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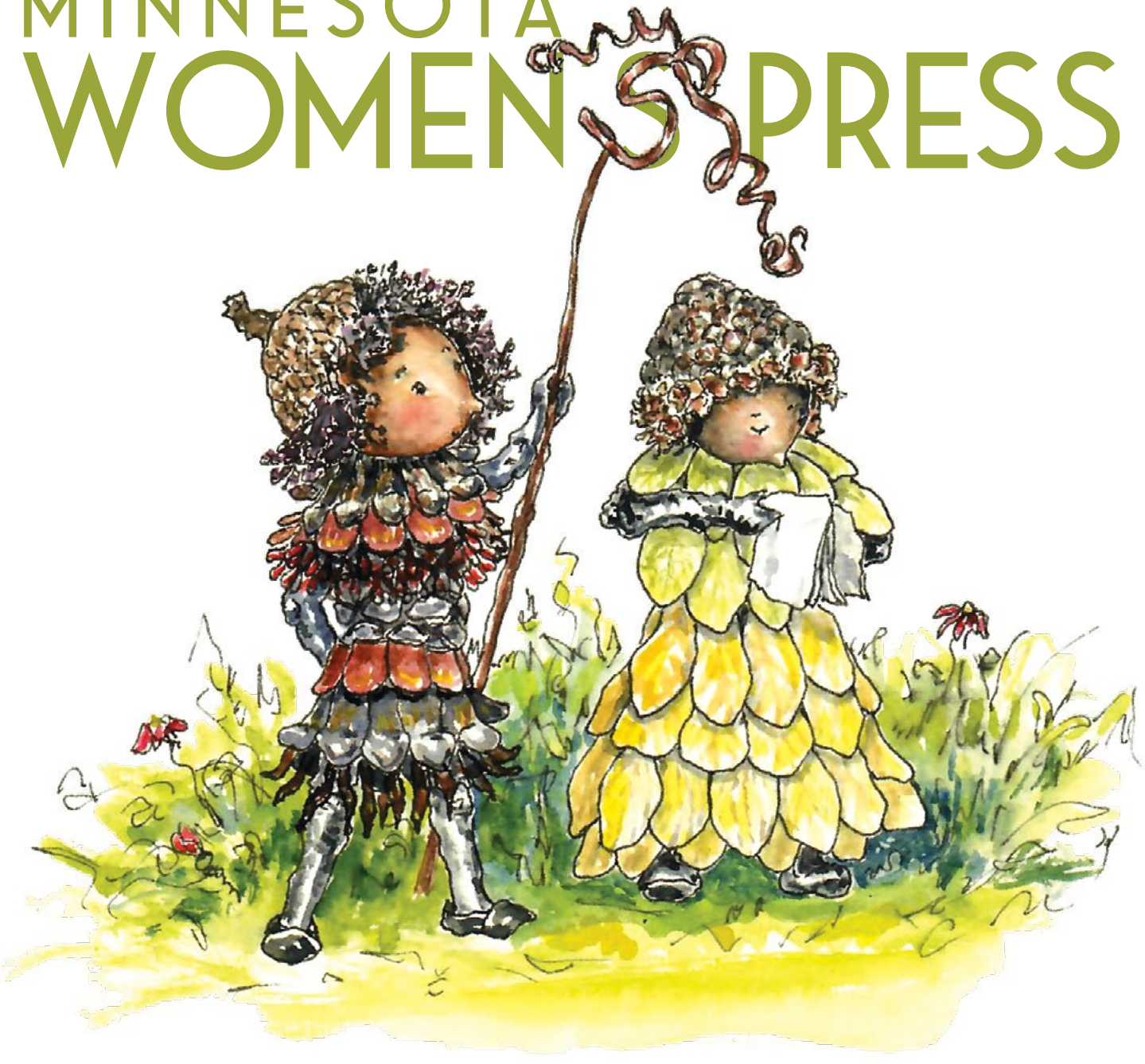

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Minnesota Women's Press has been sharing the stories of women since 1985, as one of the longest continuously published feminist platforms in the country. It is distributed free at 460 locations.

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: The Twiggers of hope and grief by Nancy Packard Leasman. See her story on page 12.

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

Upcoming magazine topics include Leading Ladies (February), Hometown Challenges (March)

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PHOTO SARAH WHITING

CHEYENNE WILSON, PAGE 18

"Active Hope is a readiness to discover the strengths in ourselves and in others; a readiness to discover the reasons for hope and the occasions for love."

— Joanna Macy

Building Hope Together

by Mikki Morrissette

The Minnesota Women's Press editorial board met for its discussion of story angles for this magazine issue a few days after the election results were in. One member of the board is a college teacher, whose students are featured in the Tapestry collection this month. She said one classroom discussion focused on how to even define what hope is.

Board members speculated that hope might be about how we find joy. Or how we build passion for change. Or where we find power in community. We talked about whether hope is simply avoiding feeling jaded and cynical — i.e., hopeless — as the world seems to slide into a fascination with authoritarian leadership. One board member wondered if we should call this month's topic "Resilient Hope." Another said we should forget hope and call it stubbornness to persevere.

Board member Priscilla Trinh writes about the movement to shift from individual efforts to community-oriented solidarity, "nurturing alternative economies to make the current ones obsolete."

Cheyenne Wilson shares how she turned trauma from sexual assault into a therapeutic process, writing a comprehensive guide for people about rape myths and resources to navigate the healing and potential legal process. This story is part of our renewed coverage in 2025 about gender-based violence.

Anne Winkler-Morey writes about her experiences "aging on the run," having retired and sold everything she owned in Minnesota. She is now a worldwide traveler who continues her exploration of how other people live.

We also feature the Twigger village people of central Minnesota. They are a perfect way to kick off our overarching theme of 2025 — How to Create the Village — and are part of our new "Books, Arts & Events" newsletter (womenspress.com/subscribe).

Grief & Hope

We continue to need to tighten our budget. We have already limited our magazine page count. This month we are downsizing our office space and reducing the number of free distribution sites (previously 420).

One-third of print media platforms have closed over the past 20 years; we are not safe from that fate, but we are part of a wonderful village. Print and online advertisers, underwriters, Badass members, magazine subscribers, donors, and distribution site partners have kept the unique Minnesota Women's Press first-person storytelling alive since April 1985.

The good news is that we have expanding relationships statewide, with conversations that will fuel upcoming stories and membership revenue. On January 12, three women in this month's issue will speak at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis about Hope & Grief. We also are working with partners to grow our coverage designed to change narratives about gender-based violence.

If you are not in the village yet, visit womenspress.com/donate or reach out to ads@womenspress.com. Our monthly Badass members will be invited to a 40th anniversary celebration on May 1.

