MINNESOTA WOMEN'S PRESS

Changemakers

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Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health Partner

Miss Morris Area 2025
Natalie Demos
Mental Health Advocate

The Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health is excited to partner with Natalie Demos, Miss Morris Area 2025, to collaborate on our shared pursuit of optimal mental health for all. Learn more about her journey and mental health message. *The full interview is posted on our website www.macmh.org.*

What are some of your strategies to care for your mental health?

I treat my mental health just as I would my physical health! I use my medication reminder on my phone to remind me to take my medication. I use the coping skills I learned in talk therapy for when I'm feeling overwhelmed. I practice self-care and I have a routine that I stick to that helps me with time management, staying active, and getting good rest every night!

Some of my favorite ways to practice self-care are watching my favorite tv show, a good face mask, listening to music, spending time with loved ones, and snuggling with my basset hound Asher Mountain!

Read the rest of the interview:
macmh.org/in-the-news/meet-miss-morris-area-2025

We'd love to hear your voice on the topic of Mental Health. Contact us at engage@macmh.org for more information.

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION FOR children's mental health

Cultural Providers Network

Seeking to build and sustain a network of culturally and ethnically diverse voices to promote policies, practices, standards, and research that improve the mental health of children, their families, and communities.

CPN

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION FOR children's mental health

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

10 providers

10 episodes

Diverse perspectives

Learn more about the Cultural Providers Network by visiting macmh.org.

About the podcast

This **FREE**, multimedia cultural mental health project is a **powerful** and **innovative** initiative to bring new perspectives, learnings, and opportunities to the field.

Learn from 10 providers from diverse cultural backgrounds as they share how they **prioritize humble, authentic support** for all people seeking to optimize their mental health journeys, while **promoting their individual well-being and sustainability** in the field as professionals.

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"Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting ... What we do matters."

— Rebecca Solnit, author of Hope in the Dark

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

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Minnesota Women's Press has been sharing the stories of women since 1985, as one of the longest continuously published feminist platforms in the country. It is distributed free at 460 locations.

Our mission: Authentic community-based journalism that amplifies and inspires the stories, action steps, and leadership of powerful, everyday women (cis and trans) and nonbinary people.

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

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Cover: Ayan Omar. Photo Sarah Whiting. Story on page 14.

Minnesota Women's Press earned six 2023 awards from the Minnesota Newspaper Association, including community service leadership.

Upcoming magazine topics include Hope & Grief (January), Leading Ladies (February)

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How We Will Create the Village

by Mikki Morrissette

In this month's Changemakers issue, we celebrate women whose work embodies the transformative power of individual action. These women — along with hundreds of others recognized by Minnesota Women's Press since 1989 — are at the heart of our mission to recognize people statewide who drive change. The selection process began with nominations from you, our readers. Even after weeding out people who had already appeared in our pages, there are at least a dozen more women who could have been featured if we had the space.

The women highlighted in 2024 represent an array of passions and backgrounds. They are advancing mental and physical health, challenging injustices, protecting the environment, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering dialogue for mutual understanding.

As we face the challenges of healing, supporting, and protecting each other in 2025, the eight women featured this month remind us that meaningful transformation happens when people come together with purpose. They stand as a powerful reminder of the impact we can have, individually and collectively.

Still Alive, and Seeking

As we near our 40th anniversary, I am deeply grateful to philanthropists Michelle and Bill Pohlad, and longtime supporter Kristin Siegesmund, who stepped in to help us stay afloat when we faced an urgent financial shortfall in October. Without their generosity, and those of others from our capital campaign so far, this magazine would no longer happen.

I purchased Minnesota Women's Press a year after Hillary Clinton was passed over during the 2016 election. I knew it was important to keep this magazine open — the longest-running feminist publication in the U.S. That truth rings louder today.

Thanks to philanthropy, we now have the start of a budget to hire a membership consultant. To ensure long-term sustainability and deepen our impact, I need someone to work alongside me as a partner, helping to increase revenue so that I can focus on content and conversations statewide. We are also forming a steering committee to help raise funds and plan our 40th anniversary celebration on May 1. Contact me with ideas at editor@womenspress.com.

Resources

We have dubbed 2025 the Year of Creating the Village. Learn about the monthly themes that will guide our work.
womenspress.com/submit-a-story

Our newsletters keep readers apprised of mutual aid asks; commentaries; online social justice series; legacy stories from our archives; and contemporary books, arts, and events.
womenspress.com/subscribe

