino in Morton to close in March 2020, Markeela Toreen had just been promoted to assistant marketing director. As the largest employer for the Lower Sioux Dakota community in Redwood County, the casino had to lay off more than 650 employees. At the same time, the tribal government laid off most of its staff and suspended per capita or gaming revenue payments. “Across the board, suddenly revenue stopped,” Toreen says. “This was so impactful on our community.”

As one of the few casino employees who were not laid off, Toreen began looking for ways to ensure her community’s needs were met. One of her first calls was to a friend, Lindsey Caraway, who volunteered for Ruby’s Pantry, a non-profit that had been distributing food in the Redwood area since 2014. Toreen learned that Ruby’s Pantry was looking for a new distribution site. She quickly arranged for Jackpot Junction to host an April event in its parking lot. She saw how quickly food for 300 families ran out and realized her community was facing a serious hunger issue.

Toreen contacted the Twin Cities food bank, Second Harvest, and the local St. Cornelia’s Church, as she organized a drive-through food distribution event. “I had never done any kind of food work. I had no idea how to break things down and pack them,” Toreen says. But she knew where to turn for help. “Dakota women are known for making sure families and communities are cared for.”

Anne O’Keefe stepped up as Toreen’s “right hand.” Grace Goldtooth, vice president of the Lower Sioux Tribal Council, helped organize volunteers. Several elders made and donated masks for each event.

On the morning of the April event, Toreen and the volunteers divided a semi-truck full of bulk food into individual boxes for 800 families. The boxes were placed into the trunks of cars to maintain social distance.

Throughout April and May, several food distribution events were held each month. Toreen estimates that at least 500 women volunteered. “One teacher called and said she needed food for a family,” Toreen says. “It touched my heart that even though her students weren’t in school, she was still making sure they had what they needed.”

The pandemic has been especially hard for Redwood
County, where nearly 44 percent of students receive free and reduced lunch, according to the Minnesota Department of Education. With support from the Tribal Council, and Lower Sioux’s grant writer Nora Murphy, funds were secured to open the Cansa’yapi Food Pantry in the weeks between the large distribution events. “[No one] should have to choose between groceries and making rent,” Toreen says.

When the casino reopened in June and events were scaled back, Toreen continued to support needs by helping to create an Emergency Food Weekend Backpack program for kids.

Toreen is quick to say that the work has been a collaborative effort that relied on hundreds of volunteers and the support of both casino management and the Tribal Council. “This is the true beauty of our community coming together,” Toreen says.

Elders enjoy daily nutritious meals delivered to their homes. Students receive lunch and breakfast, even when they are not in school. Other tribal communities have been in contact to learn from their efforts.

The Lower Sioux community is making sure that families will have enough food for the winter. In addition to hiring four people to manage these new food programs, the casino’s Exposition Center, which once hosted concerts, has been transformed into a staging area for food programs.

“One of the unexpected gifts of the pandemic,” Toreen says, “is the way it has brought our community back to its core.”

A monthly healing fire brings families together and helps heal other issues in the community. “The biggest learning is that it always goes back to ‘it takes a village,’” she says. “We are a strong, strong village.”

Suggests Markeela Toreen: “Don’t be afraid to take the first step in a direction you do not typically travel. You will realize your journey is far bigger than your normal route.”
For those familiar with the Twin Cities activism scene, Marny Xiong is a household name. Mention her to an educator, and they might beam with gratitude. Mention her within the Hmong community, and you might get stories about the difference that she made in each person’s life. Mention her at a protest, and you might see a wave of grief and pride wash over the crowd.

Xiong died of COVID in June. Two of her sisters, Amee Xiong and Mary Xyooj, remember her as a fierce advocate for racial and gender justice from an early age.

“Marny was always a courageous child growing up. Our mom shared that when Marny was in kindergarten, she received a call from the principal informing her that Marny had stood up for others against a bully who wouldn’t let anyone enter the front door of the school after getting dropped off by the buses,” says Amee Xiong. “When she saw injustices against her peers and communities, she made it her issue to fight back to hold people and institutions accountable.”

When Xiong was attending the University of Minnesota-Duluth, she organized Black, Asian, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ students after the Multicultural Center was vandalized. The students successfully convinced administrators to conduct one of the first campus climate surveys and create a Black studies degree program.

From a student, to a school administrative manager at Minneapolis Public Schools Hmong International Academy, to a chairwoman of the St. Paul Board of Education, Xiong was an advocate for education.

“Marny believed the school system is a crucial tool to uplift students out of poverty and prepare them to have the skills to reach their dreams and goals,” Amee Xiong says. “Marny also saw how, through her education, she was never taught about her own history of Hmong descent, or the true history of Black Americans.”

In May, Xiong organized and gathered all of Minnesota’s Asian American elected officials to write a letter denouncing racism after Donald Trump began using the term “Chinese virus” and anti-Asian hate crimes spiked.

“The forces of white supremacy will continue trying to scapegoat and divide us to distract from the massive gaps in social safety nets and worker protections, a broken healthcare system, longstanding structural racism and more,” the letter read. “While they brew hate, we are building a powerful movement for change.”

As one of her final acts on the school board, she worked...
to reach a settlement ending a historic teacher’s strike over pay and classroom practices. “Her legacy will be that all educators can see that same potential in every child in our school district,” St. Paul’s superintendent Joe Gothard told EdWeek.

Xiong was known for her ability to build connections between marginalized communities to create action. “Marny said that she envisioned a world where the education system reflects the values of all our communities, and that students are at the center of it all. In April 2020, she initiated a policy to encourage safe spaces in the St. Paul Public School district from racism, xenophobia, and stereotypes during the pandemic,” Amee Xiong says. “She wanted to see all young people succeed and have mentors and support.”

One of her goals was to purchase a home for her parents and her siblings. “She loved to surround herself with family and friends,” Mary Xyooj says. “She remembered birthdays and surprised family members with birthday cake. She was very inclusive of people, ranging from elders to youth. She would brighten people’s day with her smile, conversations, and stories.”

Xiong had been caring for her father, who was diagnosed with coronavirus, and she was admitted to the hospital a day before he was. Marny Xiong died with her mother and Mary by her side. Other family members were virtually present via iPad.

As Xiong once said during a speech, “We all contribute, show up, and give back differently to uplift the community. Never give up hope that change can happen, and that your impact could make a difference.”

Marny’s mother, See Xiong, who worked to care for both her husband (who survived the virus) and her daughter as they battled COVID-19, is hoping to change the name of Washington High School in St. Paul to Marny Xiong High School. To offer support, email Amee Xiong at ameexiong@gmail.com.

“When she saw injustices against her peers and communities, she made it her issue to fight back to hold people and institutions accountable.”

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In 2018, Minnesota Women’s Press featured the voices of two young women of color who wrote about how their Lao-American and Native heritage were not reflected in school education, even though both cultures have deep roots in the state.

As the “35 Years of Minnesota Women’s Press” book reveals, the state was an early adopter of inclusive education efforts, which dropped off in the 1990s. This article reflects a synopsis of what happened and why.

In 1987, the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum was founded by Peggy McIntosh, of Wellesley College Center for Women, after she published a paper about white privilege. SEED is an acronym for Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity.

The mission of SEED is to provide teachers with leadership training about what gender-fair, multicultural, disability-sensitive curriculums might look like. Sixteen Minnesotans trained to begin creating inclusive education in statewide classrooms. In 1989, the Minnesota State Board of Education (SBE) led the nation and passed an inclusive curriculum rule, asking school districts to outline specific goals and timelines to include the experiences of women and minorities by June 1990.

By 1991, approved plans numbered 95, with more than 300 in process, but 23 districts had not worked on a plan at all. The job of the state's inclusive education coordinator, Linda Garrett, was cut from the legislative budget.

“To start having a curriculum that reflects all the people of the United States,” said Garrett, “we must start looking at things differently. Our history has often been written from Eurocentric male perspectives. In the area of westward expansion, for example, students should begin to see both positive and negative aspects. They should read what the [Native] people have said about it, how the broken treaties affected them. What the pioneer women contributed and what they suffered. Bring in multiple perspectives.”

In 1992, Minnesota was the first state to develop its own SEED Project, due in large part to the work of co-directors Cathy Nelson and Dena Randolph. About 200 educators and parents met to explore ways of fostering diversity in school systems. The attendees for the conversation were a diverse group — except, as Minnesota Women’s Press reporter Mary Miller wrote:

“White males were a conspicuous minority at the workshop. Women and people of color continue to be the first to acknowledge the importance of multiculturalism in education, while white males continue to hold most of the administrative reins in school districts. One of the challenges for Minnesota will be to get white males to become agents in the change-making process.”

Inclusive Curriculum Effort Dies

By January 1998, the proposed “diversity rule” was dead. Every district was in compliance with the plan by the 1995-96 school year. Yet having written plans did not mean that the plans had to be put into action. A new SBE diversity rule would have asked school districts to “provide evidence of proactive efforts to eliminate education-related disparities.” It established consequences for noncompliance.