If you have thoughts to share about how you plan in 2025 to create hope — and stubbornly, actively, or resiliently persevere — send them to me at editor@womenspress.com. I will add them to our online Tapestry section.

Use this QR code to become a Badass member and join the celebration

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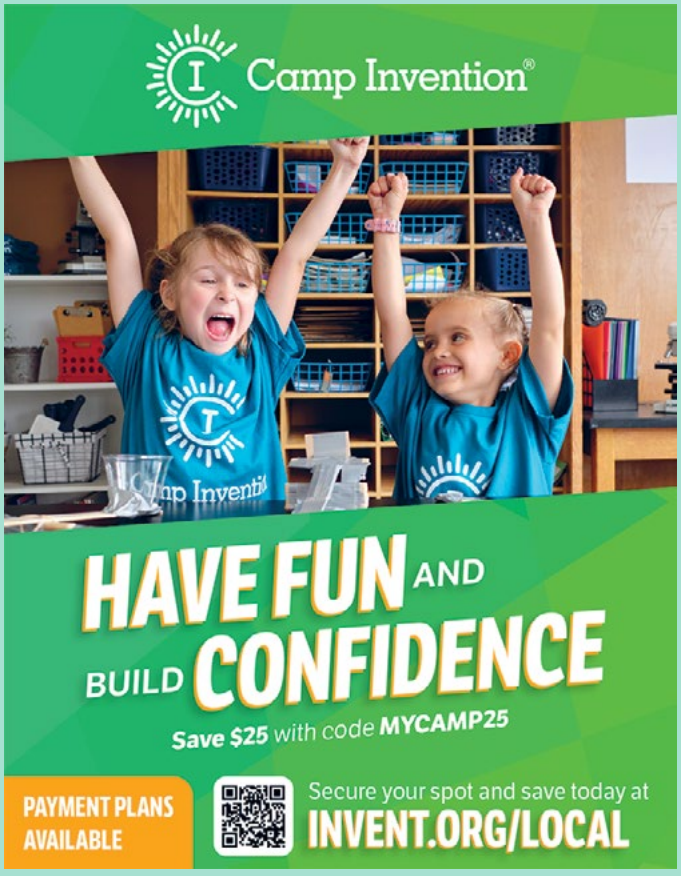

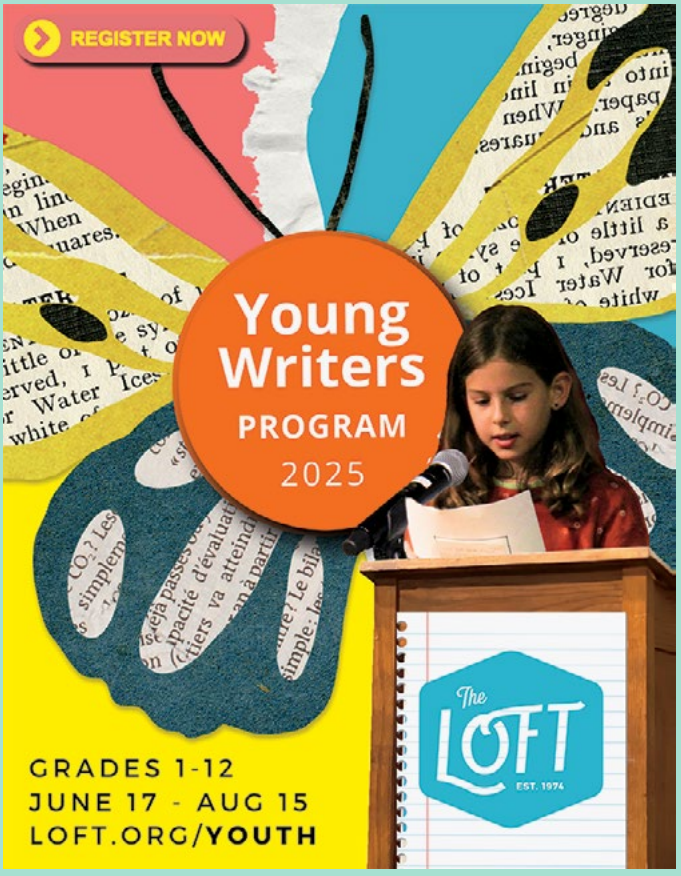

Belts, Battles, and Balance:
How Karate Shaped Who I Am Today

BOTH PHOTOS SARAH WHITING

Eve Wandering (center) practices at Shotokan Karate in Northeast Minneapolis.

At five years old, I was full of energy and curiosity. The dojo — our training ground for martial arts — smelled of sweat and fresh mats. My tiny fists clenched as I mimicked the instructor's movements, more wobble than warrior. The sharp kiai of older students startled me, but it also sparked something inside — a desire to be part of that world of precision and power.

By the time I earned my green belt at 13, I had learned to steady my stance, channel my energy, and push through tough training sessions. Then Covid hit, and the mats I had grown so familiar with vanished, replaced by the creak of my living-room floorboards. My sparring partners were now chairs and coffee tables, their constant presence making every block and strike feel awkward. On the screen in front of me, a patchwork of students kicked and punched in bedrooms and basements. Without the physical presence of my instructors or peers, I felt detached and discouraged. Eventually, I stopped going to karate altogether.

For a couple of years, I avoided the dojo, convinced I had outgrown it. When I was almost 16, I realized that discipline shouldn't depend on location; it's a mindset. I needed to retie my belt and try again.

Returning to the dojo was like stepping into sunlight after a long storm. The air hummed with energy, and the communal rhythm of drills reminded me of why I fell in love with karate. Though it took some time to get back into my flow, muscle memory guided me. With determination and grit, I worked my way from green all the way to brown belt, and stopped being just another student. I began teaching in some of the summer camps I used to attend, passing on the lessons I'd learned to the next generation. When I guided them through their first kata or helped them correct their stances, I saw myself in them. Teaching these kids was like revisiting my own early steps in karate. It was during the camps that I got to know Jethro, who is now my boyfriend, and a wonderful sparring partner.

Competition days are always a blur. The echo of cheers and the steady cadence of judges' commands create a sense of controlled chaos. I remember only the feelings evoked at my first tournament: the knot of nerves before stepping into the ring, the laser focus as I bowed to my opponent, the exhilaration of giving everything I had. Every match since has been a lesson in resilience and grace.

The thrill of competition reminds me why I love karate: it's not about winning, but about challenging myself and learning from every experience.

Karate isn't just a sport to me. It's the hours spent perfecting a single movement, the shared laughter, and the connection forged through training. It's in everything I continue to learn as a teacher and student. Karate shapes who I am. It's a journey I'll carry with me for the rest of my life. MWP

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Lessons from the Scene of a Coup

PHOTO SWESWE THEIN

submitted by Thet-Htar Thet

I learned how to be an activist in Minnesota during my early twenties, advocating for immigrant rights, trans youth, and housing. I learned how to speak out and write about it from the East Side Freedom Library and the Loft Literary Center. The streets and community spaces of the Twin Cities shaped the way I show up in the fight to protect my own home country's fragile democracy.