Your support is critical. Together, we can continue to lift up marginalized voices, feminist leadership, and solutions to the changes around us.
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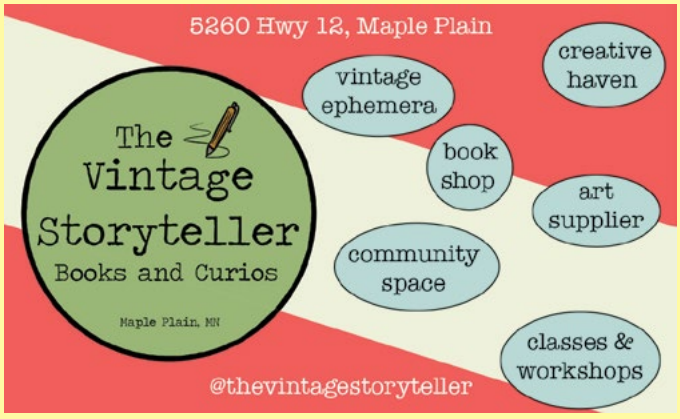
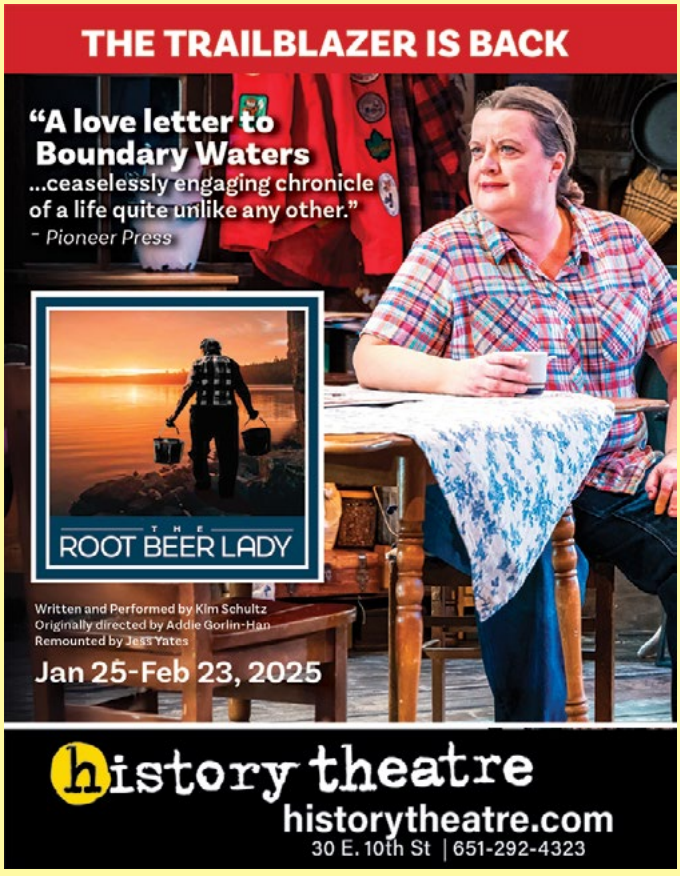
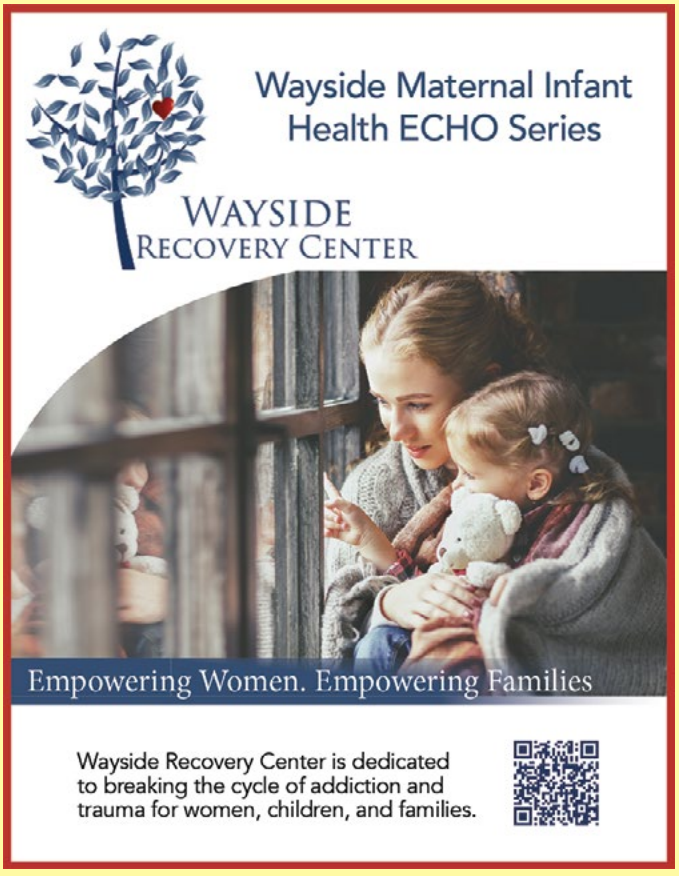






A Showcase of Books

Author Stephanie Saldaña recently spoke at Saint Thomas More Catholic Church in Saint Paul about her book *What We Remember Will Be Saved: A Story of Refugees and the Things They Carry.* The book encapsulates her conversations in 2016 across the Middle East and Europe with refugees from Syria and Iraq — more than half of Syrians were displaced, and millions of Iraqis were uprooted by ISIS.

In her book, Saldaña shares the stories of people who found a way to save a connection to their past despite losing everything. Many escaped without being able to take anything from their home. "The war introduced me to the terrible goneness of things," she writes in her prologue.

The people she features, Saldaña says, taught her that even in the face of immense violence and loss, "there is always something small to be carried, some act to be done, and that these little things transform history in ways we only later understand." She quotes an Arabic saying, "Awal al-shajara bithra" — a tree begins with a seed.

Other recommended books:

- *The Braille Encyclopedia: Brief Essays on Altered Sight,* by Naomi Cohn
- *Core Samples: A Climate Scientist's Experiments in Politics and Motherhood,* by Anna Farro Henderson
- *From Conflict to Convergence: Coming Together to Solve Tough Problems,* by Mariah Levison and Robert Fersh
- *Rise to the Challenge: A Memoir of Politics, Leadership, and Love,* by former Minnesota Lt. Governor Marlene Johnson
- *Swinging Into History,* by Karen Swanson
  This is a children's storybook about Toni Stone, a Saint Paul woman who was big-league baseball's first woman player (told in part from Minnesota Women's Press stories).

Learn more at womenspress.com/books, which includes a full story about Saldaña's talk and book excerpts, a Q&A with authors Marlene Johnson and Mariah Levison, and synopses of the other titles. MWP

Sign up for the new Books, Arts & Events newsletter at womenspress.com/subscribe

Britt Howell: Proactive About Health

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

reported by Demetria Dickinson

Britt Howell is diabetic. So are most members of her family. As she participated in her seventh-grade home economics class and listened to a doctor give her mother instructions about diet, she realized the importance of food to health. The topic became a passion. "I started cooking at a very early age," she says, "because I became vegan very young. If I was going to be able to eat the way I needed to eat, in a family that's West Indian Native American, I had to learn how to cook my own foods."

Originally from the Washington, D.C., area, Howell initially studied cosmetology and worked at day spas. In the mid-90s, her passion for food and health led her back to school to acquire a certification in fitness and nutrition. She started a career as a personal trainer.

At the age of 50, two of her sisters died of complications from diabetes. Howell refocused on women's health and created BrittFit50 to help others live a healthier lifestyle. The program expanded into BF50 Indigenous Health Initiative, which incorporates cultural arts and emphasizes sustainability and green living in underserved communities.

The Initiative holds events that teach and discuss sustainable food systems, cooking and eating plant-based food, and Native American art. It hosts Open Streets, bike tours, tree-planting projects, and panel discussions about sustainability and access to food.

Howell started the bike tours with routes to Minneapolis urban farms. Participants would begin at Hope Community Garden, bike to Little Earth Urban Farm, then go to Mashkiikii Gitigan Urban Farm, and return to the start. At each stop of the three-mile journey, someone from the location would talk about the farms and gardens and the indigenous food being grown there.

Other bike tours show off the green spaces at the University of Minnesota, or a park built by the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization. One trip invites the residents of a senior living community to see and learn about the solar panels and electric cars of southeast Minneapolis.

Howell, a Black and indigenous woman, says all of her work is centered on indigenous traditions and foodways. Her events start with land acknowledgments and native prayer, and include indigenous food made from ingredients that she grew herself.

Inspirational Teachers

Emphasizing the importance of education, Howell credits several teachers as role models. Her fifth-grade

teacher, for example, sought her out in high school and encouraged her to compete for an academic scholarship, which required keeping her grades up through high school. She did, and earned the scholarship. Howell says the bigger lesson she learned from that experience was that every class has at least one person paying close attention; she keeps that in mind whenever she teaches about healthy food.