In September 1997, the SBE had given preliminary approval to the rule. A hearing needed to be held if 25 letters were received opposing any proposed rule. Miller reported that 900 of 1,300 letters received were form letters from the Christian Coalition. Two days of hearings took place in November, and the majority of in-person testimony was opposed. The primary reasons given: it represented social engineering in our schools, would cost too much and undermine local control, and might take away from teaching students core subjects.
One person said at the time, “What was most discouraging to me in the hearings is that it was as if everyone else was silent in the face of a sort of inflammatory name-calling. That to me is not a criticism of the far right; it is a criticism of the far left.”

Arguably the last crushing blow to the inclusive curriculum effort at the time was when long-time advocate Cathy Nelson died suddenly in December 1998. Nelson, 45, had helped the Minnesota SEED program grow from 36 trained educators in 1992 to 1,422 state leaders.

Miller wrote a memorial essay about Nelson. She said Nelson had maintained patience and long-term vision. “The reality is that for a lot of districts,” Nelson had said after the diversity rule failed, “it isn’t going to matter about this rule because they’re already set on their own path and they know the direction they’re heading. And other districts that haven’t had the wake-up call yet — they’re coming.”

**2020 Hindsight**

In conversation with people involved in Minnesota education, the emphasis has been on trying to improve diversity in the teaching pool and to offer anti-racism curriculum. Said one equity facilitator, organizations engaged in interrupting equity efforts are still strong around the state.

Buy “35 Years of Minnesota Women’s Press” at womenspress.com/buy-book
I am a printmaker and book illustrator living and working in rural northern Minnesota. I take a keen interest in observing what goes on in the natural world nearby and in the human world of families and creativity.

In my artistic life, I continue several decades of making woodblock prints of life around me, and exploring painting and drawing in various media.

During the pandemic time, I found myself making sketchbook art to seek comfort. These Comfort Drawings have become a frequent series on my social media pages, almost daily. I notice that these sketches center on home, the place where I feel most at peace. I sense more ideas on the way. Stay tuned.

Details: woodcut.com
The story of Magdalena Kaluza starts with their parents. Their mother is a white American woman of Polish and French-Canadian descent with family ties in the Iron Range, who went to Guatemala to study Spanish. Their father is of Mayan K’iche’ mixed race (mestizo) who played the guitar and grew up in the midst of the revolution. Both parents were working towards social justice and solidarity before Kaluza was born.

Kaluza’s day job is working at Take Action Minnesota, which allows them to deepen community ties through storytelling while engaging in social justice work.

In 2019, Kaluza applied to Power of Vision, an arts organization based out of Hope Community in Minneapolis. It enabled Kaluza to listen to and tell the stories of the Phillips neighborhood, as well as support tenants in the Corcoran neighborhood.

At the same time, Kaluza was supporting tenants in the Whittier neighborhood as they fought to claim their buildings from a landlord who charged high rents without maintaining the buildings. After a long legal fight, the tenants won the right to own their buildings in the summer of 2020. Kaluza worked with the tenants group named Cielos sin Limites (Sky Without Limits) to create a mural that celebrates the struggle and victory of the tenants.

During the uprising in late May and early June, Kaluza focused on connecting community: organizing fire brigades, setting up lines of communication to keep community abreast of minute-by-minute changes, and starting the process of political education. As the situation calmed in the Twin Cities, Kaluza continued the long-term work of education, pointing out that community safety is more than “police or no police” — it is everyone having needs met.

Political education coupled with direct action is work Kaluza is engaged in at the local level as well as in the wider city and state. Their work focuses first on housing and then on climate change and immigration rights. Kaluza speaks with passion about the need for housing that people can afford to live in safely and with dignity. Without this, they argue, other fights are impossible. “We can’t work on climate change or immigration rights if we don’t have places to live.”
Wide-Angle View

As a child, Kaluza spent the school year living in the Phillips neighborhood in south Minneapolis and the summers in rural Guatemala with their father’s family.

Growing up, their mother characterized Phillips as a microcosm of what is going on in the world. When the Hmong fled Vietnam, many found refuge in Phillips. When people fled the drug epidemic in Chicago, they moved to Phillips. As people leave east Africa, you can see it reflected in the Phillips neighborhood. At the same time, the social issues that plagued the world, and the ways that U.S. foreign policy impacted other countries, were on display without subtlety in Guatemala. They recalled looking around at the Guatemalan community and seeing darker skinned people than Kaluza, yet the ads and billboards featured people who were lighter.

Kaluza grew up engaged in social justice. They were taught early that they have the power to act and can change the direction of the world. They cannot be a neutral actor, instead they have an obligation to be a positive force.

Kaluza’s connection to art also is rooted in being bicultural. “Growing up across two cultures really drove home a deep desire for solidarity and understanding across so-called borders — cultures, identities, class, races.”

This drive to connect brought Kaluza into the arts, specifically storytelling. In high school, they participated in a spoken word workshop, which led to joining Palabristas, a group of Latinx spoken word and slam poets. Through Palabristas, Kaluza had the opportunity to travel around Minnesota performing, in hope that it would inspire others to share their own stories.

Kaluza believes art creates space for vulnerability, which in turn creates deeper relationships. “Talk to one another — in neighborhoods, apartment buildings, places of worship, workplaces. In those conversations, practice being vulnerable. If we share our stories about how we and our loved ones are impacted, the people we speak with will also have their own stories to share. By sharing vulnerability, we build deeper relationships. We need deep relationships to face what’s coming — floods, heat waves, climate refugees.”

Magdalena Kaluza believes that the pandemic has given us an opportunity to collectively reject systems of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism. To create solidarity around what we need, Kaluza says, more people need to tell their stories and to actively listen to the stories of others.

Resources

- Incanidxs Unidxs por la Justicia (United Renters for Justice), inquilinxsunidxs.org
- moneypowerlandsolidarity.libsyn.com — A local podcast about social justice and housing
Claire Avitabile brought visibility to women and transgender theater artists by founding 20% Theatre Company Twin Cities. After 15 seasons, the company is closing its operations in 2021, taking the time to first celebrate its impact.

Avitabile was studying at Smith College in Massachusetts when the New York State Council on the Arts released a report from a three-year study of the status of women in theater. The researchers demonstrated that 23 percent of the 2000-01 productions in the American Theatre magazine were directed by women and 20 percent had a woman on the writing team.

Julie Baber, who was one year ahead of Avitabile at Smith, used that glaring statistic as the basis for starting a theater company in New York, which she named 20% Theatre. A year after that, another friend from Smith moved to Chicago and co-founded 20% Theatre Chicago.

Avitabile arrived in Minnesota in 2005 and was struck by how difficult it was to get directing work. When she did get work, she was shocked and saddened about the lack of pay for the actors and theater professionals with whom she collaborated. She also felt there was a need for more queer theater in the Twin Cities. With Baber's permission, she started 20% Theatre Twin Cities.

“I just woke up one day and felt like I could run off of the 20% model,” Avitabile says. Since then, 20% has produced traditional full-length plays, experimental work, and content specifically focused on trans stories.

“To be honest, we didn’t actually produce a play with a trans character until 2008, mainly because I didn’t know of any and was struggling to find plays with trans content,” says Avitabile. “Then, my good friend and fellow Smith College alum, Tobias K. Davis, emailed me his play “Standards of Care,” which had an amazing modern plot, great dialogue, humor and heartache, and featured a trans character without being a
Trans 101 type of play. The response to our production was amazing. We knew right away that we needed to do more trans work and also do the work to engage more trans artists on stage and behind the scenes, which is what we did.”

Avitabile is most proud of the company’s Q-STAGE: New Works Series. Begun as an incubator program in 2013, Q-Stage exemplifies many of the values of 20%, including providing opportunities for early career artists, who are given resources, mentorship, and a larger stipend to create work.

“That project has been incredible to watch grow over the years,” Avitabile said, adding that the program will live on in the hands of Artistic Director Marcella Michelle, who will bring the program to another queer arts group, Lightning Rod, after 20% sunsets.

Michelle became part of the 20% team five years ago after seeing an audition notice for a trans woman of color. She says Avitabile’s dedication to the mission, and her willingness and desire for accountability, have been crucial. “There are so many queer artists and so many trans artists who found a home in 20%, myself included,” Michelle says.

“I think the legacy she is leaving behind is present in me personally, as someone who is in a position to continue that legacy, and who feels that Claire’s work has genuinely changed my life.”

Avitabile says she has been committed to educating other cisgender people about how to best engage transgender artists. She has talked to local directors about not just finding a trans actor, but having transgender dramaturge and designers.

After 20% has its final curtain, Avitabile’s goal is to go back to school to earn a license as a marriage and family therapist. “It’s a more recent dream,” she says. She also hopes to get back into directing as a freelancer, without also producing.