On February 1, 2021, I woke at 6am in Myanmar (also known as Burma) to news of the military coup. My mother shook me awake and, in a hushed tone, said, "They did the coup." Nearly four years later, on November 5, 2024, it was around the same time of day that I learned about Trump's victory in the U.S.

Both moments brought a gut-punch of disbelief and a profound sense of loss, although the stakes were drastically different. In Burma, the fragile democracy we fought to build was crushed in a single orchestrated act of violence. Tanks rolled into the streets. Leaders were dragged from their homes in the early-morning hours. Months followed with more disappearances, death, and destruction.

Yet as I scrolled through my phone, the screen flooded with images of soldiers, cries for solidarity, and the faces of friends who would soon risk everything for freedom. It was a reminder that hope — if it is to survive — requires defiance.

This convergence of personal and political awakenings has shaped my understanding of what it means to live in the aftermath of seismic political shifts.

Whether in the chaos of a military coup, or the jarring realization of a divisive election result, the emotions of grief, anger, and helplessness feel strikingly familiar. Yet, what I learned in Burma has stayed with me: despair, while natural, is a luxury we cannot afford. Hope is not passive; it demands action.

In the days following the coup, we took to the streets, knowing the risks. It was a deep belief in the collective power of ordinary people that drove us. I remember the sound of chants echoing through neighborhoods, and the quiet courage of those who held the line as military trucks rumbled closer. The protests were messy, fragile, and heartbreakingly human. But they mattered. Each small act of defiance — raising a flag, banging pots and pans, marching despite the curfew — was a declaration of hope.

These experiences have given me a lens through which I view the current U.S. political climate. Polarization, distrust in institutions, and attacks on democratic norms have left many Americans wondering if the foundation of their democracy is as secure as it seems. For those of us who have lived through the collapse of a democracy, the warning signs are glaring.

What I've carried across borders is the understanding that resilience is forged in community. When the systems meant to protect us falter, it is the connections between people — the willingness to show up for one another — that become our greatest defense.

In Burma, it was the networks of students, artists, and laborers that sustained the movement.

In the West, success is often framed as sweeping victories and immediate results. But the reality of activism, especially in times of crisis, is more incremental.

In Burma, we celebrated the smallest wins: a protest that lasted longer than expected, a journalist's story that reached international headlines, a neighbor who joined us for the first time. These moments didn't topple the regime, but they kept the spirit of resistance alive.

Similarly, in the U.S., progress might not come in grand gestures, but in the daily work of holding the line — whether through voting, organizing, or simply refusing to give in to apathy.

Hope is not a naive belief that everything will be okay. It is a deliberate choice to envision and work toward something better, even when the odds seem insurmountable. It is what has sustained me in Burma, and it is what I hold on to now. MWP

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

How I Am Growing My Own Solidarity Economy

submitted by Priscilla Trinh

It's hard to "live, laugh, love" in these times. However, as alluring as nihilism and despair are, I cannot give up on change — because that's what oppressive forces around us want. It takes a certain amount of pride and stubbornness to keep doing something — anything! — whether or not we have hope. I push for change because I feel an intuitive tug inside my body that something is wrong, and know that it doesn't have to be that way.

Around the world, there are strong movements promoting alternative ways to exist: buen vivir, swaraj, and post-growth, to name a few. In North America, as abundant energy (crude oil, natural gas, coal) becomes less accessible to the vast majority of the population (e.g., the working class), I envision a future with more localized economies and regional governance.

Deep Time

When trying to reconcile our complex world, I center the concept of deep time to stay grounded. Life first appeared on Earth about 3.7 billion years ago. In about 7.5 billion years, the sun will expand and engulf the planet's orbit, effectively ending all planetary life. To put those large numbers into perspective, we can compare the 12 billion years of Earth's existence to the clock on the next page. This perspective is not meant to induce existential dread. To me, it is a comforting reminder that nothing lasts forever.

There are real perks to modern society — like having mass-produced toilet paper and strawberries during Minnesota winters. Yet the modern empires of today are not equitable or sustainable, and like civilizations before, this era will not endure.

The collapse of modernity and late-stage capitalism will affect people differently, based on class, race, gender, and geography. Yes, that scares me. Climate migration, food supply chain disruptions, militancy, instable telecommunication, and inaccessible health care will be everyday concerns for millions of people.

The grief many of us are feeling now is a sign of humanity. It is healthy to slow down and process a spectrum of emotions to avoid spiritual burnout. The rise of concepts — like "joy is resistance" from abolitionists, or "pleasure activism" from adrienne maree brown, or "rest is resistance" as popularized by The Nap Ministry — is an invitation to reframe what it means to advocate and exist in dysfunctional systems.

The world does not need more activists. It needs healers, facilitators, growers, creators, mediators, and so many other roles. Many of us in our twenties are at different places, financially and mentally, to fulfill these roles. Yet this is a great time for everyone to experiment with what "better" feels like and how to get there.

Experimenting with Hope

During the pandemic, my peers and I started a nonprofit, The Overstory Alliance. Our mission is to support projects aimed at dismantling exploitative systems that extract human and planetary resources. Some of our accomplishments:

- Coordinating the Line 3 Media Collective to support pipeline resistance and nonviolent direct action.
- Forming Movement School, a political education and organizing initiative for young adults.
- Inspiring a Minnesota chapter of the Sierra Club to start a degrowth working group, to address overly optimistic narratives around Green New Deal transitions. Movements like degrowth and post-growth recognize that endless economic growth on a finite planet is impossible and advocate for a restructuring of the way power, resources, and capital flow through societies.

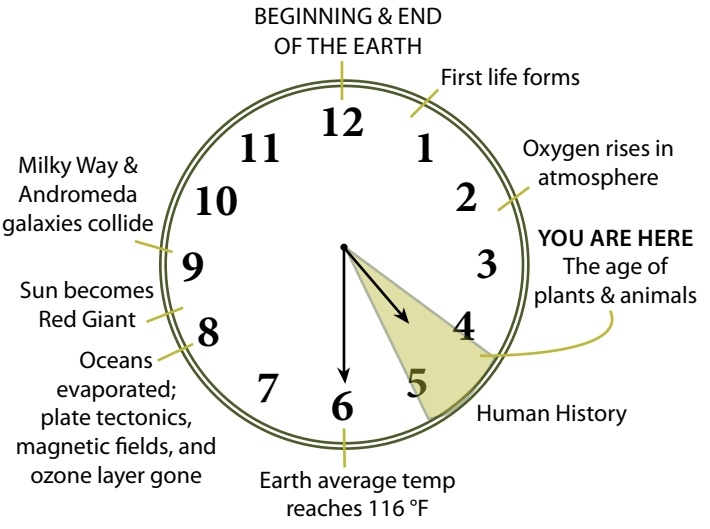
Other movements around Minnesota give me hope:

- Efforts to support unhoused people at encampments.
- The East Phillips Neighborhood Institute winning a decade-long justice fight to repurpose an abandoned building into a community hub and urban farm.
- Cooperative Energy Futures creating community-owned renewable energy sources.
- Native women establishing food sovereignty through hydroponic enterprises.
- Friends posting stories about global liberation struggles.