Howell has her plate full of speaking and networking events. She's the Minnesota Farmers' Market Association profitability coach, and has been a keynote speaker for sustainability events around the state. She recently attended a cultural convening hosted by Artists for Understanding, which works to counter hate through the arts and humanities. The program to bridge cultural divides is supported by the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities.

Howell emphasizes the necessity of working with governmental and local bodies to host events and educate about food and sustainability.

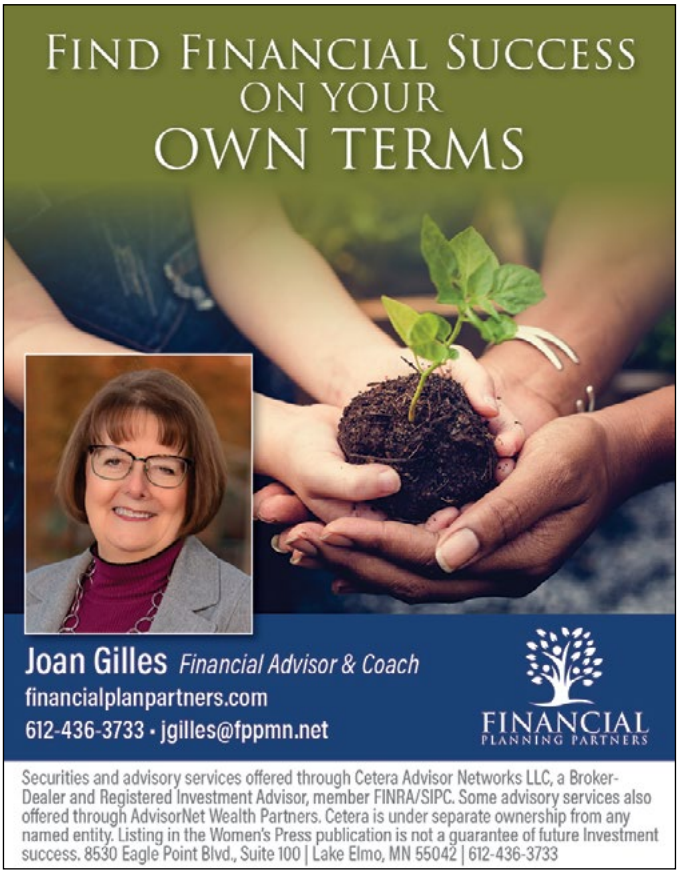
"Are we doing enough collectively to work together and break the silos?" she asks.

She has partnered with the Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota State Horticultural Society, the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, the Franklin Library, and Surly Brewing Company, among others. For over 12 years, Howell partnered with Nice Ride to have bikes available for BF50's bike tours, including electric scooters. After Nice Ride closed, they gave a fleet of bikes to Howell.

Howell wants to see more people involved in her initiatives and others like them, and for more media to celebrate people doing the work.

"If we can keep seeing powerful women, who are doing extraordinary things, on the front of magazines, and inside the magazines," then others will be inspired to do similar works, she says. MWP

Britt Howell wants everyone, especially people of color, to get outside. "I want to push us to get Black and brown people canoeing, biking, swimming, exploring the earth, birdwatching — all the things they don't think we do," she says. "We do. We're just not amplifying." In summer 2025, Howell is hosting an event to get people of color onto the Mississippi River with kayaker Devin Brown (who was featured on our August 2023 cover). Learn more: #BrittFit50



Alice Moren: Taking the Big View in Grand Rapids

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

reported by Mikki Morrissette

As a lifetime resident of Grand Rapids — a northeast Minnesota town of just over 11,000 people in Itasca County — Alice Moren has learned how to help her neighbors have civil dialogue. Over the past dozen years, she has helped organize and moderate conversations about religion, LGBTQ+ issues, race, bullying, drugs, and more. In 2004, her role started with hosting the Circle of Support program, which focused on not only giving low-income residents a supportive place to talk about their concerns, but also helping others understand why poverty exists.

As Moren explains, some people wonder, "Why don't people just get out of poverty? If you don't like your circumstance, move, do something, change it. 'Get a job' is the famous simple answer." The program "highlighted the need for the community to have a better understanding around the systemic nature of poverty. It is so easy to just stop at 'it's their own fault' thinking."

Moren wants people to understand the interlocking pieces.

"Even understanding the history behind Columbus Day. Why does it matter that today we also celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day and Juneteenth? How does that help some of our community members feel seen?" she says. "Many of us didn't learn about these things in the K–12 education system [or learn] how historical trauma has an impact. Addiction, suicide rates, health outcomes, stress, economic mobility, student success. It is all interconnected. People just want to blame people, without realizing that there are so many other things going on that cause poverty."

Roughly once a month, Moren moderates local Big View conversations as part of her role with the KOOTASCA Community Action program (representing Koochiching and Itasca counties). She has a bachelor's degree in social work and a master's degree in counseling and psychotherapy, which helps her steer conversations in a manner that is safe for participants.

"I'm framing the conversation, and then facilitating the audience discussion that follows," she explains. "Most of the time it is productive. About ten percent of the topics require keeping things calm — validating someone's concern even when they are angry. We've had some tense moments. I try to do caretaking so no one is being harmed or disrespected."

Some of the stressful discussions have been related to LGBTQ+ rights, and a workshop about white supremacy, which some neighbors believed was a made-up concept. "I didn't walk into this knowing how to tame an angry audience," Moren says. "That has come with practice over time."

When the 110-member Twin City Gay Men's Chorus sang

at a local venue, it involved more than six months of planning with partners, partly to anticipate responses and security needs. In the end, the event was peaceful. Subsequent events — including a program focused on the science behind transgender identities — did spark controversy.

The Frustrations of Funding

One frustration, Moren notes, is that funding often requires proving impact with data. Donors want to know, for example, how many people have left poverty because of the programming. She knows that the impact is more about making improvements in people's lives, which generally doesn't happen in a measurable way. Depression, anxiety, coping with trauma, lack of trust, and other precursors are not reduced simply by becoming aware of them. "I think individual growth comes from feeling heard," Moren says.

Many institutions, she adds, use the discussions as training for employees who need to understand clients and the intertwined nature of hunger, housing, transportation, and available low-wage employment.

Recognizing the importance of social assets — having people to connect with as a way to reduce suicide rates, for example — is not easy to measure but can have enormous long-term impact. The pushback tends to be: "So you want to help poor people make friends? I want to see something that gives big numbers faster."