Meanwhile, 20% has published all of the plays from its Naked I series, which brings together the stories of people who identify as trans, queer, or gender-nonconforming. She also is arranging for the company’s archives to go to the Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies, so that anyone can learn about the company’s history.

Details: tctwentypercent.org

Claire Avitabile suggests:
“Take a chance on new work once in awhile. Don’t settle for familiar, over-done plays, most of which are written by cis white men. There are incredible plays deserving of a stage and resources and audiences. Generally, I hope that people will listen to queer and trans people and stand up for our rights. I hope that people will stop rejecting and being afraid of what they don’t know or don’t understand, and make time to learn what they can.”
Women for Political Change: Equitable Restructuring
reported by Cirien Saadeh

Women for Political Change (WFPC) aims to build the political power of young women, trans, and nonbinary individuals. The statewide student chapters are made up of people who identify as queer, trans, disabled, and BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color).

Ongoing evolution has been a hallmark of the relatively young collective, which transitioned from a student group at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities in 2015 into a formal nonprofit in 2018. In recent months, it has begun to change the nature of its organization.

As a typically event-oriented group, WFPC leaders struggled in 2020 to adjust to the constraints of the pandemic. In past years they hosted house parties aimed at fundraising or educating attendees about political power.

“We started the year so strong. We had this beautiful brunch in January [with] local speakers and free food. We were able to talk about [our] work. We had a poetry performance, a panel,” says co-founder Felicia Philibert. “That’s been a hard thing to do in the pandemic, bringing people together and building meaningful relationships.”

WFPC pivoted to generate on-the-ground support with a mutual aid fund after the group saw that many nonprofits were not directly responding to its base of women, trans, and non-binary folks under the age of 30. That aid included political education, resource-sharing, fighting against possible evictions, and establishing a commitment to statewide mutual aid. “When people are fed and their kids are clothed and they have a house over their head, then [they can say] ‘Now we can organize.’ That is where we see the role — mutual aid and education, and less policy and politicians,” says co-founder Ana Mendoza-Packham.

The group announced sweeping organizational changes in October. Restructuring will transition executive directors to program directors. Its mutual aid fund will be more easily accessible.

WFPC also is eliminating its 501c4 status as a tax-deductible social welfare organization, maintaining its 501c3 status. It will invest in the power and political education of its base.

“Nonprofits are not going to house the revolution. We are very much aware of the nonprofit industrial complex. Our long-term vision is that WFPC [will] not exist in our present form,” says Philibert, who is transitioning from Education & Advocacy Director to Operations Director.

As a queer Haitian American, with a background in electoral politics, social work, and organizational development, Philibert believes in the intersectional nature of the work. “WFPC is a means to an end. As we make these transitions, our goal is to sustain the work of the revolution as a whole, and our community’s work, and not the nonprofit organization itself,” Philibert says. “We are not scared to say that we mess up sometimes and want to be in relation with folks so that we can address their needs and concerns, be real on that front, and build meaningful relationships.”

The killing of George Floyd brought attention to the organization, which raised money for its Mutual Aid Fund and the Frontlines Fund, which was for Black youth leading protests. The mutual aid fund now has a coordinator to restructure the program according to community requests, and will re-open for applications.

“The uprisings over the summer brought us a lot of visibility,” says Mendoza-Packham. “While we did play a significant role in distributing aid and resources, the uprisings didn’t happen because of us. We weren’t the catalyst of that. We just helped where we could.”

Felicia Philibert and Ana Mendoza-Packham say helping out neighbors needs to happen year-round and encourage mutual aid donations. WFPC is seeking feedback from queer Black youth, ages 16-24, on the future of its Mutual Aid Fund and the organization’s overall efforts. womenforpoliticalchange.org
Islamic aesthetics and gender politics influence my art. My work unfolds across a range of media: screenprinting, drawing, sculpture, and installation. My palette plays with vibrant reds, yellows, and hot pinks that alternate with majestic gold, purple, and blue. I screenprint stylized figures within a context of Arabic calligraphy and geometric design.

Using rolls of screen-printed fabric or paper, I build spaces and passages that feature murals and small sculptures based on interviews with Arab women. Secluded by columns and domes, and nuanced by sound and light, these installations recall Bedouin tents and Islamic architecture. More recently, I have been experimenting with 2D animation and investigating ways to integrate it within my installations.

I hope to take the viewer on a visual journey that makes her relate to the beauty of Islamic art in an acceptance of human conditions and otherness. I seek to evoke curiosity and playfulness to stimulate my audience to examine human values from a neutral perspective.

Details: hendalmansour.com
In a time when there is a lot to be stressed about, it is helpful to take a step back to see long-term vision that is being accomplished. For 26 years, The Alliance has reminded policy makers, through its long-term relationships and community partnerships, how issues are interconnected, that racial disparities are deep, and that people directly affected by development decisions need to be at the table.

People of color are starting to have more transit options, that originally had been focused largely on bringing white commuters to downtown jobs, and are starting to get a more fair share of public infrastructure jobs. In July, The Alliance members were part of S.A.F.E. housing protections enacted in St. Paul, to take effect in March 2021, that will reduce evictions, displacement, and discrimination.

The Alliance is a largely foundation-funded coalition of 33 member organizations, based in Minneapolis, that works on issues of transit, housing, and strengthening jobs throughout the Twin Cities. It has a staff of six, focused on coalition and campaign building in frequent meetings with member and partner organizations. The board consists of members who are not simply engaged in governance, but understand how the on-the-ground work happens.

Board president Nelima Sitati-Munene, of African Career, Education & Resource Inc., has been a member for eight years. She serves the coalition because it “is made up of some of the best organizations in the Twin Cities and in the nation, coming up with innovative ways to engage community and solve some of the most pressing issues of our time. The staff builds strong relationships in the community and among policy makers. The organization enjoys the trust and respect of both, which is key to bringing about change that is needed.”

A priority is to change the narrative around density development so that it is inclusive of affordable and equitable housing, local hiring, and public green spaces. The Alliance notes that the Twin Cities needs 65,000 affordable units.

Moving at the Speed of Trust

The Alliance got its start in 1994 when social justice activists realized their capacity to influence decisions at the local level.
could be amplified if they united as a coalition. Regional growth and development was perpetuating imbalances because of disregard for impact on environment and racial equity. As long-time staff member Maura Brown put it, the Twin Cities area was becoming “sprawling, with no regard for the consequences.”

By the early 2000s, The Alliance was partnered with organizations rooted in low-income communities of color. Says executive director Joo Hee Pomplun, “A collective of people at the table know their community issues better than any individual decision-maker can.”

Before taking the lead staff role, Pomplun had been an organizer in community and public health, increasingly aware of the disparities, and did mitigation for small businesses. That work led them to The Alliance before joining the board, then the staff.

“I always admired the work of The Alliance in being responsive and diverse. It’s about not looking to represent a specific community, but the whole community, and those most disenfranchised and harmed by systems.”

Brown, who grew up in South Minneapolis, attended college on the East Coast. While there, she read a description of her neighborhood as a “ghetto” and wanted to know who had the right to define a community. She knew her home neighborhood to be supportive and nurturing of one another. When she returned, she went to work organizing with low-income tenants.

Essential to the work of The Alliance, Brown says, is developing respectful relationships so that everyone feels heard, which can mean “slowing down policy work to unpack power and other dynamics.” It is about moving at the speed of trust.

Adds Pomplun, “It’s not only about problems and systems. It is essential that we are strengthening leadership and shifting the decision-making processes to be more centered in communities that are the most impacted, currently and historically.”

Acknowledging intersectional identities and experiences of individuals and communities also is key. “It is important to create environments that are safe to talk about perspectives — learning what drives those passions,” they add.

At a particularly difficult time in one coalition, when there was harm and distrust to confront, members took part in a healing practice, which helped them take a step back. Pomplun reports, “We were able to re-see each other as the human beings that we are, reconnect in relationship, then go back and think about the work we wanted to do. Working on the human side means the work moves forward.”

**Adaptation**

The Alliance did extensive work in 2020 with small businesses led by people of color. The initial outreach was to survive the pandemic, says Brown. Now it is about taking relationships and conversations to “move from survival to creating a system in which we can thrive,” says Pomplun.

Brown says 2020 “stretched our capacity for adaptation. The work plan we put together changed dramatically. Our central mission now is to help our partners survive and transform as we see what COVID and uprising has brought. Along with tremendous suffering is unique opportunity.”

Pomplun adds, “It is essential that we move from short-term emergency relief to what is next for our entrepreneurs, who are taking on debt in order to keep business alive, who will struggle to bridge that gap.” If revenue largely goes to landlords and corporations, “what is next in being able to have communities retain its unique identities?”