All these actions indicate a cultural shift from individual efforts to community-oriented solidarity. By centering the collective and developing communal structures rooted in shared resources, we are developing a more inclusive economy with self-governance.

The end of capitalist systems is not a story of good overthrowing bad, but rather a pluralistic tale of nurturing alternative economies to make the current ones obsolete.

In efforts to further self and community sufficiency, I am taking up skills like gardening, woodworking (check out the Minnesota Tool Library and Fireweed Workshop), and effective meeting facilitation. With the benefit of technology, I can continually learn and share these skills through mediums like the Offers & Needs Market, developed by the Post Growth Institute, or Buy Nothing groups that are nearly ubiquitous in every town. This is how we generate social capital.



I often return to the inspiring words of Samirah the Sapphic Siren, an online educator, to keep building the world I want to share with others: "Mutual aid is not rooted in generosity. It's rooted in community. I don't like it when people see community building as selfless. Building community is necessary for both of us. It's crucial to your survival today, and it might be crucial to my survival another day." MWP

Resources

- offersandneeds.com
- overstoryalliance.org
- buynothingproject.org
- mntoollibrary.org
- Autonomous Yurt Union, building yurts for encampments

Aging on the Run

submitted by Anne Winkler-Morey

COURTESY PHOTO

I read Tom Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again* in the fall of 1975, at Oberlin College, before I dropped out. In the autobiographical novel, a young white man from Asheville moves to New York City and then returns to the South, where he feels he no longer belongs. Despite Wolfe's protestations, he and his fictional self still clung to the racist ideas he grew up with.

As a young person who left Wisconsin and spent formative years in North Carolina and the Northeast, the book agitated me. I remember debating Wolfe's relevance in college, asking why we didn't instead read Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye,* which takes place in Loraine, Ohio, eleven miles from Oberlin. I got a B-minus in that class.

It was the title of Wolfe's book that was on my mind when, after a year away, I returned to Minnesota for a visit in October. I wondered if I had the right to call it a homecoming. Many would not consider me a Minnesotan. I wasn't born there, and I have no ancestors there. In 1976, at age 17, I ran away to the Twin Cities with dreams of becoming a dancer. I found the love of my life in Minneapolis, and we raised a child there. Five decades passed. It is as close to a homeland as I have.

I have a bittersweet relationship with Minneapolis; joys, yes, but also attacks, rejections, resentments, and persistent blues. I often dreamt of leaving, but I'd persist because in the 1970s — when the Twin Cities was like a ground zero for Anonymous groups — I joined one. I was not a Twelve-Step success, but one of the program's aphorisms stuck with me: There is no geographical cure. When I desired a break from what bogged me down in the Twin Cities, I would remember that mantra and try to hold on.

In 2011, however, I did get away for a year, cycling the perimeter of the U.S. with my spouse David — an experience that only increased my wanderlust. In 2023, after we had both retired, we sold our home and gave away our possessions, put what we could carry in backpacks, and began a life on the run.

A year later, after living in 19 countries, we returned "home" for a visit. I was nervous. How would it feel to be in Minneapolis without a place to live that was ours? Would anyone want to see me? Would I wish I had never left? Would I want to stay?

I made sure we had reservations for the next six months of travel, as though the town itself would suck me back in if I didn't have a planned exit.

The return was as emotional as I imagined, but in different ways. We saw one-third of the people we wanted to see, and did a quarter of what we planned to do. Much time was spent on health care. We attended the wedding of our nephew from

a distance. Our child, Emily, came for the wedding and caught Covid. David and I never tested positive, but we curtailed our time with others in case we did.

I thought it would be tough to see the house we lived in for 30 years, but it wasn't. I felt removed, like it belonged to someone else, which it does. What made me weepy was walking to old haunts: the creek, the holding pond, the grocery store, the café, sitting on a favorite park bench while watching a great blue heron walk on water.

We joined the parade that circles Bde Maka Ska at dusk. We also walked Lakes Phalen, Wildwood, White Bear, Como, Powderhorn, and Harriet. We crossed the Mississippi River and followed the path along Minnehaha Creek.

We traversed the Cities on foot. In the first days, we walked the boulevards of Bloomington, past signs supporting police as well as a fence with George Floyd's name woven in. We stayed in our old neighborhood for ten days and did the South Minneapolis circuit: Butter Bakery Café, George Floyd Square, and the 37th Street cemetery, which honors Black souls killed by police in the U.S. We attended a small pro-Palestine protest in Powderhorn Park. We met beloved friends at cafés. We walked from South Minneapolis to downtown Saint Paul to meet with the Twin Cities Labor Chorus.

COURTESY PHOTO

I felt no claim to our house of 30 years, but walking these familiar paths, I sensed indelible ownership. Where my foot falls is mine to remember and nobody can take that away from me — not even me.

Some things had changed. During our October visit, the lilacs were blooming! Deep purple, white, and lavender. Lilacs are a Minnesota sign of spring. Back in the day, before we had a house or a bush, David and I used to steal lilacs in springtime and put them on our table for each other's May birthdays. Walking by our former home, I saw purple blossoms envelop the roof. Beautiful, yet an ominous sign of a climate in flux.

Some things were the same. There were still unhoused encampments in parks and parking lots. I found this social neglect newly shocking. In Paris, Dublin, and Lisbon, I did see people living outside in tents, but nowhere have I seen people without homes in such numbers as my Minneapolis, a city so rich in Fortune 500s and nonprofits.

I write this from Istanbul, where our host tells me that homelessness is nearly nonexistent in Turkey. I was skeptical at first. After two weeks here, I am starting to believe him.

In some ways, the more things have changed, the more they have returned to old patterns. A Jewish Israeli scholar of genocide, Raz Segal, was offered a job in the Center for Holocaust and Gender Studies at the University of Minnesota. The offer was rescinded after he analyzed genocide in Gaza.

This outrage reminded me of Michael McConnell. He and his husband were the first gay couple legally married in the U.S. In 1970, he came to the University of Minnesota to fulfill a job offer, only to have the university library rescind it because he was openly gay. Luckily for Minneapolis, he found work with the Hennepin County library system and settled in the city.

