



WOMEN 2 WOMEN MICHIGAN MAGAZINE

W2W

Great Day
Protocol

Stacey Kimbrell

Trend Tea

Michelle Shook

**Holiday
Gift Guide**



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W2W

Women *Inspiring* Women *for Good!*

---{ contributors }---

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Deborah St. Hilaire • Suzanne Young • Tamesa Martin • Mimi Matthews
Debra Loader • Lesley Howe • Christen Rachow • Kim Hytinen
Stacy Kimbrell • Michelle Shook • Tara Moreno

Christmas is a time for getting with the girls and kickin' it for some cocktails.

Debra K. Collins
Publisher



Christmas brings much joy to my life, it's like camping, but more sparkly.

Mimi Matthews
Editor



I have my own naughty list and I'm telling Santa.

Lesley Howe
Executive Assistance/Marketing



Christmas elves are all over my house - I can't seem to get them to leave.

Jennifer Gardner
Creative Director



Our Mission:

Women2Women Michigan was created to connect women with women for good to encourage, support, have fun, do business and provide links for women's resources.

DO YOU KNOW A MICHIGAN WOMAN WE SHOULD FEATURE?

Submit your stories online at w2wmichigan.com. Article guidelines are under the magazine tab.

WHY ADVERTISE WITH US?

Women make the majority of purchasing decisions. They buy goods and services for their homes, gardens, businesses, entertainment, health and nutrition, the list is endless. They want to be informed and connected in their communities. Event-driven marketing makes education fun and rewarding. You can reach these women in a heartwarming environment at Women2Women Michigan events and through our magazine.

READERSHIP & DISTRIBUTION

Women2Women Michigan magazine is distributed to subscribers via US mail. It is also available at every Women2Women Michigan event, chamber events, and women's organizations. It is professionally delivered to various locations throughout the area including restaurants, hospitals, retail locations and medical offices in southeastern Michigan. Interested in hosting a distribution location? Email us at office@w2wmichigan.com.

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---{ note from our publisher & editor }---

joyful



Mimi Matthews Editor
Debra K. Collins Publisher

Theme: *Celebrations*

During this time of year there are many celebrations and gatherings. We want to wish you a wonderful season, and our hope is that you are able to enjoy friends and family without a lot of worry and stress. Our suggestion: do what gives you JOY and see if you can get rid of the rest. It might seem impossible at times but we have a couple of articles that may help you some: Christen Rachow's "Let's Have A Conscious Holiday" (page 28) and Deb St. Hilaire's "Feeling It" (page 12).



"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious"

— Carl Jung

The staff at W2W has decided that the things that give us joy are gatherings of family and friends (make it easy, make it pot-luck and take the recipe on page 13!), cooking together, creating and following traditions, and just hanging out together with friends. Contact someone you haven't seen in a while and plan to get together. Our hearts are always warmed when we get to visit with a precious girlfriend!

Stacey Kimbrell gives a way to start each day with purpose and intention in "Great Day Protocol" on page 24. And of course, when the spirit of gratitude permeates the season, our days seem better too. See Suzanne Young's article on page 20 for suggestions.

Thank you for being a part of our community. You inspire us and your support is a gift to our hearts!

May you be blessed abundantly with joy, love, and hope during this season, and always.

Happy Holidays,

Mimi & Deb



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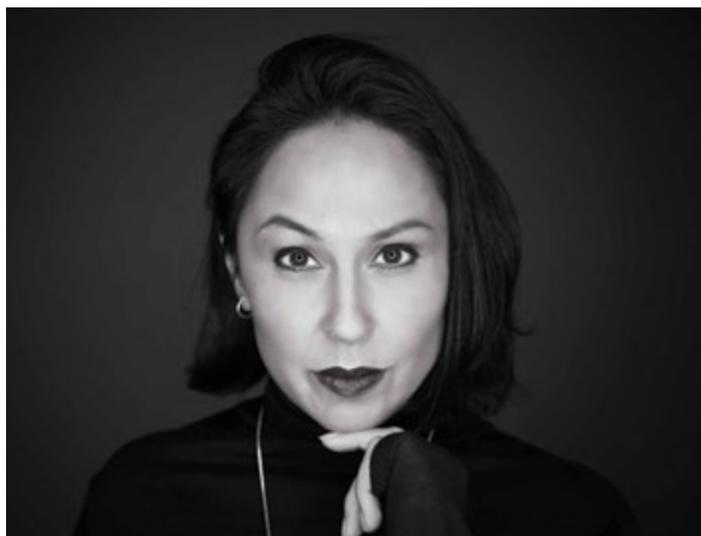
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{ healthy eating, healthy lifestyle, healthy mindset }

Inner Weather Report

How do we increase our vibration? Lift up our energy, our mood?

Have you ever been feeling down, frustrated, depressed, or really angry, and felt stuck in that feeling? You wanted to move the emotion, you wanted to feel happy, relaxed, in the groove, but you just couldn't "will" yourself out of the dumps. Not only does willpower not work for "diets", it doesn't work to lift your spirits either.

So, what does?

I heard about the Inner Weather Report a little bit ago and the visual of this was so powerful, I wanted to share it with you.

Starting in the upper left quadrant – the weather is stormy. With Hurricane Ian in our so recent past, it's easy to visualize the high energy, fury and destruction of that storm. The effect on us can be similar when we are feeling desperation, rage, anger, fear, hate, or resentment. It takes a lot of our energy to be in any of those states, but it is depleting and destructive.

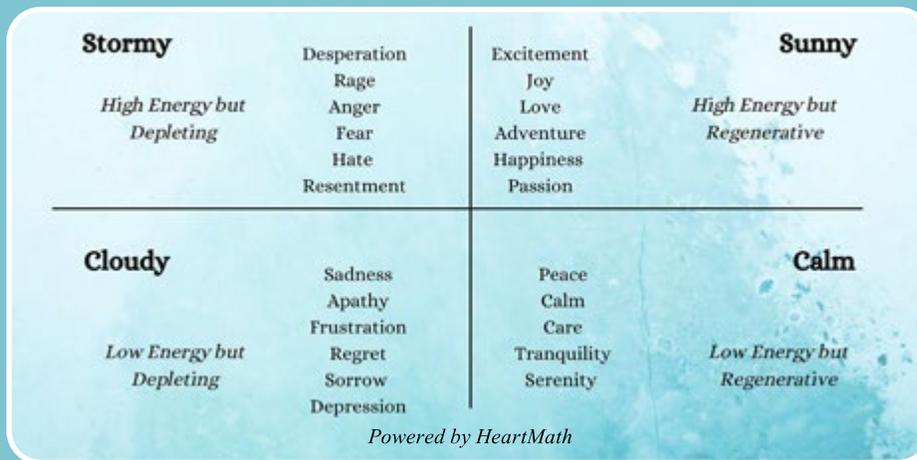
Lower left quadrant – the weather is cloudy. Here in Michigan we have A LOT of cloudy days! It doesn't take much energy, but it's also depleting. When we are feeling sadness, apathy, frustration, regret, sorrow, or depression, that also doesn't require a lot of energy, but it is depleting and can be destructive as well.

Lower right quadrant – the weather is calm. There's not much energy here, but the calmness is regenerative and renewing. Here you may be experiencing peace, calm, care, tranquility, and serenity.

Hmmm – doesn't that feel nice? It feels like "weather" where I could spend time and it feels restorative.

Upper right quadrant – the weather is sunny. There's high energy around a sunny day, but unlike the stormy hurricane weather, this is regenerative and renewing. High energy emotions in this "weather" might be excitement, joy, love, adventure, happiness, and passion. You can feel the energy vibration get higher and higher!

Emotions add texture to our lives. No emotion is wrong or bad. Although some emotions recharge us and others can deplete us and rob us of our enjoyment.



How much time do you spend on each side (left or right) of the weather? No judgment... Ask yourself how often do you live on the left side and how often do you live on the right side? What patterns do you see?

Ok, you have some clarity around your "inner weather" – now what?

You can change, or shift, your inner weather to be more regenerative, restoring, and high vibe in a few minutes. You may already be familiar with a breath technique like the 5-5-7 breath to help you relax when you are stressed, but I want to take you deeper.