Munene indicates 2021 will be a year for the organization to work at state-level advocacy. “We will be supporting efforts to prevent evictions and support renter’s rights. We will increase support for an inclusive workforce and lift up the role of small businesses to preserve our communities.”

As Brown noted, “Partners are eager to work with ideas that, two years ago, seemed unrealistic. Now it is about changing what is conceived to be possible.”

To connect with the work of the Alliance, sign up for The Link, its bi-weekly newsletter. Explore two tools created by The Alliance that offer questions and checklists of requirements for development and planning work that centers equity and community benefits: “Our Area: Alliance Regional Equity Agenda,” and The Equitable Development Principles and Scorecard. [thealliancetc.org](http://thealliancetc.org)
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Pandemic Adjustments

We asked readers to write about how they plan to connect during these insulated months and recharge from this tumultuous year.

Anna Tennis

In Northern Minnesota the winter arrived in October, having evidently gotten the news that we weren’t up to much anyway. Winter decided to make its chilly landing with considerably more aplomb than previous years. Gone was the sneaking frost, inching its way in. Instead, we had quick snow accumulation, and the days were suddenly cold enough to necessitate emergency clothing measures — snow pants, for heaven’s sake!

This year, concerned with getting more than candy from strangers and neighbors, we elected to do reverse Halloween. We dropped bags of sugar-bomb snacks at neighbors’ houses, and sat around a yard fire to enjoy our own spoils.

We are handling Thanksgiving and Christmas the same way: fires in the yard with friends and family, closer groups and shorter visits, catching up and communing until we are too cold to sit anymore, or the wood runs out. With patience and creative thinking, we aim to retain joy in the holidays, despite the pandemic. Bills are paid, we are still healthy, and we are in this together. That is likely what we’ll remember the most.

Kelly Holstine

I got divorced at the beginning of the pandemic, which means that I have been living alone (with my pets) and single for the majority of this eon. Thinking about the holidays can be a little daunting, but this epidemic continues to provide unique opportunities for growth.

About a decade ago, I renamed Thanksgiving “Grateful Day.” I wanted to spend the day with my friends and family, but didn’t want to support a holiday that was created to celebrate the genocide of Native Americans. I attempted to change its meaning, but I still don’t think it is far enough removed from the original intent. This year is the perfect opportunity to start boycotting it all together. Since I am not responsible for anyone else’s holiday experience, the pets and I can just treat it like any other day and not participate in the whitewashing of Native history.

I identify as pagan, so my favorite holiday is winter solstice — what Christmas used to be before Christians reappropriated it. On that day, I reflect on my previous year, make a list of emotional burdens that are not serving me anymore, burn them, and get excited about future possibilities. This healing and centering ceremony helps me listen to my inner voice while also connecting me to the collective voice.

This holiday season, I intend to connect with myself, my people, and my community, and find out what folx need. This year might be challenging because not everyone is used to spending holidays without their families and friends. But this situation opens the door for us to be even more intentional about making authentic connections with the people we love, even virtually. I am, surprisingly, looking forward to all of it.

Sadia Ali

My resolution for making 2021 a year of regeneration is self-care and routines. As humans, we thrive collectively with day-to-day routines. For me, 2021 will be about recapturing those routines and making them stronger. Self-care is how we advocate for ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Self-care is the base of how we show love to ourselves. Routines combined with self-care will be the regeneration I am working on for 2021. I want my physical, mental, and emotional selves to align and recover from the shockwaves of 2020. My overall resolution is to make 2021 a year of revival and growth. I am hoping the year welcomes us all as a whole.
Ellie Krug

One of the unfortunate effects of my divorce and gender transition is that Thanksgiving and Christmas have become sad days — some years, I spent one or both holidays alone or as the third-wheel at a friend’s gathering. Truth be told, I just want to get past the holidays and simply make it to January 2, a blank page and fresh start for the new year.

This year, the virus lockdown will only complicate things; I know that is the case for so many others, too.

Still, I have some hope. For the past several years, my oldest daughter has spent the holidays with me. In the past, we have sometimes gone to a nicer restaurant and then a movie. More than once, we’ve eaten in, with me as the cook for her favorite meal: spaghetti. It’s not much work, either: she insists on Ragu, the red-sauce-out-of-the-jar that she grew up with.

Yep, even I, the world’s worst cook, can do that!

Last Christmas, we started a new tradition: writing down a favorite memory of each other. Because I’m neurotic, I typed out a couple pages of several memories.

My daughter was more judicious and gave me a holiday card with several handwritten paragraphs. She referenced a memory of me during a family vacation at Disney World 20 years prior when I still presented as male. Her words — loving and affirming, written with tremendous heart — quickly had me crying.

That card is now among my most cherished things. Because of the comfort it offers me, I have gone back to the card and its wonderful words many times during this difficult year.

I plan to ask my daughter if we can exchange more written memories this Christmas.

I am hoping that she will say, “Yes.”
An Ethnic Studies Requirement

The Minneapolis Public School’s Board of Education voted in November to require a one-semester ethnic studies course before graduation, beginning with 9th graders in 2021-22. Elective courses now offered at some schools include First Nations Studies, African American Studies, Hmong Studies, and Race & Identity Studies.

Several states have explored a deeper commitment to ethnic studies curriculum in recent years. Some are statewide, some are district by district. Ethnic Studies courses are designed to engage students in learning beyond the Euro-American perspective.

The growth of interest has been inspired partly in response to an Arizona law in 2010 that banned ethnic studies. As NPR reported in 2017, “Republican lawmakers were specifically targeting a Mexican-American studies program at Tucson High School, where minority enrollment is 88 percent. The Republicans who wrote the legislation claimed the classes were stoking racial tensions and ‘radicalizing students.’”

Arizona prohibited classes and materials that "promote the overthrow of the U.S. government," "resentment toward a race or class or people," or "ethnic solidarity."

Stoking resentment, said one of the Tucson teachers who offered the class, was not the point. The class began with an affirmation, a Mayan precept called In Lak Ech, which translates to "You are another me."


Eugenics: The Legacy We Do Not Want to Return

A nurse called attention in September to hysterectomies performed by a gynecologist on detained migrants without their full consent. She was working at a detention center in Georgia and reported that almost every woman was told they needed the procedure, which removes all or part of the uterus.

The 19th, a new gender-based online newsroom about politics, reported a history of the eugenics movement in the U.S. In 1905, Indiana made sterilization mandatory for “certain individuals in state custody.” Eventually, more than two-thirds of states passed similar laws, which was especially associated with women impacted by poverty, disability, criminality, alcoholism, and having children out of wedlock.

In 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a state’s right to forcibly sterilize a person considered “feeble-minded.” One person testified that it was a justified response to addressing the “shiftless, ignorant, and worthless class of antisocial whites of the South.” The law has not been overturned and has impacted as many as 70,000 women.

As Elspeth Wilson, author of “The Reproduction of Citizenship,” told The 19th, “England and the United States started the eugenics movement, not Nazi Germany.” The idea was that America would be stronger if only the physically and financially strong reproduced.

According to some reports, between 1973 and 1976, at least one-quarter of Native American women between ages 15 and 44 were sterilized. About one-third of Puerto Rican women of childbearing age were sterilized between the 1930s and 1970s, Wilson said.

Source: The 19th, “Whistleblower Complaint”

A New Approach to Celebrating Diwali

Diwali is the Hindu festival of lights that marks one of the most popular celebrations for Minnesota’s 50,000 Hindus, which was celebrated — in adapted form because of the pandemic — on November 14.

Sahan Journal quoted Monika Vadali, of Plymouth, whose neighbors are largely Indian immigrants. “It’s one of the first festivals that comes when it gets cold. I look forward to it. It has religious significance and there’s normally a neighborhood get together. One of our friends plays music, we hand out sweets, and do fireworks on the driveway.”

Pooja Bastodkar, the president of the Hindu Society of Minnesota, explains that the holiday started around 5,000 B.C., and commemorates the homecoming of a prince named Ram. The kingdom celebrated his return by lighting lamps in the palace and around the kingdom. In modern times, “it’s a time for celebration with family, cleaning, lighting up your home, good food, festivities.”

Bhakti Modi, of Chanhassen, joked with the Sahan Journal reporter: “Thanksgiving doesn’t have anything on Diwali, because Thanksgiving is one day. With Diwali, you’re eating for like 10 days. This is a nightmare for diabetics.”

Modi, who works at a software company, said she knows many people who were resistant to new technology. She said the good thing that happened in 2020 is that more people embraced computers and video calls in her family.

For Diwali, “We’re going to do a huge family call with all my family members across the world, across the U.S., in India, and other places. We’re going to get together on a Zoom call and eat together and talk together,” Modi said.

Source: Sahan Journal, “Hindus Light Up”
Minnesota youth have been affected in extraordinary ways in 2020. Most are attending school virtually or in hybrid models. In spite of these challenges, or perhaps because of it, youth are mobilizing with intensity. They are confronting systemic racism, police brutality, social inequity, and climate change. Here are a few of the teenagers who made an impact in 2020.