Conversation Topics

In the future, Moren would like to host a conversation about food insecurity. "We see senior citizens who worked their whole lives but didn't have a pension — the food support they might get does not last a month. I try to help the community understand all faces of poverty."

Moren does not position herself as an expert on the topics, other than discussions about poverty. Generally she brings people in as guest speakers. In one year, topics included "Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot," "The Indian Mascot: 21 Years Later," "Homelessness in Itasca County," and "Youth Sexual Exploitation: It's Happening Here."

A discussion about addictions proved so popular that it led to a series exploring the life of an opiate addict, the concept of harm reduction, youth addiction, and the question "disease or choice?" Speakers came from the medical profession, emergency responders, treatment centers, and people in recovery.

With the long-time popularity of Big View, people often suggest topics and speakers to her. Sometimes that involves showing and discussing controversial films they do not want to host themselves, like *The Doctrine of Discovery*, about the dehumanizing history of indigenous people through white domination, and *1946*, about how one word in a mistranslated Bible largely led to the anti-gay movement.

When a documentary about bullying in schools was shown, led by a gay man, Moren had to negotiate with its long-term venue at a church. "Those two things collided in a way that helped me understand we need more conversations around the oppression experienced" in the LGBTQ+ community.

Moren is proud of past discussions about racism in the history of the Iron Range, including the presence of the Ku Klux Klan in Grand Rapids. One topic she has not yet felt ready to address includes how police handle people in a mental health crisis.

"I hope that when people leave Big View conversations," Moren says, "they go away with something they didn't know before, or a willingness to think about things in another way. When you are opposed, yet sitting in a room with someone who is explaining their experiences, sometimes it can be shocking because we view some of these issues as happening elsewhere, not here. I think you have to change people's hearts before you're going to be able to change their minds." MWP

Alice Moren wants readers to commit to correcting false narratives. Attitudinal barriers create divisions that promote shame, intolerance, racism, and homophobia. For example, she says, "Help family, friends, and neighbors broaden their understanding of why poverty exists by modeling civil conversations despite opposing viewpoints." Learn more: kootasca.org

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PHOTO SARAH WHITING

Marvina Haynes: Determined Voice for the Wrongfully Accused

reported by Erica Rivera

Minneapolis native Marvina Haynes didn't choose to become an advocate for the wrongfully incarcerated; rather, she was "forced into it" by the wrongful murder conviction of her brother Marvin.

On May 16, 2004, a man attempted to rob a north Minneapolis family-run business, Jerry's Flower Shop. The shop was staffed at the time by 57-year-old Cynthia McDermid and her 55-year-old brother, Harry "Randy" Sherer. The suspect entered, inquired about a bouquet of flowers for his mother, then drew a gun on McDermid and demanded money. Sherer walked in on the scene. McDermid escaped, but Sherer was shot and killed.

When McDermid spoke to a 911 operator at a nearby home, she described the assailant as a Black man in his early twenties, 5'10" to 5'11", 180 pounds, with short, cropped hair. Two days later, police received an anonymous tip that the gunman went by "Little Marvin." They immediately pinned the crime on 16-year-old Marvin Haynes, despite his markedly different appearance from McDermid's physical description of the suspect. Marvin was younger, shorter, and weighed less than the man McDermid originally described. He also wore his hair longer and natural.

This was in an era when Minneapolis was trying to be "tough on crime." Authorities seemed ready to point the finger at the wrong person rather than come up empty-handed. The police arrested Marvin for a curfew violation, then interrogated him for hours about his alleged role in the murder — saying, incorrectly, that they had evidence against him. Marvin denied any involvement and repeatedly asked to speak to his mother during the interrogation.

Police obtained a search warrant and raided the Haynes family home with search dogs. "The media, the police, investigators, dogs, showed up to our house," Marvina recalls. "We found out through the media that my brother was being charged as an adult for first-degree murder and second-degree assault."

The police had no fingerprints, DNA, murder weapon, or surveillance video indicating Marvin was involved in the crime. But because of teenage boys' statements — which were later found to have been coerced and subsequently recanted — Marvin was convicted on both counts and sentenced to life in prison.

Haynes's parents fought to free their son. Legal fees depleted the family's finances. Then, the couple split up. After their separation, "every day of my life became a fight," Marvina says. She started speaking out, but encountered

apathy toward her brother's plight. "A lot of people believe in the system because we have been taught this system works."

Through her advocacy, Marvina discovered that wrongful incarceration was common.

"This didn't only happen to my family; it happened to many families in that time," she says. "There was a pattern. The same prosecutor, attorney, investigators. These folks were ruining people's lives, and still haven't had any accountability."

In 2021, she founded MN Wrongfully Convicted Judicial Reform (MNWCJR), an organization that provides families impacted by wrongful conviction with legal assistance, advocacy, and emotional support. Families across the country seek out the organization's help. The organization is working toward legislation "so the system can stop trying to just solve cases and actually do the work and get it right," she says.

In 2022, attorneys from the Great North Innocence Project took on Marvin's case. On December 11, 2023, Marvin was released from the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Stillwater, and his conviction was vacated. He had been in prison for 19 years and 7 months.

Marvina says that today her brother is "encouraged, and he's hopeful, and he has a lot of faith." But he is also struggling, due to those almost two decades in prison — some of that time in solitary confinement.

"Our family lost everything," Marvina recalls. "So when he got out of jail, there was really nothing that we could give him besides love. He needed more than that."

Marvina says she values justice, accountability, and empowerment through education. In 2023, she ran for Minneapolis City Council in the fourth ward and finished second. She created the annual event Minneapolis Speaks, which connects local businesses and families. Community members enjoy free haircuts, face painting, and other entertainment. The third annual event in August distributed 250 book bags and fed 500 people. MWP

Marvina Haynes does her work on a volunteer basis. MNWCJR welcomes volunteers and donations. Supporters can call elected representatives and share the stories of the wrongfully incarcerated. "This is what it takes. Without telling [the] story over and over again, they'll just [overlook] it and act as if it never happened," she says. "I want to make sure no one in Minnesota prison is wrongfully incarcerated." Learn more: mnwcjr.org

Ayan Omar: Connecting Diversity in St. Cloud

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

reported by Cirien Saadeh

When Ayan Omar was an elementary school child in Georgia, she was an English-as-a-second-language student and "mute," because she was insecure about her language skills. An English language learning teacher, Mrs. Lindsey, pulled her out of class every day for English lessons, which partially consisted of a beanbag chair and books on audio cassettes.

Today, Omar credits her teacher with finding "that the best way to teach me was to provide me the space. Mrs. Lindsay allowed me to find myself in books."