We begin the same – I invite you to get comfortable in your chair, or lay down if you prefer, and begin to slow your breath, allowing it to get deeper and slower. Relaxing into a beautiful rhythm of quieting breaths. Focus your breath on your heart space – inhale and exhale into your heart and soul. You may want to spend a couple of minutes here to quiet your spirit.

Then, remember a moment in time that you felt appreciation or gratitude. Or maybe a moment of great love and caring. Picture it, allow the emotions of that moment to light up your soul. Feel it fully – re-experience it with your mind, heart, and body. Spend a minute or two in this space of appreciation and love, staying with it until you start to feel the shift.

Even just a few minutes practicing heart focused breathing can change your inner weather report and raise your vibration. Appreciation and gratitude are powerful emotions.

With the Holiday season upon us,

give yourself permission to appreciate, to love, to be grateful even in the midst of a whirlwind of activity. Your inner weather is your choice. Appreciation and gratitude are emotions that will raise your vibration to a "sunny" day.

► Debra Loader is a National Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach and she works with women who are exhausted from doing it all. She can be reached for private or group coaching at debra@debraloaderlivingwell.com or 810.287.4096.





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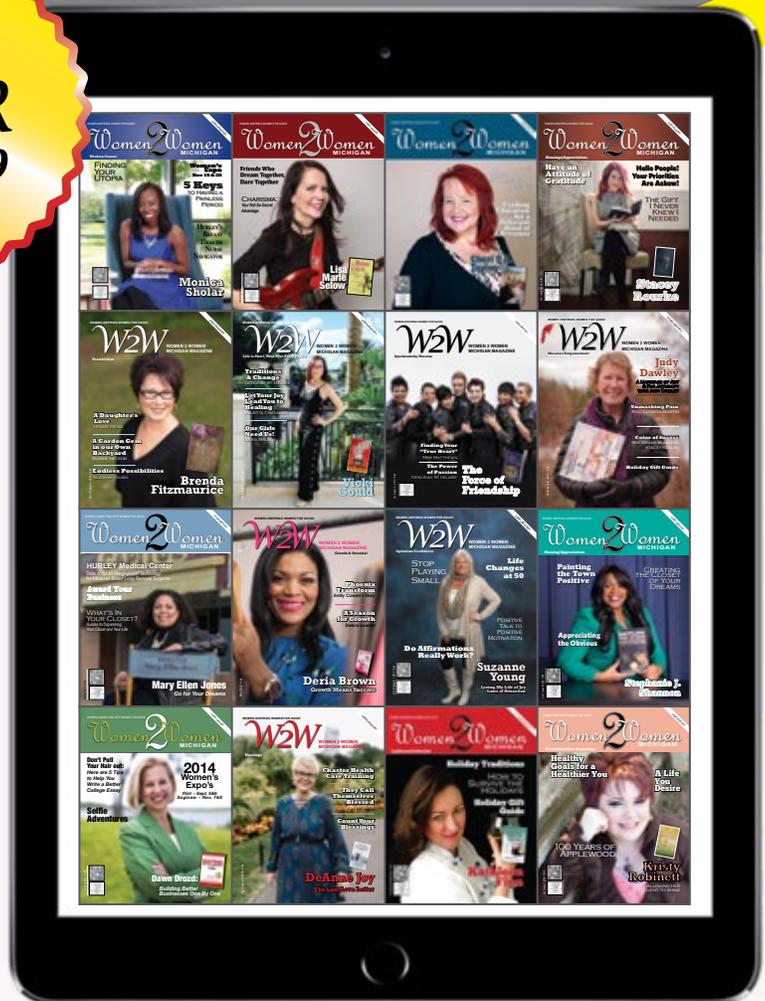
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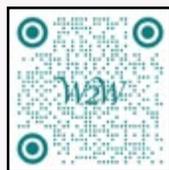
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Women2Women Michigan is inspiring women for good, for fun, for encouragement, and for support. We publish a monthly magazine filled with great information for Michigan women. Our goal is to provide our readership with inspiring articles that motivate and empower.

We are an event-driven business that produces weekend getaways, expos, shopping trips, network nights, seminars, workshops, road trips, retreats, and other event marketing.



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Tara Moreno

Recovery Reiki®



---{ cover story }---

The reader learns about the pain-body—a term coined by Eckhart Tolle to describe the shadow aspects of the human experience—and explore chakras, gut health, crystal healing and meditation techniques.

I'm passionate. Passion is what is injected into any work I'm a part of. If it doesn't ignite the fire within me, I pass on it. My dominant role at this time is being the founder and executive director of Serenity House Communities, a recovery community organization in Flint, Michigan. We help men and women—serving 70 percent women—recover from substance use disorder, codependency and trauma, holistically.

I founded the organization because holistic practices have changed the fabric of my own life in so many incredible ways and I wanted to give to those who could not afford it.

I was born and raised in Flint, Michigan. My father was a shop worker at Buick City and my mother a stay-at-home mom. Academics came easily for me. School was a reprieve as I grew up in a toxic home environment with drugs and alcohol. My mother and father divorced as my father had an affair with another woman. After he left the home, it was then I started using drugs and alcohol too. I was 15.

This would set the tone for the next 15 years of my life. After many years of pain and hardship I was able to find recovery. It started with 12-steps and then I found my way towards holistic medicine. During my recovery I went back to college to obtain a master's degree in composition and rhetoric and became a news reporter. Not too long after I founded Serenity House and Green Tara Holistics, LLC.

In 2013, I had my biggest spiritual awakening where I went from hoping there was a higher power to knowing without a doubt that there is one. During these years I was led to become the founder of Serenity House Communities—although it did not make sense at the time. Despite that, I trusted my intuition and seven

years later we have served over 1,000 women each year. Additionally, I founded Green Tara Holistics which is the LLC that houses my trainings and books.

My children are the number one reason why I continue doing the work that I do. I know that the work I'm doing is promising a better life for them and those they touch in their lives. My mission is to help heal my family, my community and the world. I know that each of us has the power within us to heal anything.

✿
*After millennia of being
persecuted, it is the
woman that will alchemize
her pain to create a new
earth, a new way of being.*
✿

I have worked on high-level projects that include speaking and healing activities for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), Genesee Health Systems and other various treatment centers in Michigan. I have also led guided meditations for the national Recovery Leadership Summit in Washington DC and St. Paul Minnesota. I've spoken on many platforms regarding Serenity House and Green Tara that include the Get in the Heard podcast put on by the revered McShin Foundation. I also am a member of the Families Against Narcotics Advisory Board, a member of the Genesee County Prevention Coalition, and a SUD advisory council member for Genesee Health System. Most recently, I'll be speaking at the Multiple Pathways Conference in Punta Gorda, Florida in January 2023.

When going through tough life challenges, I trust the inner work I've done. I have a firm connection with my higher power

and I understand that if I let the trials and tribulations happen—and I feel what is happening all the way—I will come out with a radiance I did not have before.

My books, Recovery Reiki®: Self-healing & Emotional Mastery Manual and the Workbook were written to accompany the trainings I provide. The training is helping people break free of patterns that keep them stuck in addictions, unfulfilling relationships, and trauma responses. This book walks readers through the process of whole-person healing where they learn about the history of Usui Reiki and Recovery Reiki® and how it's used in modern medicine. They learn about the pain-body—a term coined by Eckhart Tolle to describe the shadow aspects of the human experience—and explore chakras, gut health, crystal healing and meditation techniques.

The beautiful thing about creating the manual and workbook is that I was able to work with another amazing woman, Jennifer Gardner (graphic designer for this magazine), who did the graphics and layouts. The manual can be found on Amazon and Barnes & Noble and the workbook just on Amazon.

It has been said in many spiritual circles that the women are leading this spiritual awakening. It is the woman that will rise above the ashes and take her rightful place in the world once again. After millennia of being persecuted, it is the woman that will alchemize her pain to create a new earth, a new way of being.