Juwaria Jama is a junior at Spring Lake Park High School and the state lead for Minnesota Youth Climate Strike. She is part of Youthprise’s MN Young Champions program, working to get unemployment benefits for previously working high school students.

Jama was inspired by the community response to the murder of George Floyd. “Seeing the protests going on all around the state, it’s shown that there’s so much people power,” she says. Adjusting to online activism has been difficult, she admits. However, “the pandemic has shown us that there is always going to be a solution.”

Nyagach Kueth led teen activists in organizing numerous demonstrations, including an emergency protest after police officer Derek Chauvin was released on bail. She raised over $80,000 on GoFundMe for businesses on Lake Street affected by the uprisings.

Kueth, a senior at Washburn High School in Minneapolis, calls out the pressure on young activists. “The youth are told that we are the future. That is a huge title to uphold,” she says. “We have what it takes to [change the world], but to give us that title is kind of absurd.”

In the wake of Floyd’s murder, Monique Walker — a high school senior from St. Anthony who is taking a full load of PSEO classes at the University of Minnesota — created an anti-racist curriculum and hosted a mix of online and socially distanced trainings. “The trainings were to inform the white people in my community about the horrible history of racism in the United States and to unlearn white supremacy.” She also raised around $4,000 from the trainings, which was donated to Black-led organizations.

Walker has been organizing with other youth at St. Anthony, seeking to disrupt patterns of racial discrimination. They have successfully lobbied the school’s bands to diversify their repertories, which previously consisted of almost
entirely white composers.

“What inspires me is trying to make things different for people younger than me,” Walker says. Middle schoolers in her hometown of St. Anthony have more diversity than the upper grades, she says. “But I want to make sure that their voices are being heard.”

Semhar Solomon, also a senior at St. Anthony High School, had a busy summer of organizing. Following the uprisings, Solomon created a network of supply drives that raised $10,000 and sent 50 carloads of donations to affected communities. She spoke at several protests and organized a rally in honor of Philando Castile, who was murdered by St. Anthony police four years ago.

Solomon admits that all her work took its toll. “I would not be at my house all day,” she recalls. “Then I would come home, eat, and go out again.” She eventually came down with a stress-induced flu and had to take a break.

Solomon experienced a major disappointment in August, after she organized the first annual Black Village Fest, which was intended to showcase Black-owned businesses. She had to scrap the event when the city council, who had previously approved the event, handed her almost 30 pages of guidelines less than 24 hours before the event was scheduled.

“I don’t discredit the fact that those COVID guidelines need to be addressed,” Solomon explains. “But giving that information less than 24 hours [in advance]? It was one of those losses that made me feel bad about myself, made me feel skeptical of our city council. I have a group chat with activists, and they were like, ‘yeah, this has been happening a lot recently.’”

What has Solomon learned from her 2020 organizing experience? “Making yourself the priority so that other things also can be a priority is important,” she says.

There is a sense of urgency to the work. “I don’t think waiting is something any of us want to do,” says Solomon. “I want to see the change now.”

Suggests Monique Walker: “Activism comes in all different ways. If you do not have the time to protest in the larger community, be an activist in your specific community. I want people to be brave and use their voice no matter how hard it is.”
Jael Kerandi knows how slow the wheels of progress turn at the University of Minnesota. Last spring, she was finishing her term as student body president, the first Black student to hold the position in the University’s 169-year history.

On May 25, after Kerandi watched the video of the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, she knew that the University would make a public statement. “I wanted them to hear from me first,” Kerandi says. “I did not want to see a blanket statement. I wanted to see action by our university. I knew what I needed to do.

“At the end of the day, my sole obligation is to the students,” she says. “My job is not respectability politics. I have to hold the institution accountable.”

On May 26, Kerandi issued a clear letter to University President Joan Gabel and the Board of Regents that demanded the immediate end to the school’s relationship with the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD), which has “repeatedly demonstrated with their actions that Black bodies are expendable to them,” she wrote. “This is a norm that we have been desensitized to due to its frequency. MPD has continually shown disregard for the welfare and rights of people of color on our campus.”

In the letter, Kerandi illustrated MPD’s repeated offenses against the Black community, from a botched 1989 SWAT raid that resulted in the deaths of two Black elders, to the murders of Jamar Clark and Philando Castile.

“We have lost interest in discussion, community conversations, or ‘donut hours,’” Kerandi continued, referencing the University’s usual action in the wake of a shock to the community. “We no longer wish to have a meeting or come to an agreement. There is no middle ground.”

She gave university leadership 24 hours to respond. Something striking happened. President Gabel responded quickly with a letter of her own, promising
to end the school’s relationship with the Minneapolis Police Department.

Kerandi’s words caught the world’s attention, garnering coverage from NPR to CNBC. “I genuinely never expected it,” she says. “What to me is the most inspiring part of [being in the public eye] is talking to other student leaders who say, ‘Now that you’ve set this precedent, now that I have something I can refer to, I can push for the same thing at my institution. Now I feel empowered to talk with my administration. Now I understand the power of student voice.’”

While the University was the first institution to cut ties with MPD, public school districts, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, museums, law firms, and concert venues soon followed.

This fall, Kerandi was elected chair of the student representatives to the Board of Regents — in addition to numerous other representative roles on campus — which give her a role in guiding the future of the University. Kerandi plans to push for recruitment and retention of Black faculty, funding the research of BIPOC students, and embedding anti-racism into everyday culture, “not just a three-hour training to click through.”

“Frankly, the larger shift needs to be cultural,” she says, “but that doesn’t happen overnight.” The University can be an important part of creating equity in the communities students enter after graduation.

Land-grant universities are responsible to serving the state, Kerandi points out, so they should “feel like it’s their duty [to do anti-racism work].”

Kerandi will graduate in Spring 2021 after completing double majors in Finance and Marketing, and double minors in Business and Leadership. Her studies are in business, “but working for the community and serving my community will always be a part of me. You can be an activist wherever you are,” she says.

“I stand on the shoulders of so many,” Kerandi says. “There are thousands of Black women and activists beside me. We must keep going. The marathon has to continue.”

Jael Kerandi’s list of ways to take action:

• Support local, grassroots organizers
• Read the MPD150.com report
• Engage in local elections
• Educate yourself, but be mindful that knowledge is most valuable when it informs your decisions and actions
• Tell yourself every day that someone’s humanity and right to life is not a partisan matter
At the start of her long legal career, when she was an attorney at the League of Minnesota Cities, Ellen Longfellow was known as “The Sewer Queen.” Although her cases were small, she took many of them to trial and defended cities against sewer backup claims, sidewalk mishaps, potholes, and the like.

“I enjoyed that, because a lot of the claims involved public works–type issues,” she says. “Public works people are kind of the salt-of-the-Earth, who are underappreciated until something goes wrong.”

She persevered at that job for 24 years. Seeking a change, Longfellow became a loss control trainer, teaching city authorities on how to avoid claims and lawsuits. She conducted legal clinics with the Hmong population in St. Paul and the Somali population in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. She worked as a crime victim advocate and with the elderly.

Eventually, her path led her to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), where she became an attorney focused on helping Muslim communities in Minnesota fight discrimination.

“Civil rights was a totally different area I had not worked in before. It was inspiring to try to help people with discrimination claims,” Longfellow says. It also was challenging work. “It was hard to figure out if they were being discriminated against because of their race, religion, or ethnicity. For many people in the Muslim community, they [face all] three.”

She did clinics in the community and took on criminal and administrative cases. Many of CAIR’s clients were temporary workers in fractured workplaces.

“Companies have been cautious about hiring [full-time] workers,” Longfellow says. Many employers take advantage of unskilled Muslim immigrants who are working through temporary agencies. Whereas temp workers used to move into permanent positions, in the current job market, “people are working temp [jobs] one, two, three years,” she says. “If you are working temp, all you get are low wages, no benefits. They get stuck in this. It is very difficult to get significant wage increases or promotions.”

When a discrimination claim came up, often the temp agency and the company contracting it would bicker over who was at fault. “That was very frustrating: to try and figure out who should be responsible,” Longfellow says. “We think that both of them should, but the way they set up the system, they could point fingers at each other.”

Ellen Longfellow: Winning Civil Rights

reported by Erica Rivera
Many of the issues that arose involved prayer in the workplace, especially if the employees did shift work or were on an assembly line. Some Muslims pray five times a day, which didn't always coincide with designated break times.

Another common workplace issue involved clothing, such as a woman who wanted to wear long dresses or the hijab at work. Sometimes an employer had a legitimate objection, like a printer who was concerned that a long dress would get caught in mechanical equipment; other times there was no good reason for the employer to object.

CAIR didn't have the resources for civil litigation, so Longfellow relied on other methods to resolve her clients' issues, from writing letters to employers to filing claims with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Sometimes, she was able to get employers to change their workplace policies.