Inspired by her school environment, Omar grew up to be a language arts teacher. Since 2021, she has been director of equity services for St. Cloud Public Schools.

Omar identifies herself as a Somali American, Black, a refugee, and a generation 1.5 American — meaning someone who came to the U.S. as a child from another country. She grew up in a family of 12 and is a co-parent of two daughters. She continues to be an avid reader. "I buried myself in books growing up in the U.S., particularly the writings of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Zora Neale Hurston. Finding the Black female storyline has allowed me to find a path forward."

Omar moved to Minnesota from Georgia in 2005 to study education at St. Cloud State University. The city was undergoing a dramatic demographic shift as more Somali refugees moved to the area. According to a recent Minnesota Public Radio story, St. Cloud's population of roughly 69,000 people has become increasingly diverse in recent years. Its Black population grew from about 1,700 in 2000 to nearly 15,000 in 2020, according to census data. Approximately 4,400 of those residents have roots from Somalia, similar to the percentage of Irish and Norwegian. The dominant heritage is German.

In recent years, Omar has offered "My Neighbor Is a Muslim" workshops across Central Minnesota. The workshops, based on work created by Lutheran Social Services, were provided through UniteCloud, a St. Cloud–based social justice organization that shut down in February after they faced three lawsuits for calling out local racism.

St. Cloud school board member Natalie Copeland, who co-founded UniteCloud, worked with Omar on anti-racism and cultural understanding sessions. "To know Ayan is to love Ayan," she says. "She is ever-patient, and her smile can disarm even the most unwilling participant at a cultural understanding workshop. Although she can come across as very gentle, she is firm in her values and goals. She knows who she is."

Influence and Inspiration

Says Omar, "Something I learned early on in Minnesota is that 'Minnesota Nice' is too nuanced and unintentional compared to the directness and loudness of my Somali culture."

She also adds: "I have learned there are ample opportunities to learn and engage in community-focused events: celebrating culture, honoring culture, bringing people together. I see many institutions actively participating through partnerships and conversations."

At Technical High School in St. Cloud, where Omar became the school's first Somali American teacher in 2014, students approached her about starting an international club, aimed at celebrating diversity and creating school-wide connections. The after-school club plans and hosts activities, which have included teaching non-Somali hockey and football students a traditional Somali dance, dhaanto.

Omar has a mental list of people whom she would like to see more engaged in the school's cultural community. "In Georgia, 99 percent of my teachers were teachers of color," she says. "I lived in Clarkston, which had a strong refugee resettlement program.

"I had the privilege of attending school with 40-plus nations represented in one building. I saw the additional burdens and barriers that we collectively push through."

She names many specific teachers as those who offered support as well as tough love when needed. For example, "Ms. Irvin, my seventh-grade math teacher — there was no grace from her, but I loved how she challenged me. I recall that her line was, 'You can always do better.'"

Omar's teachers influenced her to become a public servant. At one point that included considering a medical career. Ultimately, she says, "I wanted to become a teacher so I could be the adult for a kid who looked like me. In 20 years, I want them to say, 'Ms. Omar went above and beyond in finding the connection, finding the support, and continuing that connection.'"

Omar keeps in touch with former students. Two of those students are third-year pre-med students at the University of Minnesota, working on bringing CPR and first-aid training to Somali mothers. One of the young women was impacted when her brother almost died at home. Students asked Omar for help getting the project off the ground. She connected them with a space at the St. Cloud Community Outpost House (aka COP House) and a course at the St. Cloud Community and Technical College, so they could audit a class and get trained in first aid.

"Many students have brilliant ideas. They're just looking to share it, and pull in the right people, so they can take it off the ground," Omar says.

Omar became the school district's director of equity in 2021 after being encouraged by Willie Jett, who is now the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Education, to apply for the position. Jett is formerly superintendent of the St. Cloud Area School District.

In 2013, Jett noticed Omar teaching with the book *The Color Purple*. He introduced himself to her after class. "I didn't know who he was, because I was just a student teacher. He walked me into the [human resources staffing] office and he said, 'Do whatever you need to do to keep her here.'"

Among other things, Omar has since co-created an Inclusive Decision Making Framework tool with Laurie Putman, St. Cloud Area School District's superintendent. It helps to ensure that people from disenfranchised communities are not left behind.

"What I hope to do is bring enough awareness to adults in a position of power," says Omar. "[Equity] work requires a lot of listening and intentional responding. The question is: how can we embed equity in every space that provides service to our students and our families?" MWP

Ayan Omar says authentic equity work requires three skills: effective questioning, effective listening, and the ability to respond compassionately.

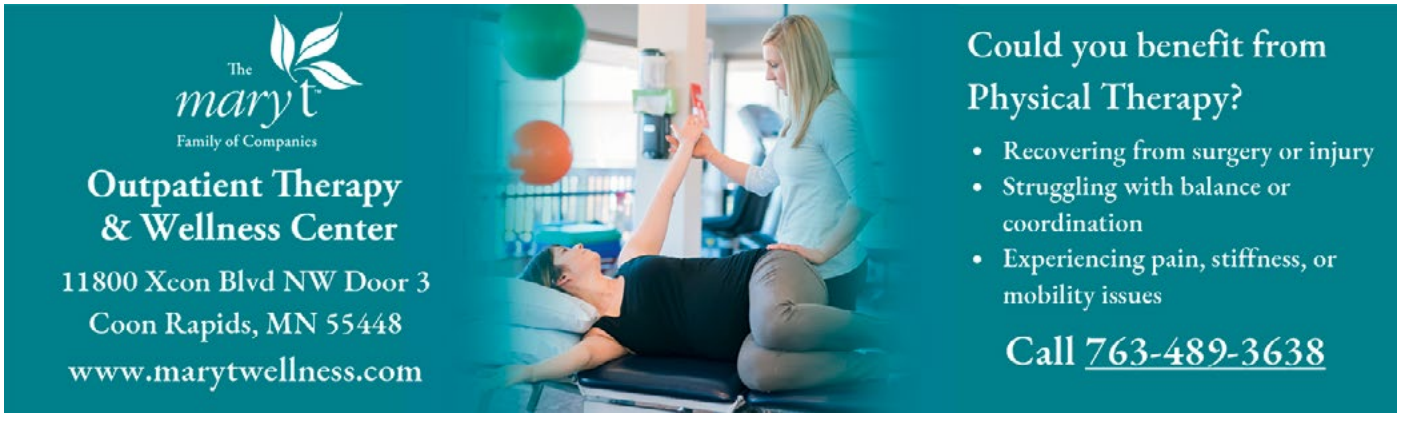

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

ANEW's Recovery Clinic: Can-Do Spirit

reported by Amy Gage

Program Supervisor Nyasia Arradondo-Russell (l) and CEO Michaelene Colestock sit with Marcel, the French bulldog.