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---{ she means business }---

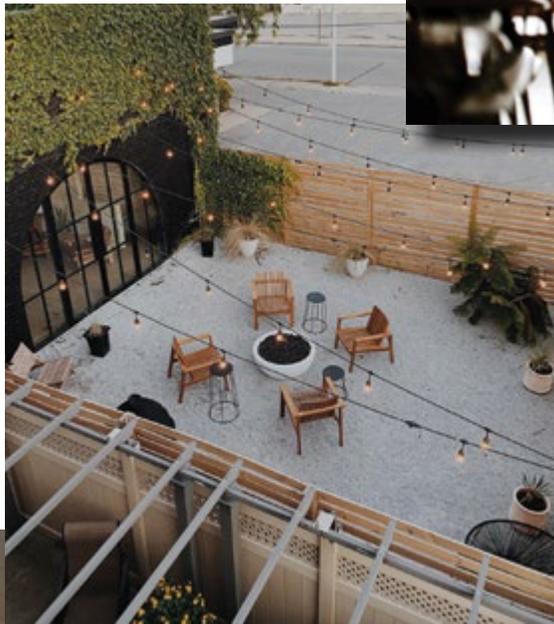
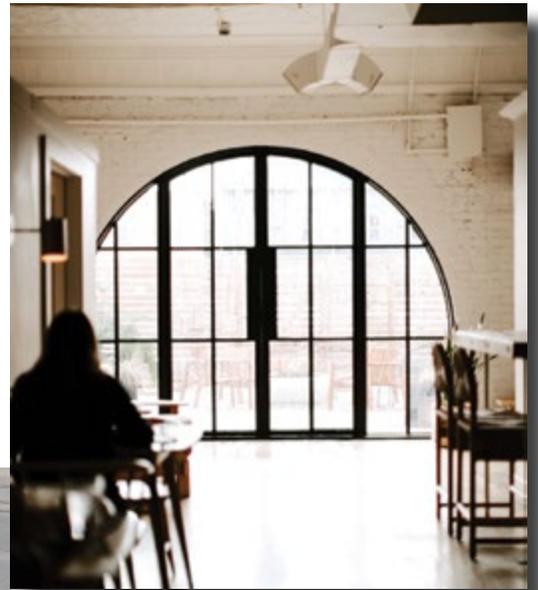
Lindsay Edmonds

Did you ever meet someone for the first time and think, “Wow, she certainly has it together”?

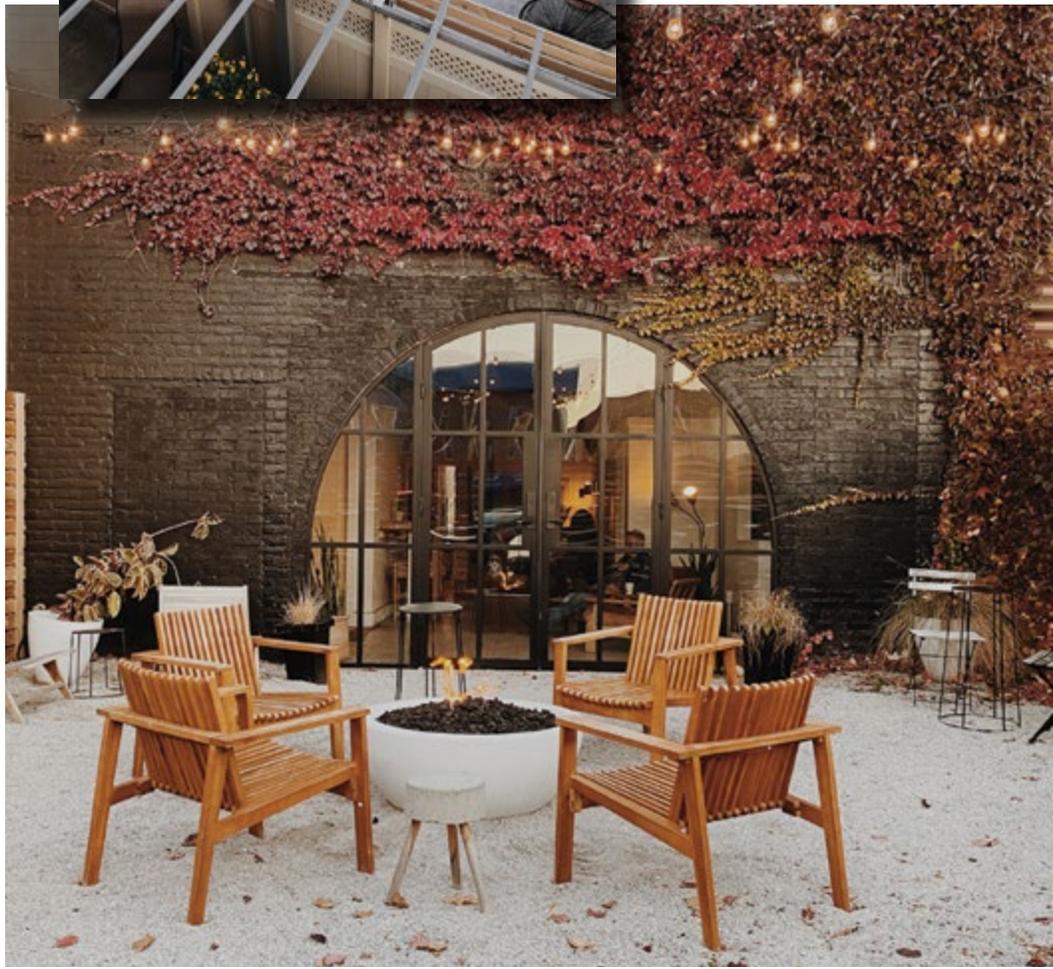
That’s how I felt the first time I walked into Populace Coffee Shop in Bay City. The look was country, bohemian, and big city all rolled into a very chic, comfy place to hang out...and there were lots of people doing so. Outside there were little tables and chairs and two dog bowls full of water. It was summer. Lindsay Edmonds greeted every person as they walked in, while brewing and serving customers with a smile.

After graduating from Berry College with an Exercise Physiology degree in 2007, she spent some time in Italy. That’s where she discovered her love of “specialty coffees and teas” and the feel of the Italian gathering spots that served them. Bringing people together is the core of everything she does.

She brought her own sense of style and taste into Populace, which is now “Harless & Hugh”, named after her grandfather. She opened “The Public House”, known for their craft cocktails and Sunday brunch, and then branched out into Airbnb. All have that same chic boho, big city, country vibe.



“Jump in feet first. Go in blind. If it’s your passion, there’s no room for failure.”



Lindsay gets her work ethic from a family line of entrepreneurs, her style sense from her decorator mom. She returned because she loves the Michigan outdoors. She was a rower in college and carries that same dedication throughout everything she does.

She's not all business though! Her mornings are filled with self-care rituals. She takes the time to stay grounded and replenished. That's something we can all learn from her. That, and to do something you love.

She's not so much in the front of the house anymore. She boasts of the team support she's put into place. That's another thing she's good at. Lindsay wants to see young people become successful, wants them to come back to Bay City and be involved in the community. That's what she does with such passion and much success.

She splits her time between Bay City and Traverse City now, with her life partner, photographer Julia Ross. Up north is her place of peace. She still does Sunday brunch and you'll often see her mixing a cocktail or brewing a coffee. Always with a smile. She truly does have it together.

Her words of wisdom: "Jump in feet first. Go in blind. If it's your passion," she continues, "there's no room for failure."

► *Deborah St. Hilaire* is a unifier, enlightener and catalyst for change in the way



women are treated and treat each other. Author, speaker, transformational coach and teacher, Deb, the founder of *MyBodyMindSpirit.com*, is dedicated to enriching lives through selfcare, meditation, movement, thought and journaling. She can be reached at 989.450.4200 or deb@mybodymindspirit.com.



Find her at HarlessandHugh.com or ThePublicHouseBayCity.com

Stop by H&H or The Public House!
Both are great gathering places!

Feeling It



This is a wonderful time of year. We may be seeing loved ones we've been missing, sharing laughter and food, making cherished memories and taking pictures, both mentally and physically.

Only problem is...it always seems to pass so quickly. Our time together flashes by, especially in comparison with the preparation and anticipation leading up to those special gatherings. Wouldn't it be great to be able to slow those moments down, to somehow make them last longer and linger after?

I've been practicing. You see, my family doesn't get together often, partially because of distance and partially because of busy schedules.

When we were little (my side of the family) we spent 3/4 of our time at grandma and grandpa's house. It's weird how I can still recall events, vacations and moments of laughter and grief vividly.

Q: What was different then?