“You’re not just helping one person, but you’re making it a better place for other people to work,” Longfellow says.

Longfellow's largest settlement on behalf of CAIR involved a case against the Minneapolis Park Board. In 2018, four Somali teen boys were handcuffed and held at gunpoint by Minneapolis Park Police after someone claimed they were harassing a white couple. As it turned out, the boys were the victims of harassment.

CAIR worked with the boys’ mothers, none of whom spoke English. They were eventually awarded a $170,000 settlement.

“It felt good to help these mothers get some resolution for what had happened to their sons. They were so young, and it was very traumatic for them to be handcuffed and put in a police car when they hadn’t done anything,” Longfellow says. “Civil rights you don’t win very often. But when you do, it feels good.”

Longfellow retired from eight years with CAIR in March. Her work was recognized by CAIR executive director Jaylani Hussein, whose suggestion led to her selection as a 2020 Minnesota Women’s Press Changemaker.

Longfellow has no regrets about her career trajectory, unpredictable as it has been. She sees each role as a stepping stone to the next.

“I would recommend that you take advantage of opportunities when they come up,” Ellen Longfellow says. “I didn’t know I was going to become any of these things, but the connections you make can lead you to different places.”
A theme in Minnesota Women's Press since its earliest years has been spirituality. We have had conversations about the roles of women in faith and religion, including limitations from “the stained-glass ceiling.”

The Re-Imagining Community, an ecumenical nonprofit organization that explored Christian concepts and imagery from a feminist perspective, gathered in 1993. It included 2,000 people from 49 states and 27 countries, and was held at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Critics accused the organizers of heresy and being anti-Christian. Some called for the resignations of women who participated.

In 1998, Carmen Peota wrote about the second iteration of the “Re-Imagining Revival,” when people gathered in St. Paul. Among other details, the event included clotheslines stretched around the ballroom on which hung 400 clergy stoles from LGBTQ+ people who had been barred from serving their faith communities.
From Peota’s 1998 Article

“The backlash against 1993 shows how important it was,” said Rita Nakashima Brock, director of the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College.

Because women have had few opportunities in the 2,000 years of Christian history to shape Christian doctrine and theological debate, Re-imagining is a process of voicing women’s ideas, stories, and more formal theological constructs.

Storytelling is a key feature of the Re-Imagining format. Conference participants sat around round tables and were encouraged to share their experiences with others. It is also one of the sore points for its critics who feel that feminist Christians overrate new voices and underrate the Bible, God, and Jesus.

“We need to demonstrate that it’s not an oxymoron to be a Christian feminist,” said one of the conference organizers.

The View from 2016

Eighteen years later, Anne Hamre wrote “Re-Imagining: Revisited and Revived.” The 2016 story quoted original Re-Imagining participant Sherry Jordon and Mary Kay Sauter, then a retired United Church of Christ pastor, who was a co-chair of the 1993 conference. Sauter said, “I don’t know that we would have continued if not for the backlash.”

Jordon noted that the issues discussed in 1993 were still relevant. “There are still debates over inclusive language, sexuality. And the placement of women as senior pastors has not progressed as much as it could have.”

For 10 years, one paid staffer and volunteers operated a grassroots movement focused on dialogue between feminist theology and the church. They organized six more conferences in the Twin Cities; published a quarterly journal, a songbook, and a book of essays and liturgies; taught “faith labs” on feminist theology at churches; and organized small groups to discuss feminist theology and do feminist rituals.

Hamre reported:

“As an associate professor of theology, Jordon knows women’s stories are often devalued and lost without a conscious effort to preserve them. In that spirit, she’s on a year-long sabbatical focused on preserving Re-Imagining’s history and making its contributions available to others to build upon. The work involves oral interviews with presenters and organizers, digitizing the cassette tapes of the conferences, and creating a website to make materials available and continue the work of Re-Imagining.

As 60-, 70-, 80- and some 90-year-olds, we’d like to pass this part of the women’s movement on to another generation,” says Sauter, 70. “Let them build on it, make it their own.”

2020 Hindsight

The Re-Imagining community will disband as an organization in 2021, but as Sherry Jordon puts it: “The Re-Imagining movement continues whenever Christian communities empower people of various gender identities, sexual orientations, races, social classes, and faith traditions. The work of loving and searching for God, justice, and a challenging, empowering, and inclusive church continues.”

Details

• Buy “35 Years of Minnesota Women’s Press” at womenspress.com/buy-book
• ReimaginingCommunity.org includes digitized conference sessions from the earliest years.
• Union Theological Seminary has archived conference recordings: tinyurl.com/MWP-Re-Imagining
• Duke University has digitized oral interviews with 72 people connected with Re-Imagining, including planners, participants, and presenters.
A lot has happened in the world and in my personal life since my article was published in the Minnesota Women’s Press in 2017. In June 2019, I experienced a total burnout. My mother passed away in 2018. After a busy year of teaching following that, I began to experience extreme fatigue and brain fog. My body rebelled and I could only work on my art for a few hours a day. I shifted my focus from painting to mixed media: cut and paste to begin with, then little by little, I added layers and texture.

I started teaching again in the late fall of 2019, but when schools closed in March due to COVID, I was unable to continue my work as a teaching artist. I made mixed media artists journals as a way to process this massive shift. Out of that work grew an idea of making inspirational tags. I wanted to place them in Free Libraries around town as a gift for my community. Then the riots happened, yet another massive shift prompting me to add words of empowerment to the tags — breathe, rise, strong roots, earth magic — to give hope in a time of uncertainty and collective trauma. But since my town was burning, I shared the tags as giveaways with friends rather than placing them in Free Libraries, and still make them to inspire joie de vivre.

The world has changed, but my intent as an artist remains the same. Through my work, I strive to inspire awareness, healing energy, and a loving relationship with the planet Earth. I try to evoke a place full of magic — a poetic space that fuels the heart.

Details: marieolofsdotter.com
A few years ago, I read an interview with director Ava DuVernay (“13th”) about the chain leading from pre-Civil War chattel slavery to modern-day incarceration. One assertion DuVernay made stuck with me. She said that one should be wary of conservatives jumping on the “end mass incarceration” bandwagon, because they know that mass surveillance is coming to take its place.

With that idea planted, I wrote the first in a series of near-future science fiction stories, “Adjudicated,” about a woman of African descent who is arrested, arraigned, and implanted with nanobots that turn her into a walking, talking audio-video recorder with GPS monitoring. The story was published recently in “Astral Waters Review,” an online journal of inclusive science fiction and fantasy.

My series of short stories is focused on technologies being used to maintain and uphold classism and capitalism, as well as punitive actions against sex workers, people with chemical addictions, the poor, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Because of the related material, I attended a video panel discussion by the Walker Art Center in October entitled “Futures Focus: Race and Technology.”

The panelists were film director Shalini Kantayya, New York University professor Meredith Broussard, and Valeria Lopez Torres, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota.

Lopez Torres, a design student whose research interests include artificial intelligence (AI), talked about “technochauvinism.” The term was coined by Broussard to describe how the presumed advantages of technology help justify increasingly invasive uses, and that the public is lured into accepting privacy-invading technologies by the convenience they offer in shopping, for example.

The panel discussion was centered on “Coded Bias,” a documentary about facial recognition software (FRS) and algorithms. In the film, FRS was proven to not recognize dark-skinned or feminine faces accurately, showing that the automated computations that tech companies create — as well as the masses of data fed into them from Internet usage, smart phones, and other sources — are rife with the same systemic biases that plague society. Biased algorithms determine everything from what results you see when you do a Google search to who should get better credit card rates.

Broussard said that facial recognition software is being used today at a New York City housing project as a form of identification and surveillance with residents who are low income and predominately BIPOC.

In the film, one resident describes people being harassed by project management based on FRS surveillance, which is problematic. FRS has been shown in studies to fail at accurately recognizing Brown, Indigenous, and Asian faces.

Broussard suggests regulation is needed. “We need an FDA [Food and Drug Administration] for algorithms,” she said.

Kantayya talked about how the unbridled power of today’s technology barons — Microsoft, Amazon, Google — makes it hard to battle against the power of AI. Technology barons at the top today are wealthy, white, cis men.

The second story in my series, “Judie-Junkie Blues,” illustrates the current mass incarceration of people with chemical addiction, joined with the eventual extreme of mass surveillance and invasive technological interventions. I believe that if no progressive change is made, our future will be a society in which people will live in a prison cell everywhere we go.