"Women Owned | Women Led" is stenciled on the front doors of ANEW Chemical Health Services and ANEW Health & Wellness Clinic in an office complex on the east side of Saint Paul. Beneath the bold words etched by founder and CEO Michaelene Colestock is a whimsical drawing of a bulldog with the inscription "Pardon my French."

In tandem, both greetings describe the culture of this holistically focused behavioral health organization. ANEW serves about 100 women a day with residential and outpatient treatment for substance use disorders, mental health counseling, sober housing, and a child care center for infants through age 10.

ANEW is a joyful place, with art on the walls, lots of plants, comfortable furniture culled from Facebook Marketplace and Goodwill, and motivational sayings ("Recovery is not linear and that's okay") on digital screens throughout the one-story, 35,000-square-foot space. But the joyfulness supports a more somber mission.

A mural of a large tree with the words "We Recover" leads into a wing that houses 40 residential clients. Women sign the wall when they graduate from the six- to eight-week program. A white bench on the lower right has the names of former residents who did not make it — not because they relapsed, or "returned to use," as Program Supervisor Nyasia Arradondo-Russell puts it — but because they died.

An Extensive Women-Led Team

Both Colestock and Arradondo-Russell were nominated for the Women's Press 2024 Changemaker Award — Colestock for "lifting up underrepresented populations and tackling the stigma associated with substance use disorder," and Arradondo-Russell, a songwriter and vocalist, for "utilizing her platform to raise awareness and initiate important conversations surrounding the journey to recovery."

Every person on the leadership team, and all but two members of the 55-person staff, are women. These women are key to the camaraderie at ANEW.

"All human beings are stronger together," says Arradondo-Russell, who oversees day-to-day operations. "The opposite of addiction is connection."

Though not in recovery herself, Arradondo-Russell grew up around addiction in her extended family and says "divine intervention" landed her in this field — and at ANEW. She is earning her bachelor's degree in social work at Metro State University, and is the only leadership team member whose office is within the treatment center. Clients slide notes under her door and often step into the

low-lit space that serves as a refuge from the noisy energy of the hallways.

Arradondo-Russell, who is Hmong and Black, says she would like to see more women of color in the treatment field, in part to mirror the client base. "Being a woman of color, I am granted an experience that is different from my white counterparts," she says. "It helps with my insight and ability to communicate with a wide range of people."

Planting seeds for growth

Colestock — a licensed clinical counselor and addiction counselor — is at heart an entrepreneur. She worked 13 years at Twin Cities–based Wayside Recovery Center, which also focuses on women and families, and bought her first sober home in 2009 when she noticed that women who finished the Wayside program often had no safe or affordable place to go. Colestock's parents loaned her $10,000 for a single-family house in north Minneapolis, at a time when the recession had sunk housing prices. Each client paid $200 a month in rent.

After buying a second sober house and incorporating as Spence Specialties LLC, Colestock was awarded a contract from Ramsey County in 2013 to provide housing for women trying to maintain sobriety. Three more sober homes and an 11-unit apartment building followed. By 2018, after studying with WomenVenture for nine months, Colestock was ready to launch her own treatment center. Today, ANEW Recovery Services for Women is expanding to accommodate more office space and client lounges.

Spence Specialties is among the first sober housing programs in Minnesota to allow clients to live with their children full time. Colestock created the counseling center — the only nonprofit portion of the ANEW organization — when she noticed that mental health issues were restricting women's recovery. The licensed child care center, added in May within steps of the clinic, meets "the growing needs of our clients," Colestock says.

Eighty percent of ANEW's clientele have children. Clients range in age from 23 to 32, and 40 percent are women of color.

Colestock chose the name ANEW because it evokes themes of starting over — finding the "safety, sobriety, recovery, and family" clients are seeking. "For some women," says Colestock, "they're starting over many times." MWP

"See a need, fill a need" is the action step Colestock encourages people to take. "We see the barriers and needs our clients face, and we try to fill or remove them," she says. "If we cannot personally fill the need, we will refer them to someone who can." Learn more: anewchemicalhealthservices.org

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

Marla Spivak: Bee Researcher Leaves Legacy

reported by Maddie Robinson

Marla Spivak is a globally esteemed entomologist at the University of Minnesota who specializes in bee research. Her love of bees started when she was 18 years old, living in Prescott, Arizona. After reading a book about bees and beekeeping, she became fascinated with bees and eventually went to work for a large-scale beekeeper through an experiential learning program. Her first taste of research was when she was 21, at a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) bee research laboratory in Tucson.

After that experience, Spivak lived and worked with beekeepers in South America. She was a research technician at the University of Kansas, where she later received a doctorate studying Africanized bees. "That was about the ecology of behaviors of those bees, and how different they were from the honey bees we have here that are more European-derived than [they are] from Africa," Spivak says.

After she finished her doctoral degree, Spivak returned to the Tucson bee facility and started to delve into questions surrounding bee health. Since then, her research has centered on social immunity and the behaviors that bees exhibit in order to prevent disease transmission in their colonies.

She also supports foundational information about bee behavior to implement in practical work, such as breeding to improve bee health. "My research can be very basic, like under-the-hood research, to try to understand mechanisms of social immunity. I can also apply that research in a practical sense to help beekeepers," Spivak says.

Today, she leads the Bee Lab at the University of Minnesota, which focuses on research for aspects of bee health including breeding, management, and basic behavior. Her research led to the creation of the Bee Squad, an outreach arm of the lab that educates Minnesotans about honey bees and native bees, and assisted with the development of a bee research facility on the university's Saint Paul campus.

"People give me a lot of attention, and it's really not about me. I'm a conduit for the bees," she says.

As an outspoken advocate for bees and their health, Spivak's most well-known research is about developing disease-resistant bee strains to protect entire colonies. One of her main studies is about propolis, which are antimicrobial resins

that honey bees collect from plants and use as a protective layer for the colony. "[The bees] use it as a cement or a caulk — architecture around the walls of the nest — and it sanitizes and helps their immune systems. It's good preventative health care," Spivak says.

Another form of social immunity she studies is called hygienic behavior, a genetic trait where honey bees can detect sick or parasitized larvae and pupae and remove them from the nest. "They sacrifice for the good of the colony to prevent disease transmission," she says. "The questions I ask are, 'How do they do that? Do they sniff it out? Do they feel it? Do they see it? How are they figuring out that it's sick?'"

After more than three decades at the University of Minnesota as a researcher and professor, Spivak is retiring on December 31.