A: We were present. Completely and harmoniously in the moment. Seeing it, feeling it, being it, without any distractions or self-consciousness. We were our uninhibited selves. No walls, no preconceived ideas or expectations. Just there.

Q: Can we recreate this childlike quality?

A: Maybe. Let's give it a try.

As I said, I've been practicing. Here are some suggestions:

1 Do as much preparation in advance as possible. Saving very little for the day of the gathering.

2 Make a time table of what needs to be done the day of the event, like noting what time food needs to go in and come out, when to eat, clean up etc. If you're hosting, it will be much more detailed.

3 Enlist the help of young adults, teenagers and preteens. They will feel more involved if they have a job (purpose) and will bask in the appreciation and attention.

4 Do your best not to stress. Deep breaths, a morning meditation, walk and/or a journaling break will do wonders to pave the way for a stress free day. Picture everything unfolding perfectly. Even if an unexpected change happens, you'll be able to deal with it...calmly.

5 Look at the day through new eyes. Drinking in the love, laughter and sharing as though for the first time.

6 Focus on each hug, each gaze, and each face with a feeling of joy and gratitude. Slow it down for yourself and it will slow down for everyone.

7 No phones, no television while dining or opening gifts.

8 Take pictures. Send them later as reminders of that moment. Write something kind and grateful on the back, allowing both of you to remember, recall and value that moment in time.

9 Create shared memories by that photo and by talking about it. Feel it. Be in that moment again.

10 Don't worry if the house is a mess, you get to bed late or if there's unexpected company. Just be.

I so hope that some of these suggestions work for you.

After all is said and done, sit in quiet contemplation, with a slight smile and allow a feeling of gratitude to wash over you like a warm wave of love, happiness and contentment.

Just be...
Happy Holidays. Be blessed.
xx, Coach Deb

► *Deborah St.Hilaire is a unifier, enlightener and catalyst for change in the way women are treated and treat each other. Author, speaker, transformational coach and teacher, Deb, the founder of MyBodyMindSpirit.com, is dedicated to enriching lives through selfcare, meditation, movement, thought and journaling. She can be reached at 989.450.4200 or deb@mybodymindspirit.com.*



---{ recipe }---

An Easy Appetizer to Add Holiday Cheer

Before the big meal, gifts and cherished moments at the family table, you can serve up a smile and start the party with this crave-inducing appetizer to get everyone talking. The sweet touch of Roasted Garlic Whipped Feta Crostini can be your delightful way to brighten the season of gifts and gatherings. With its creamy cheesiness from a homemade whipped topping of feta and whole milk, it's an easy and tasty way to get a party started.

Preheat oven to 400 F. Slice garlic bulb in half, exposing garlic heads, and place in center of large piece of tinfoil. Drizzle each half with 2 tablespoons olive oil, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Wrap foil tightly around garlic and roast until caramelized, about 30 minutes.

Place baguette slices on large baking sheet and drizzle with olive oil. Bake on second rack in oven until golden brown about 10 minutes; set aside.

In high-speed food processor, pulse feta cheese, milk, lemon juice,

remaining salt, remaining pepper and roasted garlic cloves until whipped and creamy, adding more milk as needed to reach desired consistency. Check for seasoning and adjust, to taste.

To serve, spread each baguette slice with whipped feta and sprinkle with pomegranate seeds and minced parsley.

Recipe courtesy of Liz Della Croce of "The Lemon Bowl" on behalf of MilkMeansMore.org, Family Features).



ROASTED GARLIC WHIPPED FETA CROSTINI

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Servings: 16

- 1 bulb garlic (about 12 cloves)
- 4 tablespoons olive oil, plus additional for drizzling, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons pepper divided
- 32 baguette slices
- 8 ounces feta cheese
- 1/2 cup whole milk, plus additional, if necessary (optional)
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 cup pomegranate seeds
- 1/4 cup parsley, minced

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---{ trend tea }---



Trendy & Traditional Gift Giving Ideas for the Holidays

It's that time of year again! The magic of the holidays is upon us which means finding the perfect gift for everyone on the list. For some, shopping for that certain "persona" can be very daunting. Whether you prefer to shop online or touch and feel the items at a brick-and-mortar store, here are some fun gift ideas to help ease the burden and stress holiday shopping can bring.

Let's start with the ladies – we have the Trendsetting Diva, the Stay-at Home-Mom, the Superwoman and finally the Lady Who “Lunches”.

THE TRENDSETTING DIVA

Saturday Ritual: Indulging in some serious retail therapy.

Uniform: Changes by the week ... Fashion Week.

Reading List: Instagram or Tik Tok – checking on her followers.

Favorite Splurge: Full spa pedicure to match her new designer stiletto sandals.

Mantra: I gotta have it!

Treat the diva to a mani/pedi to her favorite salon or splurgeon a luxury item – Gucci belt, Chanel perfume or go all out with the latest Louis Vuitton bag.

THE STAY-AT-HOME MOM

Every Morning: Dawn patrol to the local school with class homemade snacks in hand, or soccer field.

Uniform: Lululemon Leggings, puffer coat and messy bun.

Netflix Favorites: Who has time?

Mantra: More coffee please!

This woman does not take the time to do something nice for herself. Give her the gift of time. Make her feel special by booking her an experience with her friends like a spa day, a wine tasting weekend away or a shopping trip will give her the refresh she needs. Note: make sure to take care of the kids for her so she can enjoy!

THE SUPERWOMAN

Saturday Morning: Yoga, coffee shop, farmers market, teen sports and work emails...all before 9am.

Uniform: Power suits, except Fridays, when it's business-casual cashmere.

Ride: Business Class.

Mantra: I'll sleep when I'm dead.

Drink of Choice: Anything caffeinated.

The superwoman deserves a super gift... but she always buys the things she wants for herself. Get her a unique gift, such as a planner, cool desk accessory or a gift basket of flavored coffees to keep her going.

THE LADY THAT "LUNCHES"

Saturday Morning: At the club - doubles anyone?

Uniform: Tennis whites or golf plaids, anything Lily Pulitzer and a string of pearls.

In her emails: A prestigious charity asking her to chair their fundraising committee.

Drink: Martinis as straight up and top-shelf as her classic wardrobe.

A classic bauble that is as special as she is to show off to all her friends. To think outside of the box, buy her a family photo shoot with a photographer to bring her grown children and grandchildren together.

Next, are ideas for the men. The three types are the Country Clubber, the Guy's Guy and the Outdoorsman.

THE COUNTRY CLUBBER

Saturday Ritual: 18 holes with his favorite foursome of old college buddies.

Uniform: Classic, preppy and monogrammed with tassel loafers.

Education: Boarding schools and Ivy League, and he's still dropping names.

Reading List: Financial Times, Barron's, Time magazine.

Ride: Powerful, luxurious and foreign — probably a Jaguar or Mercedes.

Native Habitat: On his sailboat or sipping single malt at his club's bar.

The gift of golf fits the every need for this guy to a tee! After buying him the latest club, new bag or his favorite

golf balls, consider getting him lessons so he can show his new and improved skills at the course! P. S. this gift can work for the ladies, too!

THE GUY'S GUY

Sunday Ritual: A sporting event, a big-screen TV, and a six-pack.

Uniform: Jeans, baseball cap with team logo, and his favorite t-shirt since high school.

Streaming Apps: ESPN, Anything with live sports.

Ride: Big, powerful and domestic- Ford pickup, Chevy Tahoe or Jeep.

On his Grill: Burgers, steak, hot dogs. Banned: Veggie burgers.

Native Habitat: Hardware store, any type of stadium or arena, his La-Z-Boy Chair with the remote.

The guy who has everything "sports" always wants more - Clothing and accessories of his favorite sports team are always a win - better yet - get him tickets to a game! If you want to go big, try a surround sound system or 70" smart TV for the man cave!

THE OUTDOORSMAN

Weekend Ritual: Fishing or hunting with his loyal dog and maybe a few buddies.

Uniform: Hunting camo, flannel, regular jeans — not those fancy ones.

On his Grill: Catch of the day.

Native Habitat: Fields, streams and lakes with pit stops at sporting goods stores.

Ride: American truck or power boat with gun/fishing racks and a built-in cooler.

The Outdoorsman is a simple guy - Gift him some new Levis (because his old ones are probably worn out), a Carhartt jacket or catch the gift of the season such as hunting or fishing accessories at your local sporting goods store!