Stephani Maari Booker (she/her), author of “Secret Insurrection: Stories from a Novel of a Future Time,” writes nonfiction, speculative fiction, erotic fiction, and poetry. goodreads.com/athenapm

Editor’s Note:
We are featuring Stephani Maari Booker’s “Judie-Junkie Blues” story in monthly installments, starting on the next page. Subsequent parts of the story will be featured online only. Sign up to our e-newsletter to be alerted when they are available.
The beeping of the alarm jolted Alexis out of her sleep. “Shit,” Alexis hissed as she sat up in her bed and rubbed her eyes. The lights in the room turned on automatically with the alarm that sounded in almost every bedroom at the sober living facility. A portion of a wall that doubled as a video screen displayed the time and the daily message to all the facility residents, but Alexis couldn’t read it until she put on her glasses that were on her nightstand. She didn’t care about the message anyway, and she knew what time it was. All the residents except any who had night-shift jobs had to get up at 0600, shower, clean their teeth, dress and be in the cafeteria for breakfast at 0700.

Besides the screen area of the wall in a space between two windows, the other furnishings in Alexis’s bedroom were another twin-sized bed and a wardrobe on the other side of the room. Alexis had spent the past month out of the two months she lived in the facility without a roommate, and she enjoyed every minute of that time alone. When she was first adjudicated by the law and remanded to substance use disorder treatment and the sober living facility, she had to share the bedroom with a surly man in his 50s. The 28-year-old woman tolerated his curse word-strewn rants in silence in an effort to not be a snitch or not commit a violation in the form of slapping his mouth shut. The roommate himself eventually “violated,” as it was called, and got removed from the facility.

Alexis stood up and then opened the metal wardrobe that stood next to her nightstand. After putting on a white bathrobe and grabbing a nylon bag that held her toiletries, she left the room and walked down the hall past other open bedroom doors to the restroom. The hallway was filling with other residents going the same way, people of many ethnicities, genders, ages, and sizes grumbling and chit-chatting as they wore identical white bathrobes and carried toiletry bags.

In the communal restroom, there were five toilet stalls, five urinals, five sinks on one wall with a single long mirror stretched over them, and five shower stalls. There were 19 residents at the facility, two with nightshift jobs that exempted them from morning wakeup. That meant 17 people had to share the restroom. Usage order was determined with a rotating alphabetical list by the residents’ last names. Toilets and urinals first, then showers, and last the sinks.

Alexis was number nine on the list, so she got a turn at the fourth urinal. “Andy, can I trade with you?” Residents were allowed to make trades.

Andy, a long-haired, blond Amer-Euro man in his early twenties, stood by the fifth toilet stall. “Sure,” he said. “Thank you!” Alexis didn’t feel like having to use the sanitary funnel in her toiletry bag, provided to all residents who needed it to use the urinal to make the morning hygiene routine fair.

After finishing with her morning ablutions, Alexis went back to her room to get dressed in a blue sweatshirt and sweatpants with white sneakers, apply pomade and run a brush over her close-cropped black hair to smooth her tight coils into waves, and make up her bed as required by the facility rules. Then she headed downstairs to get in line for breakfast in the cafeteria. Four facility staff supervised the residents and the automatic food dispensary as it served eggs, pancake, sausage, milk, and orange juice; once residents got their food and drinks they sat down at one of four long faux-wood picnic-style tables with benches.

Alexis sat next to Kelly, a 25-year-old Amer-Euro woman with shoulder-length dark brown hair and blue eyes. Kelly was a cocaine abuser who got adjudicated and remanded to treatment and the sober living facility three months before Alexis arrived.

On Alexis’s right side sat Annette, an Amer-Afro woman like Alexis who was 19, with large, wide brown eyes and a big halo of straightened off-black hair. Annette was remanded to the facility a month ago after being picked up by the Public Safety Squad for walking around naked and dazed on a downtown street. She had been treated for abuse of a designer drug related to PCP, but her spacey demeanor indicated that it wouldn’t be long before she was transferred to a mental wellness facility. Despite that, Annette was a good buddy of Alexis’s along with Kelly.

As soon as Alexis started eating, Kelly said to her, “Your life of luxury is about to end. I heard we’re getting a new resident today.”

“Damn.” Alexis shook her head. She was the only resident who didn’t have a roommate. “It was fun while it lasted.”

“Maybe somebody will violate today,” Annette chimed in. Violence, incorrigibility and persistent rule-breaking in the facility were violations that could lead to a removal.

“I doubt it,” Kelly responded. “Even the speed freaks in here are pretty laid back. Looks like you’re getting a new roomie.”

“Girl, that newbie better not be off the chain like Nicky was,” Alexis complained about her old roommate. “I swear if this roomie starts clowning in any way, I’m snitching their ass out.”

“I don’t blame you,” Kelly commiserated.
“They need to screen jerks like him for mental wellness treatment before they send them to any facility.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Alexis nodded as she ate her eggs.

“Anyway, Carla told me that Andy said he saw a newbie Saturday during late night,” Kelly said. Carla was Andy’s girlfriend, even though romantic and sexual relationships were prohibited at the facility. “Late night” was the privilege of staying up past 10pm on Friday and Saturday nights to watch TV and play video games in the day room awarded to residents who excelled at their sober living program goals. “He caught a quick look at somebody who looked femme and not Amer-Euro being taken to the treatment suite.”

Alexis sighed. “Aw, man, that means they’ll be out of treatment and in my room after dinner. Ugh. At least they’re femme. I don’t want to room with no dudes anymore.”

Breakfast ended at 0745. Residents who didn’t have jobs or schools to go to, including Alexis, had to attend the morning group meeting in the dayroom at 0800. The meeting, run by a staffer, went over general news and day-to-day issues at the facility. At 0830, the group was split up with roughly one half sent to the cafeteria and the other left in the dayroom for two separate counseling sessions with therapists streaming live on video. An hour later, the session ended and there was a 15-minute break before exercise time.

All residents had to spend 45 minutes doing a physician-approved exercise regimen of their choice. There was a workout room with treadmills, weights, and other equipment in the facility. Residents could also walk, run, bike, or engage in other activities outside the facility. GPS-tracking nanobots injected into the residents transmitted their locations to staff and law enforcement at all times.

After getting her helmet and gloves from the wardrobe in her bedroom, Alexis walked through the building to the facility garage, which kept bicycles, scooters, skateboards and other non-motorized transportation owned by residents, and retrieved her old seven-speed hybrid bike. The doorway she walked through to take the bike outside had a scanner that would detect contraband, such as alcohol, other commonly abused drugs, or weapons.

Before she got remanded to the sober living facility, Alexis hadn’t ridden a bike since she was 18. However, when she learned that biking outside the facility was allowed if it was approved for a resident’s exercise plan, she had her father bring her bicycle that was gathering dust in his apartment. She was glad she left the bike with her father; she learned that biking outside the facility was allowed if it was approved by residents, and retrieved her old seven-speed hybrid bike. The doorway she walked through to take the bike outside had a scanner that would detect contraband, such as alcohol, other commonly abused drugs, or weapons.

Biking gave her the only time she could be alone and away from the facility. “Late night” was the privilege of staying up past 10pm on Friday and Saturday nights to watch TV and play video games in the day room awarded to residents who excelled at their sober living program goals. “He caught a quick look at somebody who looked femme and not Amer-Euro being taken to the treatment suite.”

Alexis sighed. “Aw, man, that means they’ll be out of treatment and in my room after dinner. Ugh. At least they’re femme. I don’t want to room with no dudes anymore.”

“Not as nasty as Lucille Bogan, and she was out way back in the olden times, long before Denise LaSalle,” Alexis responded. “You know what? I haven’t even told you my name. It’s Alexis. Femme.”

“Not as nasty as Lucille Bogan, and she was out way back in the olden times, long before Denise LaSalle,” Alexis responded. “You know what? I haven’t even told you my name. It’s Alexis. Femme.”

It was customary with the Sovereign and Free People of the Americas (SFPA) to introduce oneself with one’s preferred pronouns: “femme” for she/her/hers, “dude” for he/him/his, “they” and “ze” for genders in between and outside the feminine-masculine binary.

“I’m Natalie, femme.”
As winter approaches, and the challenges of a year like no other continue to test us, we look for comfort wherever we can find it.

For readers, often this is on the pages of a book. In these tough times, we are grateful when we find books that inspire us, enlighten us, and give us strength and energy as we usher in a new year.

One of the joys and gifts of fiction is that it takes us into new worlds, offering us new perspectives. It is a way to escape the present for a few healing hours.

Some believe that escape reading needs to be mindless happy talk, but tales of difficult things, stories that are thought-provoking and engaging, also can let us escape the present and return with renewed hope.

Consider, for example, the latest novel from Minnesota treasure Louise Erdrich, “The Night Watchman.” This novel is about hard things — violence against women, poverty, the struggle of Native Americans in the 1950s to keep their tribal identities and lands — yet it is a deeply hopeful tale, with characters from whom the reader can learn much.

In her Afterword, Erdrich encourages the reader: “If you should ever doubt that a series of dry words in a government document can shatter spirits and demolish lives, let this book erase that doubt. Conversely, if you should be of the conviction that we are powerless to change those dry words, let this book give you heart.”