Had Professor Segal been able to stay in Minnesota, he would have found fertile ground for collaboration with progressive thinkers and doers in our community. That activism — despite disappointments — is why the Twin Cities will always be a home to me. MWP

Anne Winkler-Morey will write an online "Aging on the Run" column for us this year, thanks to underwriting support from Joan Gilles of Financial Planning Partners.

The Twiggers of Central Minnesota

submitted by Nancy Packard Leasman and her Twigger friends

Who Are the Twiggers?

Twiggers live in a wooded area of central Minnesota. The Twiggers call it a village, but that is a loosely used term, since there are no quaint houses with thatched roofs. There are no arched doorways, no mullioned windows. The land lies within five finger-hills, reaching from the upland known as the North River Road down toward the river's flat floodplain.

Twiggers are gentle, vulnerable little people, and their best defense is simply disappearing into their surroundings. They are not interested in drawing attention to themselves by maintaining blatantly apparent roads. The exception is the agate road, created by the Agate Hunters. They've heard the story of Dorothy and the Yellow Brick Road. They know it leads to Oz, whatever and wherever that might be. The agate road leads nowhere, but is a delightful sight when the sun shines after a rain.

The Twigger village is a very peaceful place. Twiggers have little conflict because they work together to stay safe in a world where nearly everything is bigger than they are.

Lilah loves the tiny trumpets that make up lilac flowers. She gets to collect a few each spring, and if she dries them carefully, they hold their shape and color. She was excited in the very rainy warm year of 2024, when the lilacs bloomed again in September. Everyone she talked with agreed that it had never happened before.

My interest in art and creativity started very early. My mother was a colorist for a photographer in the days before color photography. Her easel sat on a table by the north window of our living room. I played under the table as she worked on her photos. I absorbed a fascination with visual arts along with the aromas of linseed oil, turpentine, and oil paint.

I took art classes in college and have since worked on large-scale murals, book illustrations, and a whimsical line of note cards that have traveled across the world.

In addition to working as an artist, I am a writer, gardener, herbalist, and woodsy person, as well as a fan of the stories and art of Beatrix Potter and Cicely Mary Barker. I have enjoyed Irish stories of "the little people." During the pandemic isolation, I spent many hours cleaning up the family woodlot. Working a mundane job allows for time for creative thinking. The Twiggers came to me during that time.

The Twiggers all have life stories to share, as well as different roles in the Twigger village. Each has been illustrated with an "authorized" portrait, and some of them have been memorialized in four books (so far) about the residents of Twigger Village. There are more than 100 Twiggers, which have sprung from the woods around me near Long Prairie.

Mandy is happy that she can spend her days picking flowers. She knows a human knitter and asked for a skirt and bag. She's delighted with her new outfit.

Burrenda is much happier on sunny summer days than windy winter ones. She's adapted with her winter wear. Though she might be warmer in furs, she doesn't know any furriers.

Community Interaction

I was part of a cohort of artists who met regularly over the course of several months as part of a community arts project sponsored by Springboard for the Arts and the Five Wings Regional Arts Council. Each of us was a recipient of a grant that allowed for project development. I was able to give birth to twelve new Twiggers. They then went into the local community to meet people who have made local connections that have led to greater understanding.

The Twiggers who participated learned about concepts like values, goals, strengths, skills, and building relationships. That was pretty heady stuff for simple people, but they were brave, delighting humans and remaining with them to acknowledge their work to bridge diverse ethnic and cultural communities.

Twiggers Gina and Vera met humans Virginia and Jazmin to celebrate friendship. Separated by decades in age and hundreds of miles in cultural background — one born in Minnesota and the other in Mexico — the two humans found a fondness for working together on tasks and projects, which is why Gina and Vera wanted to meet them.

Barb, from Minnesota, and Rocio, from Argentina, assist people at difficult times in their lives through the Hands of Hope resource center. Twiggers Hibby and Mandy have been self-centered young ladies who think more of fashion than anything, but they wanted to see more of life, so they met Barb and Rocio. They thought any place with "Hope" in its name must be a good place.

Elizabeth grew up in Ecuador. Her life has taken her many places, but she has lived in Long Prairie for more than 20 years. She provides translation and other services to assist immigrants in assimilating into the community. Twigger Liza is small but loves to help her community, and wants to learn another language. She met Elizabeth at the WAVE/Saludos welcome center in Long Prairie — a place for "Welcoming Advocates Valuing Everyone" — and is learning from her. (Saludos is the Spanish translation for "wave.")

Other Twiggers have visited, thanked, and stayed with people who provide excellent customer service at a post office, hair salon, radio station, chamber of commerce, and pharmacy.

Skater loves the ice and lives for cold winter days. It doesn't take very much ice to make a rink for Skater. He's more of a speed skater unless Hosta is around. Then he's a pairs skater. Skater begged to meet the water wizard or ice maiden who has been so instrumental in getting an outdoor ice rink in town. He heard her name was Lu and was excited to meet her in her office. He is hoping that she'll show him what sticks and pucks have to do with ice.

On this month's cover of Minnesota Women's Press we have the tangled emotions of hope and grief, which are so often camouflaged by those who experience them.

The letters for Hope consist of caragana pods, daisy seed head, birch buds, pine needles, and clover. Seed pods symbolize memories and future expectations, buds stand for potential, pine needles represent poignancy and invocations of scent, and clover is there for luck.

Grief consists of leaves, dried flower heads, lilac buds, birch buds, and bayberry thorns. Grief is sharp and thorny, but the buds for new beginnings are in the midst of it.

Twiggers are fragile, as are hope and grief. MWP

Twiggerprofiles.blogspot.com

Mother and baby Twiggers usually stay hidden. It is rare that Maria grants a portrait session. She's a very protective mother and loves her baby as much as a mother can. Honestly, baby Twiggers aren't very cute. If you've ever seen one, you'll probably agree. They're sweet because they're so tiny. But their faces lack definition. Give them time, though, and they cute up.

Where We Find Hope Among Grief

We asked people to share their grief and hope in a world that seems dramatically different than it did even ten years ago.

Melissa Gonzalez Vazquez: Cultural Solidarity

COURTESY PHOTO

The future, to me, looks like a vibrant tapestry of voices that are often unheard, especially within immigrant and Latine communities. My work at LatinoLEAD allows me to elevate the stories and leadership of Latine professionals across Minnesota. I am inspired by the unwavering spirit of the Latine community and my fellow DACA recipients who continue to dream big, despite the uncertainty of their status. We carry an immense amount of hope because we know that our dreams are valid and our existence is powerful.