The hardest group buy for is the "tween". They know and want it all but you can't tell or give them anything! Sound familiar? Give them what they really want – a Gift Card.

Still stumped? The gift of food is always a good choice. Wine baskets with crackers and cheese, boxes of chocolate delicacies or a juicy fruit bouquet make great gifts for anyone. If cooking is a passion, trendy kitchen items are always a hit! A music lover? Tickets to a symphony or a concert are sure to make sounds waves with

the recipient! Is the person a free spirit? How about some essential oils, plants, or other gifts of nature from a florist or a natural living store.

Whatever persona is on the list, these ideas are sure to please. If not, just make sure you keep the receipt! Happy Holidays!

► **Meet Michelle Shook** – Trend Tea's brainchild. She's an award winning, influential marketing and branding guru with expertise in retail, fashion, real estate, home remodeling and home décor. Her day job consists of managing Birch Run Premium Outlets and she has all the scoop on the best deals.



Form & Function
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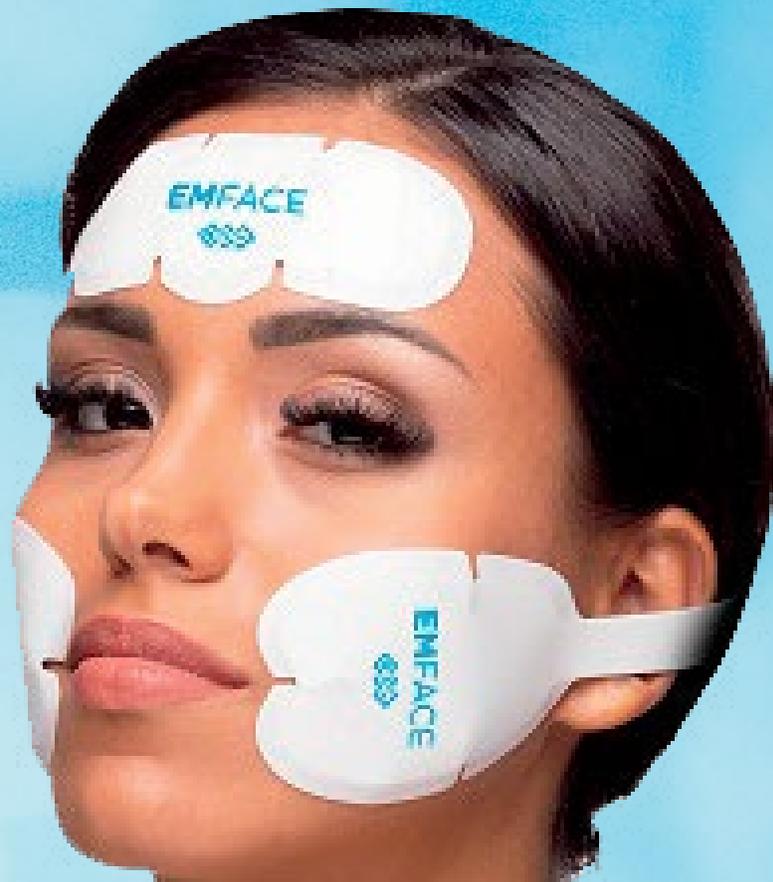
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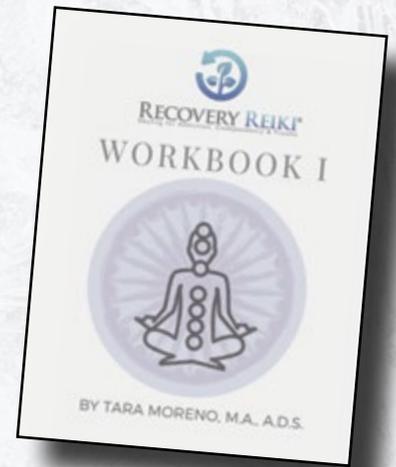
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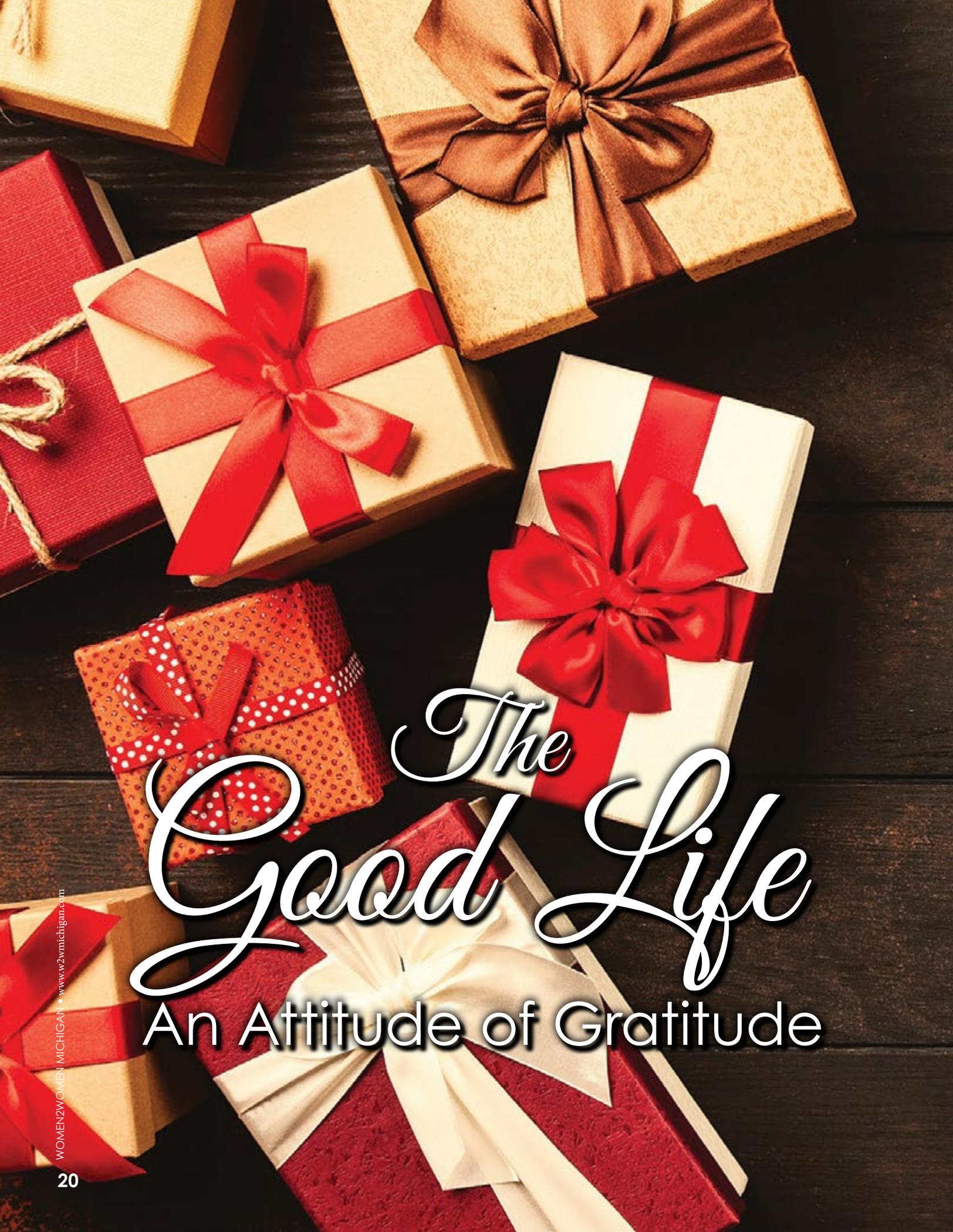
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The Good Life

An Attitude of Gratitude

---{ law of attraction }---

Practicing an attitude of gratitude is one of the most beneficial ways to make the Law of Attraction work for you. So, in honor of the season, I'd like to share four of my favorite things that I am grateful for.

1 I am grateful that in 2021, I made a conscious choice to support myself by journaling every morning. I write about anything that comes to mind i.e.: any worries, fears, or frustrations, happy times, successes, or fun new ideas I've recently had. But most importantly, I always end it with a few paragraphs on the things I currently appreciate in my life. When I began this practice last year, Covid fears and concerns were in full swing. Choosing to end my journaling with the things I appreciate, helps me start my mornings off in a good feeling place and this allows me to continue to attract more good feeling experiences throughout the day.