Reading memoirs and biographies of real women we admire is another way to find inspiration that takes us away from the discouragement that is so easy to fall into.

The new memoir-in-essays from celebrated local writer and literary activist Carolyn Holbrook, “Tell Me Your Names and I Will Testify,” is such a book. As described by publisher University of Minnesota Press: “Holbrook traces the path from her troubled childhood to her leadership positions in the Twin Cities literary community, showing how creative writing can be a powerful tool for challenging racism and the healing ways of the storyteller’s art.”

Readers looking for hope in distilled form might try picking up children’s books for their own reading pleasure. Decades ago, when we had a small bookshop as part of Minnesota Women’s Press, we sold a lot of children’s books, and we believed that they were not just for kids. We believe every woman should have her own children’s book collection.

The best books written for children offer beauty in both words and images, along with engaging tales and characters, and life truths valuable for all ages.

The extraordinary Twin Cities writer Kao Kalia Yang has two new children’s books out this year, both worth a read by adults: “The Shared Room,” with illustrator Xee Reiter, and “The Most Beautiful Thing,” with illustrator Khoa Le.

“The Shared Room” is about death, and “The Most Beautiful Thing” is about immigrant struggle, but you can’t finish reading them without a new sense of inspiration and gratitude.
Here are other recommendations of books you might not have discovered, which come from the readers who participate in our BookWomen reading groups, reading retreats, and book trips. Enjoy!

“All Passion Spent” (1931), a novel by Vita Sackville-West, which reveals the grace and depth of spirit of the aging protagonist

“Etta and Otto and Russell and James” (2015), a novel by Edith Hopper about memory, love, determination, and the long loop of existence

“Gathering Moss” (2003), lyrical nature essays, by Robin Wall Kimmerer


“I Am Malala” (2013), memoir of a courageous girl, by Malala Yousafzai

“Lab Girl” (2016), memoir by Minnesotan Hope Jahren, a remarkable scientist and teacher

“Mister Owita’s Guide to Gardening” (2014), memoir of unexpected connection and hope, by Carol Wall

“The Samurai’s Garden” (1992), a novel by Gail Tsukiyama, which offers a quiet and gentle story of friendship across cultures

“The Secret Garden” (1911), the classic children’s tale of the healing power of nature, by Frances Hodgson Burnett

“Wonder” (2012), by R. J. Palacio, a story for all ages about courage and the gift of kindness

If you plan to purchase books as gifts to yourself or others, we encourage you to buy local. Independent booksellers are a rich community resource, and they need our help in this time.
My usual mode of working is very spontaneous and intuitive. The narrative quality of each painting becomes apparent during the process of drawing, layering colors, sanding, and scraping. Through my portraits of people, animals, objects, and landscapes, I explore an imagined, fantastical universe of strange planets, transmuted species, and surreal situations.

My work is a study in contrasts — the juxtaposition of varying textures and patterns, the play between bursts of bold color and intricately drawn details and line work, and the balance between playful humor and an undercurrent of darker, more mysterious emotions. The compositions are often graphic in nature but also favor quavery pencil lines and messy brushstrokes that invoke a more handmade quality.

My paintings are not meant to be didactic; they read like pages torn from a strange storybook of narrative quandaries and puzzles.

I had a chuckle looking back at my interview in 2014 where I pondered my overall body of work in relation to self-portraiture. My more recent works definitely continue to reflect my rollercoasters of emotion, simple joys, and great anxieties.
A publication like ours is created based on the passions of our audience, which is why we seek your input regularly through surveys, invitations to submit to our Tapestry section, and networking feedback about story angles for upcoming themes. Thanks to readers who took our 2020 survey, we have a better idea of our community of readers and viewers to help shape priorities.

Common feedback is that articles are too short and the publication is metro-centric. Several women said they would like to see more light content to balance the seriousness of issues. Others would like to see more calls to action and resources to learn more and engage. Other comments:

“I’m 81 now, and visiting race again with my spiritual communities. I am learning how much I have missed in my lifetime, due to racial and economic inequality, to say nothing about those who were victims of racism. We all have so much to learn about ourselves and how we impact others without realizing it. Good people are racist, too.”

“Coming from Scandinavia, I took a 15 year step back in benefits and women’s position in workforce attitudes. You were one lone voice giving me hope.”

“Your June action guide is an example of mobilizing and providing truly valuable and relevant, immediate information that makes a difference. I didn't see this in traditional media.”

“Minnesota Women’s Press works with women and non-binary people to tell stories using their own voice, rather than a top-down model of reporting. I feel that I can trust MWP”

“MWP is a treasure. Unique and part of why Minnesota is such a strong feminist state.”

“The concerns are tangible and, since they are local, it feels like I am more able to be part of change that is needed.”

“I love how accessible it is. I pick it up free at the library. I love that it connects me with a diverse web of women in Minnesota.”

Thank you to all who participated in the survey. Congratulations to Barb Palmer, who won a $50 gift basket filled with Minnesota Women’s Press goodies, and to Teresa Thomas, who won a $100 gift certificate to NE Wellness.

Tell us what you recommend
...and you could win a $50 gift certificate to boreal.

Share your favorite people, places, and things by January 31 in the Minnesota Women’s Press annual readers’ poll

Go to tinyurl.com/MWP2021ReadersRecommend
We can’t wait to hear from you!
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Next DEADLINE: Monday, January 11, 5pm

LINE CLASSIFIED advertisements
Prepayment is required for the amount of the entire run. $35 minimum. Pay online with PayPal or mail check or Visa/MC info to Minnesota Women's Press, 800 W. Broadway, Suite 3A, Minneapolis, MN 55411 or call 612-646-3968 with credit card info.

CLASSIFIED DISPLAY advertisements
Run a boxed ad (1 or 2 inches) in a classified category. Contact us for more information, categories, deadlines, and rates.

Ads are run in consecutive issues. up to 25 words: $36/ad, 1-5 issues up to 25 words: $26/ad, 6-12 issues up to 50 words: $62/ad, 1-5 issues up to 50 words: $47/ad, 6-12 issues

For more info call 612-646-3968 or email ads@womenspress.com

Thank you for changing the world.

CLASSIFIED ADS
I was honored to be featured on the cover of the Minnesota Women’s Press as a 2010 Changemaker.

I am inspired by and thankful for local artists, community activism, and women’s voices — that is why I am a longtime fan of the Minnesota Women’s Press.

Since 2010, I have been creating new art, caring for my family, running the ColorWheel Gallery, and working on community art and healing events. The ColorWheel Gallery has been a creative community space that has supported local artists for 17 years. In 2016, I created a coloring activity book focused on Prince and the local influence he had, including his impact on me as an artist. In 2017, I created another book called “Pollinate Community,” focused on an ecosystem that relies on interdependent, diverse, and complex relationships that we need in order to survive. These books inspired community exhibits, art-making parties, and conversations.

This year has been complicated and stressful. Creative communities have been hit hard and people are struggling. But out of struggle comes much-needed change, new ideas, ingenuity, inspiration, and hope for a new and better world.

My article in 2010 was titled “Art for Change,” and that is what I still focus on. However, this year has challenged me. I had to stop, think, and re-focus on what my purpose is as an artist, activist, educator, and member of my family and community. Where should I focus my energies and passion, which seem to be depleted? Women are taught to give so much. We overcompensate and burn ourselves out to prove we can reach high expectations. I am working on self-care and reflection now.

This year for me also has been very difficult as I lost my mother, Eileen Espinosa, to cancer. She was an extremely talented artist and made art out of everything in life. She struggled to overcome her depression, anxiety, childhood trauma, insecurities, and many fights with cancer, all the time creating art. She, like many women artists, was overlooked and underappreciated. [My mother was also featured on the Minnesota Women’s Press 2016 Changemakers cover, featuring a painting she did of me.] I loved being able to show our art together and was thankful that I was able to encourage her.

Eight months before she passed away, I had a Celebration of Life retrospective of her work at the ColorWheel Gallery. It was a packed house. I am thankful that she was there to take in all the love. Remember to celebrate and honor your loved ones while they are still here.

Details: ColorWheelGallery.com, Instagram @colorwheelmpls
Please join longtime writing buddies, Carolyn Holbrook and Diane Wilson, for a reading and a discussion of their friendship and their newest books: Carolyn’s essay collection, “Tell Me Your Names and I Will Testify”; and Diane’s forthcoming novel, “The Seedkeeper.”

“Tell Me Your Names and I Will Testify” is the compassionate and redemptive story of a prominent Black woman in the Twin Cities literary community.

In a haunting novel spanning several generations, “The Seedkeeper” follows a Dakota family’s struggle to preserve their way of life, and their sacrifices to protect what matters most.

Via Zoom:
Tuesday, December 8
6:30 - 8:00 pm CT

Register/Learn More:
651-696-2788 or info@wisdomwayscenter.org

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