Her many accolades include a MacArthur Fellowship in 2010, a University of Minnesota award for Distinguished Campus-Based Faculty, and a Distinguished Service Award from the Minnesota AgriGrowth Council.

Recently, the university raised $5 million to endow Spivak's position and continue her research after she retires. "There will always be a honey bee professor on the Saint Paul campus," Spivak says proudly.

She has no particular retirement plans, saying, "My plan is to not plan. I'm not sure I'm able to do that, but we'll just see what comes next. I've never had a problem finding some new thing to get into, so we'll see what it is." MMP

Marla Spivak hopes readers will show care toward bees, as critical supporters of human nutrition and health. She says this care can be as simple as planting a garden with a diverse array of bee-friendly flowers and trees. Learn more: beelab.umn.edu

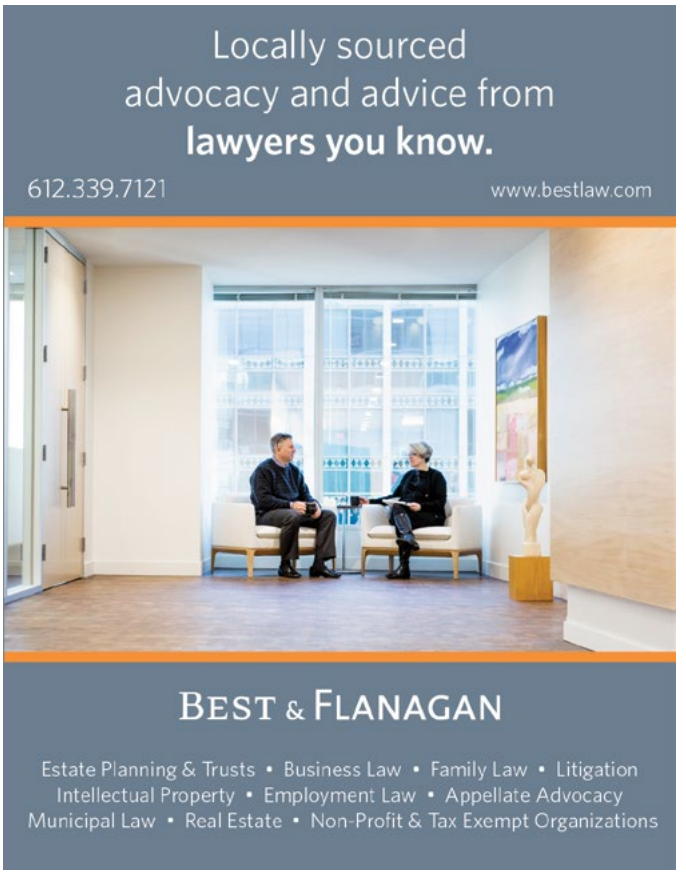

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

Leah Lemm: Musicality and Native Storytelling

reported by Viktorie Spurná and Ella Stern

Leah Lemm is a radio and podcast journalist and producer who now leads coverage of Native culture in Minnesota as part of the inaugural staff of Minnesota Public Radio's (MPR) Native News branch.

When she first began working at MPR, as the master control specialist in the international control center, Lemm started to realize that Native voices were absent. Talking to family members, she also realized that the lack of representation in the media led Native communities to be politically disengaged. She made a Venn diagram to visually represent what she cared about in life: community, audio, and storytelling.

"Right in the middle, where they all intersected, was [the need to] help tell Native stories in radio," Lemm says.

Lemm is a citizen of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. She was born in Minneapolis, where she wrote poetry, sang, and played the violin. After graduating from Anoka High School, she pursued an economics degree at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There she joined an a capella group, the Chorallaries. In her final year, she was in charge of recording the group's album. This is when Lemm discovered her true calling was in audio.

"I fell in love with recording voice," Lemm says. "Mixing voice together, editing and making things sound cool. My economics degree faded into the background."

After completing her undergraduate degree in economics, Lemm went on to earn a diploma in music production and engineering at Berklee College of Music. She returned to Minnesota briefly to work at MPR before taking one more journey outside of the state, earning a master's in creative writing at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Lemm ran into an old friend who encouraged her to get into contact with Minnesota Native News, a project led by Ampers Radio. She found herself landing in the middle of her Venn diagram. "I was doing audio editing, focusing on Native communities through storytelling, while being able to add in a little razzle-dazzle with my music," Lemm says. "My musicality comes out in journalism by having the ears to help create radio pieces that sound great. There's a musicality to weaving narration and interview and ambience and other sounds that can play off of the interview."

In 2023, Lemm became the senior editor of the new Native News branch of MPR, which she joined along with reporter Melissa Olson. Together, they built a vision for what the team's coverage would look like: telling foundational Native stories through expansive journalism. They aim to escape the common media trap of only discussing problems in the Native community. They cover solutions, events, and profiles.

The two also serve informally as MPR consultants. Colleagues who have questions about their own coverage of indigenous issues, such as approaches to stories and pronunciation, ask questions.

"We want to lower hurdles for other people to help tell nuanced Native stories," Lemm explains.

For the general public, Lemm says, "I'm hoping that we are building vocabulary for our listeners — that foundational knowledge of who their neighbor is, who the tribes are in our state, what the acronyms mean: BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs], ICWA [Indian Child Welfare Act], MMIR [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives]."

In the past decade, Lemm says, she has seen a significant shift in the amount of media made by indigenous creators telling indigenous stories. She sees this as important not only for Native people, but for anyone who wants to learn about the unique nature of different tribes and to understand Native people as modern citizens. MWP

Leah Lemm encourages everyone to seek out and enjoy indigenous storytelling and culture, from TV shows to journalism to public events. "We're right here, walking among the rest of society. Saying 'hi' and making a friend goes a long way. That slowly chips away at those barriers between people." Learn more: mprnews.org/native-news

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How We Can Heal Each Other

submitted by Comfort Dondo

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

Minnesota is home to diverse communities, including large populations from countries that have endured the traumas of war and people who have suffered personal assault, abuse, and deep loss. As the founder of Phumulani, which offers Minnesota African Women's Healing Circles, I work with refugees from the African diaspora.

As someone especially engaged in working with women of color who are escaping domestic violence and sexual abuse, I have spent a lot of time learning and talking about what our state needs for effective healing.

Four Priorities

The journey for all Minnesotans toward genuine healing often remains incomplete, due largely to limited access to therapeutic resources. The top needs:

1. Foster community connectedness. Healing flourishes in a communal context, where individualism and isolation are replaced with shared support and collective strength. Healing spaces bring people together, to reestablish community bonds.