2 I am grateful that in 2004 I bought Victor Frankl's book "Man's Search for Meaning". A valuable lesson I learned from his book is "if you don't find some meaning to your suffering it will make you insane".

a I attracted this book right when I felt my life had reached rock bottom. At that time in my life, I thought life consisted of good luck and bad luck. I often found myself thinking "Why did I have to go through 2 painful, verbally abusive, alcoholic marriages"? I thought I was a victim of bad luck. I thought bad things happened "to" me randomly, or out of the blue. After I finished reading the book, I was aware that these difficult things were not happening **to** me, instead they were happening **for** me.

b The thoughts we choose to describe things that happen to us, paint a vivid picture in our mind. These thoughts also determine our feelings about it. By saying "this happened **to** me", the word "**to**" was making me feel helpless and at the mercy of others or the unknown. With this awareness, I became inspired to search "**for**" the meaning behind my inability to experience rewarding and loving relationships. I became aware that I was the one common ingredient in all my relationships, so if I wanted to improve any relationship, the change had to begin with me.

3 I will always be grateful that in 2007, a friend introduced me to the Law of Attraction (LoA). Every day I appreciate the knowledge and wisdom I was empowered with as I practiced the LoA and proved to myself that we **do** create our reality and it's **never** too late to begin.

a God/Source energy created everything in the universe to work in harmony. The LoA was specifically designed to work with the energy of our emotions. Our thoughts produce our emotions, so when we think something that makes us feel bad, like the emotions of fear, guilt, anxiety, or worry etc. we receive an energetic message from God (felt in our gut) letting us know that this thought is not serving us. These disempowering thoughts are the ones that make us feel stuck in a rut. When we feel happy, inspired, creative, and calm, God is energetically (via intuition) letting us know that these empowering thoughts will support us and move us towards our dreams and desires. As we practice listening to our emotions (versus engaging in habits that numb our emotions i.e., addictions to food, work, exercise, alcohol, gambling, shopping etc.) we'll more effectively navigate through all the choices we are

continually being presented with. Our emotions are like a personal compass that continually points us back home to God's loving energy (also known as our inner being or higher self) found within each one of us. This is the energy that creates a life full of love, peace and happiness.

4 Next on my 2022 gratitude list is "free will". Life is about choices. We are the only one who can choose our thoughts and then pay attention to our emotional guidance system. No one can do this for us. Free will gives us the opportunity to use the LoA and co-create with the loving energy of God by listening to our intuition. This is how we create the reality of our choice.

No matter how chaotic the outside world may look during this time of year, I hope I have inspired you to see the value of looking on the bright side of life. If you'd like a complimentary coaching session on this topic, please email me suzanne@psprograms.com. The good news is, the Law of Attraction is always working so the more we focus on gratitude and appreciation, the more we will attract, not only The Good Life, but more people, places, experiences, and events to be grateful for.

► *Suzanne Young is an intuitive life coach. She specializes in the Law of Attraction and empowering others by helping them learn how to reconnect with their Inner Guidance. She is also an inspirational speaker, author, and co-owner of Personal Success Programs, since 2007, with her husband Kevin Young. You can email her at suzanne@psprograms.com and their website is www.psprograms.com. Her office number is 248.349.6225.*



Lexi Burgess

When fifteen year old Lexi Burgess was a little girl, she had her very own lemonade stand. Like many "kidpreneurs", she wanted to make some money. But not for toys or clothes or candy. No. Lexi wanted to save for her future. For an apartment, to be exact. Lexi knew at a young age that she did not want to go to college but she wanted to be self sufficient. Schools don't teach life skills, like paying bills, etc.

Her dad was an entrepreneur himself, owning Mr. Chip Windshield Repair. To thank his customers for their business, he partnered with a local bakery to give out "Mr. Chip" cookies. When that didn't quite work out, the decision was made to start a cookie business. But with the running of the repair service and mom with a full time job, someone else was needed to run things.



So, Lexi was asked if she wanted her very own bakery. Her response, "When do I start? How much money will I make? Do I get to eat cookies?" She was excited, to say the least, and Mr. Chip Cookie Company was born.

Lexi had already been running a concession cart at Flushing's Concerts in the Park, selling popcorn, pop, cookies, etc. Combining that experience with her lemonade stand knowledge, this was sure to be a piece of cake. Or, a cookie...

She would make cookies for her dad's business and sell to the community. Of course, she made some mistakes along the way. Like the time she accidentally burned an order for a Flint Bucks game. Or had issues with melting frosting.

One of the unique things Lexi offers is custom personalized cookies. (Check out the Women 2 Women Facebook page for a behind the scenes video.) Any image, logo, picture, etc. can be printed with edible ink directly to the frosting. It's something no one else in the area offers, utilizing a high tech, food grade printer. She has custom printed orders for several businesses



"If you have a dream, go for it. If you mess, up, keep going. It will get better."

throughout Genesee County, and even made some adorned with the Women 2 Women logo.

Lexi's favorite part of having the business? "Family bonding time, but, eating the cookies." Spoken like a true teenager!

I asked Lexi what advice she would give to a young, aspiring "kidpreneur. She said, "If you have a dream, go for it. If you mess, up, keep going. It will get better."

That's some pretty sage advice for a kid. Advice we could all take to heart.

Being an entrepreneur is not easy. Many times, it requires reinvention of one's self. But, as Lexi has learned, it is truly rewarding. I wonder what she'll do next.

You can check out Lexi's work on [Facebook.com/MrChipCookieCo](https://www.facebook.com/MrChipCookieCo).

► *Lesley Howe owns Firecracker Marketing & Promotions and recently started working with the Women 2 Women Michigan team. While she is no stranger to writing, this is her first foray at writing for a publication.*



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With the busy holiday season

approaching, now's the time to find ways to support our emotions. Using essential oils is an amazing way to promote a positive, peaceful atmosphere and neutralize negative energies to help put your mind in a balanced state of gratitude and harmony.

For over 15 years, I have intentionally started my day with prayer and essential oils. Before even getting out of bed, I put on my essential oils while praying and meditating about my intention for the day: to live with ZEAL in all things, to receive all that is coming my way with a grateful heart, to be conscious of my mindset, to have the self-control to accomplish my goals, and to fulfill my God-given purpose in life. Even when my thoughts stray, this protocol helps bring me back into balance.

WHAT IS THE GREAT DAY PROTOCOL?

The Great Day Protocol is a collection of high-frequency Premium Essentials Oils from Young Living, featuring the nurturing aromas of Valor, Harmony, Joy, and White Angelica.

Along with emotional support, they have unique functions to set you up for whole-body success. Other benefits may include enhancing immunological function, cleansing the body, being a source of antioxidants, easing occasional nervous tension and insomnia, supporting healthy glowing skin, and increasing spiritual awareness.

Great Day Protocol

Let's Get Started!

Place a drop of oil in your left palm. Rub your palms together, and slowly inhale *five times through the nose and mouth* deeply. Repeat with each oil.

VALOR

(A blend of Black Spruce, Blue Tansy, Camphor Wood, Geranium and Frankincense)

Apply a drop to the wrists and rub together.

Affirmation: I feel grounded, stable, and balanced. I'm full of courage and confidence.

- + for overcoming opposition and rejection
- + it is grounding and uplifting creating a rejuvenating experience

HARMONY

(A blend of Geranium, Angelica, Bergamot, Lavender, Black Spruce, Ylang Ylang, Royal Hawaiian Sandalwood, Hyssop, Palmarosa, Spanish Sage, Rose, Frankincense, Jasmine, Lemon, Orange, Roman Chamomile, and Coriander)

Apply a drop just above the navel.

Affirmation: I feel in harmony, I love others and myself unconditionally.

- + helps to balance the body and restore emotional polarity
- + helps to increase feelings of self-compassion and empathy

JOY

(A blend of Ylang Ylang, Geranium, Jasmine, Palmarosa, Rose, Bergamot, Lemon, and Tangerine)

Apply a drop over your heart.

Affirmation: I am full of optimism, joy, and contentment. I radiate joy in all that I do.