The future I dream of is one in which we redefine what it means to belong. It's one in which immigrant communities are empowered to build and thrive. I believe we are on the cusp of a cultural renaissance that embraces the full complexity of our identities and celebrates our presence as an integral part of this nation's fabric. For me, the future is filled with possibilities. As long as we hold on to our passion, as long as we lead with love and solidarity, there is always hope.

Anonymous: Navigating Russophobia and Cancel Culture

On February 24, 2022, Russia began a full-scale war in Ukraine. Many of my fellow citizens in Russia do not support the war.

The consequences of war not only bring destruction and take thousands of lives, but often lead to discrimination. I am living in Minnesota now. I love Russia's wonderful nature and architectural heritage. My country has a deep soul, with traditions that have been observed for centuries. I am ashamed only for things I don't have control of: our government and its actions.

After the war against Ukraine started, my Russian credit card stopped working because of sanctions against the country. Many airlines canceled flights to my homeland. Russian friends traveling out of the country told me about being refused service in restaurants and shops. I read comments on social networks in which people rejoice at attacks in my country and even say that Russian children deserve to die. I began to lose faith in humanity. But I do have hope in my heart that my generation can make a difference.

There is no single solution to solve Russophobia. If we could help people become more media literate, teach them to check facts, and study history, we could reduce nationalistic hatred and bias.

Alexis Cox: Parenting in a Tight Economy

COURTESY PHOTO

Three years ago, at age 23, I became a mom to a beautiful baby boy. I relocated from my hometown of Monticello to Marshall, Minnesota, where I met my fiancé. Becoming a mom has been the best thing to ever happen to me, but it has also opened up a door to new worries.

One of the main things I worry about is financial stability. I am going to school for cosmetology and work as a bartender on weekends. My fiancé is a blue-collar worker. We make enough to make ends meet for our family in a small town, but we're in a two-bedroom apartment and want to someday rent or buy a house.

In our town the housing costs are high. You cannot find home rentals for under $1,000 a month. Many apartment spaces are upward of $1,200 a month. This could be expected if we lived near a big city, but Marshall — a town of 13,000 in southwest Minnesota — is the largest town within an hour.

I would like my son to be able to grow up in a house with a yard, and space for his things. It scares me that

we will never financially be able to get to where we want to be. Although we enjoy going to parks, walking, and playing at the local YMCA, I worry on a daily basis about the world my son will have to navigate in adulthood. I feel guilty for bringing him into it.

I hope we can collectively find solutions to our economic issues for families, as well as climate change, so that my son can grow up in a better world.

Temi Ogunrinde: Loss of My Father

COURTESY PHOTO

When the Timberwolves almost made it to the NBA finals in 2024, I broke down and sobbed. My tears had little to do with the team and everything to do with my dad. It's been three years since he passed. When the Timberwolves advanced as far as they did, I knew he would have called me, overjoyed.

What is hard about grief is that people can't grasp the weight of what you're going through. They remember your grief during the holidays, during birthdays, and maybe the anniversary of the death of your loved one. But people who haven't experienced loss yet don't often realize that the reality doesn't just show up then. Yes, I miss him during those big moments, but I also miss him after a frustrating day at work, or after a promotion. The loss feels strong on a random Tuesday, or on a beautiful sunny day, or after watching a funny movie. When the love is so deep, the loss can be felt in the most random ways and in the most mundane days. Loss saddens me, but what can sometimes feel crippling is how lonely walking in it feels.

Yet deep grief also gives me great hope. My dad was the most charismatic person I knew. He was kind to all who knew him. He didn't have to know you long before he'd be willing to offer you the shirt off his back. He had a laugh that was infectious. You couldn't help but feel loved in his presence.

I am my father's daughter, and my hope is that people can see him through me. You may not have had the pleasure of knowing my dad, but I hope this gives you a glimpse of the man he was.

Rebecca Arredondo: Every Day Is a Clean Slate

COURTESY PHOTO

The lights are dim in classroom B214. The projector is on, displaying instructions for ninth graders, and all you can hear is its low hum and the soft whispers of students. Their heads are down as they scribble their thoughts. The prompt: Tell me about a person in your life who has had the greatest influence on you.

As I read the incoming submissions, I notice the same pattern: Madame Steele, Professor Arredondo, Ms. Frank, Teacher Eugene. The first people that popped up into their little heads are teachers. I couldn't help but smile.

As teachers, we serve as educators, emotional support peers, Band-Aid providers, hallway monitors, AI detectors, and on occasion security guards when a student decides to fight. When we get home, teachers are also parents, sons, daughters, friends, siblings.

The duality of a teacher is one of the most exhausting aspects of our profession. Some days it feels hopeless to continue teaching. We return home finding ourselves with emotional and physical unavailability toward those we care about. Society's treatment of teachers has worsened since I started three years ago, with parents blaming teachers for their childrens' action. People forget that our degrees are in education, not parenting.

I look up from reading my students' essays to look at their faces. Every one of them has brought laughter, headaches, smiles, and tears to my life. Every day is a clean slate for us.

I see their faces and think, "This is the best job ever."

I hope they enter our classroom feeling acknowledged. I hope they leave the classroom having learned something new about the world and themselves.

Knowledge is power. It's an honor for me to offer knowledge to students. Seeing and listening to our students gives me hope that our world can become a better place, despite the flaws of our past.

continued on next page

Several of the people who submitted essays for Tapestry were students in a media justice class at St. Catherine's University. Each of them submitted an entry. Here are a few of them.

Liz Rosen: Inadequate Housing Protections

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

I have seen firsthand the environmental issues that cause health problems. Several of my close friends struggle with asthma, which is a consequence of poor air quality. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, 82 Minnesotans died of asthma in 2020. In 2021, there were 13,534 emergency room visits and 1,305 hospital stays for asthma.

What concerns me is that many environmental issues are caused by Minnesota's housing crisis. Many people have difficulty accessing affordable and adequate housing. Much of the available housing is inadequate because of its age — older places tend to have asbestos insulation, poorly ventilated spaces, outdated HVAC, mold, lead paint, and cracks that allow allergens and pollutants to enter.

The Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC) is located in a neighborhood that suffers from environmental pollution. The HERC emits pollutants and toxic chemicals into the air.

I write this as I sit in a warm house with healthy air. It is hard for me to understand the challenges of someone who lives in a home with asbestos, mold, and cracks that let pollutants in.

Yet as a neighbor and friend, I can do more than imagine. I am learning about the governmental and community actions that could improve access to safe homes and rental properties. For example, I see hope in the Minnesota Housing Justice Center, which preserves and expands affordable housing for low-income families. I see hope in the Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, which works to advocate on federal, state, and local levels to create new opportunities for affordable homeownership in the Twin Cities.