2. Create culturally specific healing spaces. Traditional, mainstream methods are often unfamiliar or insufficient for addressing the cultural context of healing for immigrant and refugee communities. At Phumulani, we create spaces where individuals feel seen and understood within their cultural framework.

3. Invest in and recruit BIPOC healers. Culturally competent healers bring a depth of understanding about community-specific traumas and collective resilience. Building up the presence of BIPOC healers provides a greater sense of safety and relatability for those seeking healing.

4. Address intergenerational trauma. With the right resources and long-term investment, we can ensure that communities are not only supported in the present but also empowered to break cycles of trauma for future generations.

Holistic Healing Approaches

The journey toward holistic healing — which addresses body, mind, emotions, spirit, and social and intellectual needs — goes beyond traditional therapy and support groups. There are several approaches we can build.

Nature-based: Experiences in nature can provide grounding and reconnection to the natural world. Programs that incorporate community gardening, forest therapy, or outdoor gatherings enable people to find peace and resilience in nature's healing presence.

Animal-assisted therapy: Animals offer nonverbal forms of comfort and connection. Especially for those who have experienced trauma, interactions with animals provide a sense of safety, companionship, and healing.

Cultural reconnection: Rituals, storytelling, music, and dance that reflect one's culture can awaken a deeper sense of self and purpose, and promote emotional healing through pride and belonging.

Peer-led healing circles and mentorship: Healing circles facilitate a shared space, while peer mentorship programs allow individuals to feel empowered by their shared experiences.

Strong Examples in State

Several organizations are doing exceptional work to support diverse healing needs. For example:

- Dream of Wild Health provides a nature-based program, focused on indigenous food sovereignty and wellness, which helps to reconnect Native American youth with the land and traditional practices.
- Ain Dah Yung (Our Home) Center serves Native American youth in crisis by combining traditional teachings with youth advocacy and support services.
- Mental Health Connect is a statewide network that links people with mental health resources and peer support, promoting access to culturally appropriate and affordable mental health services across Minnesota.
- The Cultural Wellness Center offers classes that emphasize culture and health-oriented activities, such as Zumba and biking.

By prioritizing holistic health together, we can create spaces that honor each journey toward wellness and foster a stronger and inclusive healing landscape in Minnesota. MWP

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What's New at womenspress.com

story development designed for stronger conversations about statewide values, solutions, and action steps

PHOTO JOHANNES JANSSON

Read the full commentary to learn how this Women's Day Off in Iceland in 1975 led to the world's first democratically selected woman head of state within five years.

ADAPTED: Publisher's Commentary, "Stepping into 2025"

In the earliest days of the pandemic and the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in 2020, Minnesota Women's Press launched a second weekly newsletter with these words: "Are you tired of current systems that degrade human connections and natural ecosystems? Do you have a passion or expertise around environmental health, economic equity, or conscious consumerism? Minnesota Women's Press is using its unique storytelling platforms to connect people into a statewide community of people interested in action steps, best practices, challenges, research, and solutions-based reporting."

Although our funds have been too light since the pandemic to manifest the mission fully, we now have the start of a budget to move into the next stage — hiring a strong membership director to develop statewide connections.

Our belief is that it is collaborative, collective partnerships in our state, especially those led by women, that will generate community-based wealth and health in Minnesota. We want people of all ages, genders, and ethnicities who are engaged in equity, ecology, and economics to be part of a future media co-op with us — sharing ideas about the people, science, challenges, solutions, and consumer choices we should be amplifying together.

If we look at the gaps between people's perspectives, it tends to be ongoing disagreement about whether we have limited resources that should be controlled by some, or whether we are capable of collaboration in providing mutual aid for all. Some might boil this down to Fear vs. Love, or Generosity vs. Selfishness. I believe we are all choosing on a spectrum, regardless of political affiliation or faith.

In my personal opinion, a central reason our country is where it is politically is that there are millions of people who believe in the individual cowboy who tames the wild to take the land and make his own life — which is not realistic, ethical, or sustainable.

We need each other. We need generosity of spirit and mind. We need tolerance and acceptance of people who are not simply versions of us. We need a balance of people — who are equals — to care for us in nursing homes and hospitals, teach our children in schools, and feed us at restaurants with food that comes from collective energy. We need natural resources to survive with us.

From "Talking With Grand Rapids Reporters"

"The reason journalists are so important is that you can shine the light and apply the disinfectant. You realize a thousand people are there to have a good time, to help support people in their communities who feel marginalized. Then you had six people who are party poopers, just to spew their hate and be miserable. It was important that we were there to tell that story." MMP

Find the above stories in full, and more, at womenspress.com/election

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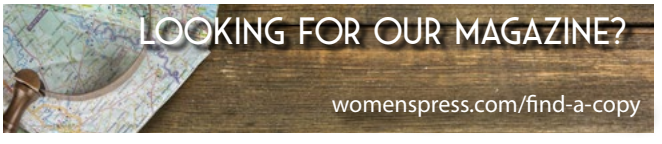

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Finding Joy in the Dark

created by Sarah Whiting

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

I have a professional shooting style that comes from 30 years in the field. It is polished and clean and looks a lot like the other images in this magazine.

But after my birthday dinner in October — which included sushi, cat-faced robots, and a cotton-candy machine — my kids, their significant others, and I decided to seek out the northern lights. It seemed like everyone had gotten amazing pictures the previous night, and rumor was they would appear again. We didn't have a plan, just vaguely drove away from the cities, keeping our eyes on the skies. We finally ended up outside of Stillwater.

We parked near the river and took a walk, but there was no sign of the aurora borealis. Since I had my camera, tripod, and semi-willing subjects, I decided to show the kids how to paint with light. We began talked about long exposures, moving the subject, and where to aim the flashlight.

My son's girlfriend, Rori, is the subject of this photograph, her body repeated as she moves and freezes. My son Tyler is simultaneously in the picture and invisible, as he lights up the cave walls with a flashlight during the exposure. Later, my daughter Eve and her boyfriend Jethro held their breath while the light touched their cheeks.

These were tricks I used to do often, both on my own and as a photography professor. I hadn't done them in ages — they are imprecise, and both subject and photographer need significant patience. These images feel incomplete, and my perfectionist side would have wanted to shoot for several more hours to get the images and light ideal.

But while playing with flashlights late into the night, I allowed serendipity. It felt like I was introducing the kids to my past.

As I continue to age, parts of my old self reassert themselves more. Sometimes change comes in the form of moments that are hauntingly familiar.

Sarah Whiting is the creative director of Minnesota Women's Press. Her daughter, Crystal, who lives in Georgia, was unable to participate in the evening. See other photography work: sarahwhiting.com

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