- + surrounds you with feelings of being loved and happy
- + creates a sense of balance and elevates the mind

WHITE ANGELICA

(A blend of Bergamot, Melissa, Geranium, Ylang Ylang, Rose, Myrrh, Black Spruce, Royal Hawaiian Sandalwood, and Hyssop)

Apply to shoulders and down your arms.

Affirmation: I feel safe, protected, and secure. I can handle all that comes my way.

- + the frequency of this oil (89MHz) helps to neutralize negative energy
- + helps to relieve feelings of overwhelm brought on by others

**Diffuse any of these to create a grounded environment for prayer, meditation, relaxation, massage, and yoga.*



Visit StaceyKimbrell.com for a free digital download of the complete protocol.

► *Stacey Kimbrell is a Speaker, and Author of Living Balanced. Stacey's passion for over 15 years is transforming families to*

*a natural way of living through natural remedies, premium essential oils, and living a toxic chemical-free lifestyle. She mixes humor as she exposes the hidden chemicals in products we unknowingly ingest and use in our daily lives. **Live with Hope & Zeal in all things!** 810-423-5721 StaceyKimbrell.com.*



---{ shades of health }---



The Strength of a Woman

Shades of Health is not a topic, it's a lifestyle that connects us to us.

The strength of a Woman can be defined as having quality, being strong and having the capacity for exertion or endurance and the power to overcome or become someone great.

From a little girl to now, I have always heard how strong women are and that they should be rewarded for their strength.

We as women can demonstrate our strength in many ways. We can live through the pressure of life and hide our pain, because we don't want to forfeit what our family, friends, and children may gain.

We as women have strength to endure and embrace the races of life because we know how to pace ourselves, plan and multitask.

We as women know how to face our challenges and overcome obstacles of setbacks because we have strength, to endure and rise again.

We as women are responsible and resilient, consistent with our daily routines of getting up early, meditating, planning our day, and putting on our makeup, while sipping our coffee and thinking about what we are going to eat for dinner.

We as women can shed many tears through the years for many reasons. But we know if we stay strong and faithful, we can get through any season.

We as women can pray for our health and the health of others. And when we fall, we can stand back up.

We as women may fall, but we will get back up, because we have the strength to stand back up tall. Come what may, because each day starts a new day, for the woman of strength to rise and shine, laughing with her friends, drinking a sip of wine.

A woman's strength is never lost. We are women of power, and every hour, we should be enjoying our flowers. We are one of God's best, so why should we ever settle for less, when we have the strength of a woman. Daily we can rise from stress and become our best and blessed version of ourselves.

We are women of strength, and together we are strengthened, for when you can rise from stress and pass the test of life, you are positioned for greatness and beyond. The pieces of your life may have been shattered like broken glass, but you still have class, and will not finish last.

You are achieving, believing, and winning the fight, that's fighting for you to get up and become a better version of you, for *you*. Everything you went through was to help you develop a more confident and strengthened you. A woman of strength, you have become, because of what you've overcome and done.

► *Tarnesa Martin, aka Nurse T, is a health educator, community advocate, writer, motivational speaker and certified life, health, and empowerment coach. She specializes in helping individuals with healthcare management.*



---{ for the love of caregivers }---



Whether you are the caregiver for your grandchildren, special needs children, or a parent or spouse with memory/physical challenges, these hints can help you prepare a bit for holiday gatherings.

Preparing For Holiday Gatherings

I can't tell you how many times I've been talking with someone who has been thrown into the assignment of caregiver and has been frustrated and overwhelmed. As I listen, I tell them that they are caring for a "special needs" person. No wonder they are exhausted and feel lost. Once they wrap their brain around that idea, light begins to shine on their situation.



We need to understand that besides **mental and physical disabilities**, sometimes the “special needs” is **emotional**, as in the loss of parents that results in children moving to another home with grandparents or other family members, or when the grief from losing a spouse so disables a person that their child has to help take care of them. Whatever the reason, there is stress and difficulty ahead in the holiday season and gatherings.

MY CREDENTIALS: I am the mom of two adopted children who are now twenty-two years old. Perhaps later I’ll write more about them, but I’ll just say that they had-and still have-many mental, social, and physical differences from those who are neurotypical. My children have been with me since they were babies, so the journey has been long and hard. I have learned a few things along the way.

For ease of writing I am using “your person” to identify those you are caring for.

CHANGES IN ROUTINE. Caregivers, this is the TNT of your life! And if you are not prepared, and often even if you are, there is liable to be an explosion or two during this season. One of the things that is so exhausting about being a caregiver is that we have to think of every possible scenario ahead and try to prepare for it. Our brains are just too full and tired. However, trying to stay with your person’s routine will help in many ways.

Keep bed and nap times the same if you can. Try to have them eat foods they are used to instead of a lot of rich, sugary foods many of us indulge in during the holiday. For those with sensory issues, take along food that you know they will eat. (One of our staples is macaroni and cheese.) If being around too many people creates stress see if your person can eat at the counter, or at a separate table so there aren’t so many “eyes” watching them. Yes, mealtime conversation is a sweet part of the gathering, but you also want to prevent any meltdowns or distraught behaviors.

NEW PLACES. We may have been there many times, but perhaps your person hasn’t. Think ahead. Prepare the way for them by explaining to them as much as you can what the place will be like. Also prepare the way by *talking with the others who will attend.*

If your person has food allergies, food sensitivities or extreme dislikes, discuss with the host before attending. When my own adopted children were small, my family in the south who hadn’t met them and didn’t understand texture and swallow issues would say, “They will eat it when they get hungry enough.” That is the way I was raised. But, no, my daughter would just starve, and my son would scream for food. Prepare those who will attend and take comfort foods for your person.

OVER STIMULATION. Too much noise, activity, people, and change. Provide a quiet and safe place for your person to

retreat to. When my son is overloaded, he needs to go into a back bedroom and look at his books. My daughter gets on her phone and connects with online friends. They aren’t being anti-social, but they are self-regulating. I have given them this “tool” to use in order to prevent meltdowns. If asked, I tell other guests that they just need a quiet moment.

Honestly, there have been times I wanted to retreat too. Sometimes it’s the best thing to do so I am not worn out from too much stimuli. I might go sit beside my son and discuss his animal books. This gives us both a relaxing moment to regroup.

If you are caring for an adult, perhaps the two of you can go into another room, and just quietly talk about the dinner, or who is there, or what their favorite part has been. These are just ideas, but you understand.

Space is limited here, but I hope these few tips from my own experience have helped you think about and prepare for the days ahead. I’m wishing you well, and hoping that your gathering times will be blessed with peace and joy.

There are many online resources for caregivers. A great article is found here: www.zencaregiving.org/2019/12/10-tips-for-caregivers-over-the-holidays.

Here is another one: www.sandiegofamily.com/resources/resources-for-families-with-special-needs/holiday-with-child-with-special-needs

► *Mimi Matthews is in the “encouragement business” as the owner of Empowordment Cards by Mimi, which features greeting cards that inspire and encourage. She is also a speaker, workshop leader, writer, and our editor. Visit her shop at www.etsy.com/shop/EmPOWordmentCards, her blog at www.particularpassions.me, and her website at www.passionistaatlange.org.*





Let's Have a Conscious Holiday

1 Take a minimalist approach to gift-giving. Discuss what you want *and* need with whomever you are celebrating with. It's easy enough for anyone to come up with a long list of things they *think* they may want, but how many of those things are also needed on a practical level and will be regularly used and appreciated? How many of those gifts will be more than beautifully-wrapped ideas destined to sit in the closet unopened taking up space? (Hello, clutter anxiety.) With these questions in mind, have each person in your family or group create a list of five things max they would LOVE to receive, and include a sixth item that is not material, but is actually an experience. This could include a gift certificate to an escape room or couple's massage, concert or comedy show tickets, an internet masterclass, or so much more. Often, it is real-life experiences that create memories for years to come, while memories of material items are quicker to fade, so have fun with it!