Kaylee Miron: Caregiver Safety and Compensation

As a certified nurse's assistant, and an at-home caregiver, I have been bitten, scratched, and cursed. I have taken care of twelve patients at a time. I have had to pry a patient's mouth from a nurse's arm. Yet I don't have enough money for food.

Health care employees work with people who are at the end of their lives and who are enduring great pain. They are doing jobs that most other people could not do, taking care of other people's loved ones. Yet nurses regularly face overwork and are underpaid. Everyone deserves to be safe, especially those who take care of others. Nurses are doing a difficult job and should be compensated as such. Thanks to the nurse's union, there is more awareness of these issues.

Makayla Klimek: Health Care Shortages

I have witnessed the common issue of burnout among health care workers. Exhausted caregivers are more likely to make errors. It also adds to workforce shortages and increasing wait times for patients. According to the Association of American Medical College, the demand for doctors alone "will continue to grow faster than supply, leading to a shortage of between 54,100 and 139,000 physicians by 2033," especially in primary care and rural communities. The situation for nurses is even more dire.

Imagine going to the hospital where all staff members are on their fifth 16-hour shift in a row. If we continue on the path we are on, there will be no one left as caregivers because everyone is so physically and mentally exhausted.

Kayla Yang: Sexual Violence in the Hmong Community

COURTESY PHOTO

For as long as Hmong people have been in America, dating back to 1975, Hmong victims of domestic violence have faced cultural stigma, systemic barriers, and community shame about gender-based violence. This has discouraged open discussion and accountability.

Victims of sexual violence can be as young as five years old. Similar to other cultural groups, perpetrators are often individuals the victim knows, such as family members, or Hmong gang members. Common forms of sexual violence include rape, domestic abuse, and sharing exploitative images.

When victims find the courage to speak out, they are often

shamed and threatened to keep their voices silenced.

As a Hmong woman and a survivor of sexual violence, I understand that the suppression of survivors' voices leaves many to suffer in isolation, burdened by grief and struggling with trauma. If we were to instead collectively spread awareness and empower survivors to share their stories, I have hope that this would lead to the healing we need.

Transforming Generations offers domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy, crisis counseling, education to Hmong men who have caused violence, youth advocacy for those experiencing violence, youth leadership training, and queer justice advocacy. transforminggenerations.org

Alexandra Nelson: Food for Mothers

COURTESY PHOTO

As a nutrition student, I hope to work in food accessibility. While I was in high school, I worked in elementary school classrooms and saw how food insecurity affects children and their families.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, about half of households receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (aka SNAP) are headed by single mothers. An additional supplemental program for Women, Infants, and Children (aka WIC) is available statewide to provide nutrition support to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and young children. Studies show that WIC improves dietary quality, reduces food insecurity, and leads to healthier birth outcomes.

Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) provides financial assistance and employment services to low-income families with children. The goal of MFIP is to help families transition to self-sufficiency by supporting them as they gain stable employment. MFIP offers a combination of cash and food support to eligible families. Participants receive help finding jobs, training for work, and improving skills to increase employability.

Looking toward the future, there is a threat to the endowment that supports government-funded food assistance programs in this country. I fear single mothers and their children will get lost — and that this will lead to dire consequences in the future. As a future dietitian, I envision a world where no mother has to choose between feeding her children and meeting other basic needs. The progress we've made is hopeful, but it's not enough. We must fight to preserve and expand these programs, ensuring they evolve to meet the needs of every family.

Linh Stoebner: Language Barriers for Immigrants

COURTESY PHOTO

The U.S. farming and construction industries, among others, rely on immigrants. According to National Public Radio, in 2022 nearly 60 percent of the construction workers in Texas alone were undocumented immigrants. Investigate Midwest quoted an agriculture industry executive who said the farming structure would likely collapse without immigrant workers.

Minnesota is home to one of the largest immigrant populations in the United States. As of 2019, Minnesota had the largest Somali population and one of the largest Hmong populations in the country. According to data from the American Immigration Council, "Immigrants make up 10.6 percent of Minnesota's labor force and support the state's economy in many ways. They account for 10.3 percent of entrepreneurs, 12.5 percent of STEM workers, and 14.2 percent of the manufacturing workforce in the state."

To support the immigrants who support important Minnesota industries, barriers must be addressed if all Minnesotans are to thrive.

As a Vietnamese immigrant who came to the U.S. in search of a better life, I've experienced the challenges faced by migrants and refugees due to our immigration status, language, and unfamiliarity with the U.S. legal system. As an interpreter, I see how missed language can have severe consequences.

I would like to see an expansion of community-based legal services that offer multilingual support, remove the fear of deportation in seeking help, and provide training for law enforcement and legal professionals on cultural competence and the specific needs of immigrant communities.

Organizations like the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota are working to address these issues, offering legal services and advocating for policy reforms that aim to make immigration justice more accessible. More widespread funding and partnerships with local communities could further amplify these efforts. MWP

PHOTO SARAH WHITING

Creating Hope After Sexual Assault

submitted by Cheyenne Wilson

When I talk with other survivors of sexual assault, I often remind them that healing mirrors the stages of grief because recovering from trauma is, in many ways, a grieving process. We grieve the loss of innocence, who we were before the trauma, the future we envisioned, and sometimes even friends and family who do not offer the support we need.

After my assault by someone I knew, I desperately searched for resources to help me navigate the confusion, anxiety, and countless questions I had. The lack of information left me in the dark, kept me stuck in denial, and delayed my healing.

Two years passed before I discovered a document for attorneys about common "rape myths." It helped me begin to understand that what I'd experienced was, in fact, rape.

Initially, I felt angry. *Why isn't this information available to everyone who needs it?* But I also felt validated. This finally empowered me to acknowledge my trauma, make informed decisions about therapy, and report the crime.

My case went to trial but resulted in a not-guilty verdict. I realized things could have gone differently if I'd had the information to make informed decisions earlier. If I had understood that it was rape, even though I knew my rapist, maybe I would've sought out therapy or reported sooner. If I'd had guidance on how to tell my loved ones, maybe I would have disclosed right away.

As I sat grieving after the trial, I knew I needed to create

a resource that could empower others with information they needed to make decisions that could change the trajectory of their lives and their healing.

I was inspired to create *We Are the Evidence: A Handbook for Finding Your Way After Sexual Assault*. It is a comprehensive book that provides accessible and practical guidance for survivors and their loved ones: defining sexual assault, breaking down myths, navigating therapy, reporting to the legal system, going through a court process, creating an individualized healing plan.

The 300-page book brings together voices of survivors, therapists, professors, nurses, detectives, lawyers, and dieticians. I moved through the stages of grief while I was writing the book, and even started to feel hopeful about the future.

The thought that I could make a small difference for someone kept me going on days when I wasn't sure I could.

I have placed some of the books in Little Free Library locations. When I check back and see that someone has taken a copy, I know I'm helping someone in my community find a way forward. Book reviews and messages from survivors let me know how the book helped them to disclose, seek therapy, or report to the legal system. We have so much work to do for the sexual assault public health crisis. Information is power.

In 2025, my hope is that Minnesota will shift how it addresses sexual violence. I want to see restorative justice become available for survivors. I want to see health care providers become better trained to identify and support survivors. Above all, I want survivors to have the resources they need to make informed choices. MWP

Ask your local library to add the book to their collections, and buy the book for a Little Free Library box in your own community. Buy from a local independent bookseller, or at Bookshop.org

What's New at womenspress.com

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

Addressing Child Trafficking in Minnesota

OUR Rescue is a nonprofit focused on eradicating sex trafficking and child exploitation, which is moving its headquarters from Salt Lake City to Minneapolis in January. The goal is to work collaboratively and strategically with the area's business and nonprofit communities to address the high number of boys and girls who are sex trafficked in Minnesota.

Says company director Tammy Lee, "The I-35 corridor runs from Laredo, Texas, to Duluth, and is a major link in transporting people, as well as drug trafficking. Minnesota's ports, such as those in Duluth, are critical entry points for traffickers, making the state a target for both domestic and international trafficking activities." She says trafficking is also prevalent near Native American reservations and through the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

According to Sharing Hope's Minnesota report card on child and youth sex trafficking, Minnesota has an "F" grade for identification of victims trafficked from other countries or caught up in the juvenile justice system. Minnesota has a "D" grade in training law enforcement and school personnel, as well as prevention education in schools. OUR Rescue is moving to Minnesota to create partnerships that improve those grades.

Read about this and related stories at womenspress.com/gender-based-violence-series. Thanks to Valvoline of Northern Minnesota and Minneapolis Foundation for supporting this series.

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womenspress.com/2024-impact-report

Other New Online-only Stories

Thanks to the support of donors Michelle and Bill Pohlad, as well as Kristin Siegesmund, new stories in the "Collective Health" series include:

- How veterans nationwide have addressed post-traumatic stress disorder, thanks to the diligence of a Minnesota therapist.
- How a mother/daughter team are helping loved ones navigate mental health concerns.
- The results of new approaches taken with carjacking teens, reported by the Hennepin County attorney's office.
- How communities are dealing with the shortage of skilled nursing facilities and workers, particularly in small-town Minnesota.

womenspress.com/collective-health

Editorial board member Cirien Saadeh is working on stories about upcoming legislative session priorities — as well as mutual aid efforts — thanks to "Diversity in Politics" underwriters. Keep checking our online coverage, which includes an ongoing round-up of White House Administration news, curated with a feminist lens. MWP

womenspress.com/election

Thanks to 2025 underwriters to date, who support Changemakers Alliance content development

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My Decades Working With Shelter Animals

submitted by Janelle Dixon

Damaged goods. That's how people viewed shelter animals when I began working in animal welfare in 1991. While many in the community supported the work of humane societies, there was a general assumption that animals surrendered to shelters were broken, sick, or dangerous. Thousands of animals were surrendered to Minnesota shelters every month. Nearly half were euthanized because we didn't have enough resources or room.

Today, adopting a pet from a humane society or rescue organization is a badge of honor. Nine out of ten animals that come into our shelters find loving homes. Organizations like Animal Humane Society worked to shift perceptions of shelter animals and help people better understand the complexity of managing companion animal populations. Over time, incremental progress led to monumental changes.

We began by investing in spaying and neutering pets — first in our shelters, then in our communities — which helped reduce unwanted litters and the number of animals in need of homes. Eventually, we were able to start addressing the challenges and barriers that led people to surrender their beloved pets, including behavior needs, food and housing insecurity, and access to low-cost veterinary care. Today, proactive services help keep animals out of shelters and with the families who love them. These programs reflect one of the biggest changes I've observed: the growing recognition that helping people is an essential part of helping animals.

As a result of these efforts, the number of animals surrendered to Animal Humane Society is half what it was three decades ago. We've reduced euthanasia in our shelters from 45 percent to just 10 percent today. We have not euthanized a medically and behaviorally healthy animal since 2011.

On December 20, I retired from the Animal Humane Society. Looking back, I am struck by the role pets play in our homes and in our hearts. When I started my career, pets were often relegated to a doghouse or left to roam outdoors. They moved inside, and we gradually made room for them on the couch — then on the bed. Tonight, many of us will happily sleep wherever our pets leave us room. Now that's progress. MWP

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Listening to the Whispers

submitted by Isavela Lopez

The future looks to me like returning to the past — returning to the land. It looks like coming back into cycle with the earth.

Imagine what our land of the Great Lakes would look like if hills and valleys were undressed of its concrete roads and industrialization. It leaves me questioning: What is progress? What is the point of expansion?

We have only a few years to reverse the effects of the climate crisis, yet I find us in the same regular routine with no evidence of urgency.

Indigenous people — the Lakota, the Dakota, and the Anishinabe — have been doing what they can to keep listening to her whispers.

How can we ignore the call to recognize what needs to be done? How do we find motivation in a world that seems to promise itself to destruction?

My Zapotec roots are from Oaxaca, Mexico, which has one of the greatest biodiversity environments in the country. The indigenous people of Oaxaca take care of about 80 percent of the biodiversity there.

When I journey home, I hike in between the mountains and breathe in the fresh altitude amidst dry forest. I breathe in the whispers of something that calls me back to hope. To be with living things, we know that we humans are not alone on this earth. In nature, I always find a spirit of reverence and resistance.

What saddens me is that we are taught not to care — not to beat with the earth — even though our humanity has so much in common with her living trees, flowers, and animals.

We all have a role to play on this earth. We just need to return, to remember.

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Metropolitan Library Service Agency
Minnehaha Animal Hospital
Minnesota Community Action
Minnesota Fringe Festival
Minnesota Housing
Minnesota Newspaper Association
Minnetonka Animal Hospital
Mundahl Law, PLLC
NAMI Minnesota
The NoPlaceLikeHomeTeam — Re/MAX Results
Nokomis Pet Clinic
Northeast Bank
Old National Bank
Ilhan Omar
Optimal Wellness
Pet Doctors Animal Clinic
ROYA, LLC
Beth Ann Schumacher — Safe Place, Safe Passages
Spectacle Shoppe
Springboard for the Arts
Tarrant and Liska, PLLC
TCB Marketing
Trio Landscaping, LLC
Tubman
Turbo Tim's Anything Automotive
Twin Cities Ballet / Ballet Royale Minnesota
University of Minnesota Press
Victoria Arts Center
Vital Fitness
Washburn-McReavy
Wayside Recovery Center
Wisconsin Great Northern Railroad
Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality
Women Winning