Benefits: *Taking this approach to gifting your loved ones cuts down on time and money spent shopping, assures that each gift will be joyously received and has a clear purpose for use or emotional fulfillment, guarantees a future experience that will be looked forward to, and takes off the pressure for finding that "perfect" gift or "enough" gifts.*

2 Remember to stay grounded. Which isn't exactly the easiest thing to do when it's winter and no one wants to go outside and connect with nature in all its icy glory. So, when walking outside barefoot is clearly not an option, other things we can do to ground include: placing our hands on a nearby tree and imagining being connected to the Earth through its roots (this can be a daily meditation practice, if desired); making sure to stop and take three deep, cleansing breaths throughout the day; incorporating grounding foods into the diet, such as root vegetables, nuts and nut butters, seeds, red and orange-colored fruits and soups, warming spices, beans, and legumes; and remembering to tune-in to the body with all five senses when we've recognized we've lost focus or feel anxious.

Outside, the snow leaves a quiet blanket of white that makes the world seem but a dream. Most of the animals have migrated away or are hibernating somewhere deep amongst the chill. If just a single branch were to snap, it's as if one would hear it for miles. All of nature has slowed into a slumber.

But not humans.

December means more than winter. It means planning for Christmas and New Year's. It means family get-togethers, work parties, home-cooked dinners and hand-crafted sweets. It means shopping—often last-minute—for a laundry list of people, and, if we're lucky, budgeting accordingly. It means decorating and wrapping, and standing in long lines for holiday deals and family photos to send out those cute, little "Season's Greetings" cards. All on top of our normal, everyday lives. Yes, December is a time of chaos and exhaustion for many. Yet, must it always be this way?

Here are some ideas to bring you down from the holiday crazy chain, so to speak, and enjoy a more peaceful and conscious end of the year:

We can ask ourselves, “What do I feel? What do I see? What do I hear? What do I smell? What do I taste?,” as a way to get zeroed-in on the present moment. Staying centered is always important, but even more-so when times are hectic.

Benefits: Remaining grounded gives clarity of mind, reduces mental stress, decreases physical pain, improves sleep, and balances our root chakra, which is the energy center in the body associated with survival, a sense of security, self-esteem, courage, and the ability to manifest what we desire. An open and balanced root chakra takes us out of survival mode and into “thriving mode,” where we feel more supported in life and have a zest for what each moment can bring to us.

3 Start a daily gratitude practice. Whether thinking them to yourself, writing them down, or saying them out loud or sharing them with someone, list three things each morning after first waking up that fill you with a feeling of gratefulness. The “Christmas Spirit” upon us already makes it easier to get into a gratitude mindset, so now is a

perfect time to monopolize on that and solidify this into a habit. Stress always becomes less in the face of gratitude.

Benefits: Making this a morning routine sets the tune for the whole day ahead, and, long-term, can actually help to literally rewire your brain out of complaining and into appreciation.

4 Supplement. There are several supplements you can find at your local grocery or health food store that can combat stress and/or anxiety naturally. Some of these include: lemon balm, passionflower, magnesium glycinate, coenzyme vitamin B-complex, L-theanine, kava kava, ashwagandha, Bach Rescue Remedy, or even a combination of some of these or things not listed. Empaths in particular may find the Bach Rescue Remedy especially helpful during the holiday season, since it works on the mental and emotional aspects of self. Just be sure to check with your healthcare provider regarding any potential interactions with medications or conditions when starting anything new. For example, L-theanine may lower blood pressure that is stress-related,

which someone on blood pressure medication would need to know. If not contraindicated, a good supplement or supplement regimen could give the boost needed to power through the holidays without getting drained, and even make them more enjoyable.

Benefits: Vitamins, minerals, and herbal supplements are non-addicting, and can help the body to more readily cope with stress, which often depletes us of key nutrients. You can also customize your supplement combinations to fit your specific needs.

Cheers to a healthy, happy, and conscious holiday season!

► Christen Rachow is a Genesee County native who believes life is way simpler than we often make it out to be. She hopes that, despite the holiday go-go-go, each reader will make the conscious decision to slow down, breathe, and fill up their own cup so that they can give more of their beautiful self to the world. YOU are the greatest gift this holiday season.



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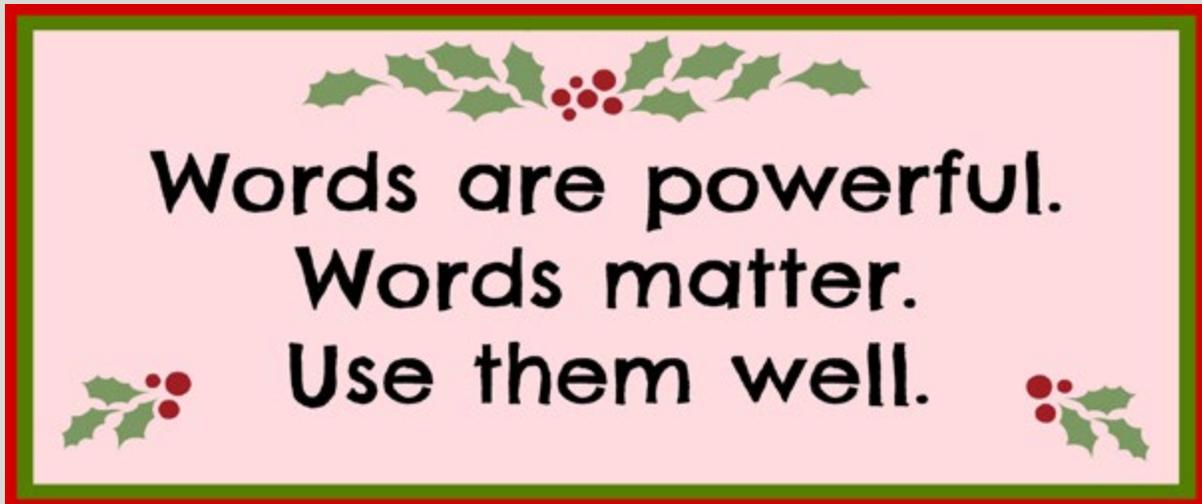
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---{ sparkle & shine }---

Bless With Your Words

Words are powerful and they matter. The old adage “sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me” is a bunch of hogwash—probably made up by someone who didn’t have tools to use against bullies, or by parents who were helpless to console their child who had been hurt deeply by words. Unfortunately, harsh and ugly words stay with us a long time, maybe forever. But so can sweet, encouraging, and affirming words.



“A blessing can be something that provides happiness or does good for a person.”

~Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Because words are effective, when we use them to *bless* they provide all kinds of benefits. To give a few Merriam-Webster choices, those benefits include: grace, mercy, favor, kindness, relief, help, comfort, support, consolation, solace, delight, joy, and pleasure. Can you imagine giving those things to someone?

Imagine, in the checkout line, a young mother with a crying baby and a couple of preschoolers, grocery cart loaded, children fussy, looking totally exhausted and as if she might crumble. Most likely she is feeling self-conscious at the noise, and absolutely she is stressed. How could you bless her with words? Perhaps, “You are doing a good job, mom. Hang in there.” Or maybe even adding, “Could I help you?” and helping to unload the cart while she holds her screaming baby.

Others around this little family may be rolling their eyes and frowning because their shopping experience isn’t as peaceful as they’d like. But you? You would provide encouragement, help, kindness, and mercy—things she would never expect from a stranger. And that’s how we bless with words (followed by action at times).

Besides blessing strangers, we should be blessing with words every person we love. I tell my adopted daughter who had a traumatic neonatal and birth experience that I will always be here for her no matter what. That there is nothing she could ever do to make me leave her, which provides comfort and combats her feelings of abandonment. I call her my precious treasure to negate her sense of being rejected by her birth mom. Do you see how these words are a blessing to her? They also provide solace to her injured emotions. The people you love may not have suffered such trauma, but *everyone* is affected by the harshness of the world we live in. Everyone could use words of kindness, comfort, favor, and mercy.

Once, during a W2W event, while in front of my booth (EmpoWORDment Cards—get it?) I had several conversations about words and how they affect us. Each person had truly felt the effect of words in their lives, and most remembered cruel words. Words are powerful. We need to work at giving people wonderful, sweet words that bless them. If you want to leave a lasting impression with people, leave a positive one!

► Mimi Matthews is in the “encouragement business” as the owner of Empowordment Cards by Mimi, which features greeting cards that inspire and encourage. She is also a speaker, workshop leader, writer, and our editor. Visit her shop at www.etsy.com/shop/EmpowordmentCards, her blog at www.particularpassions.me, and her website at www.passionistaatlarge.org.



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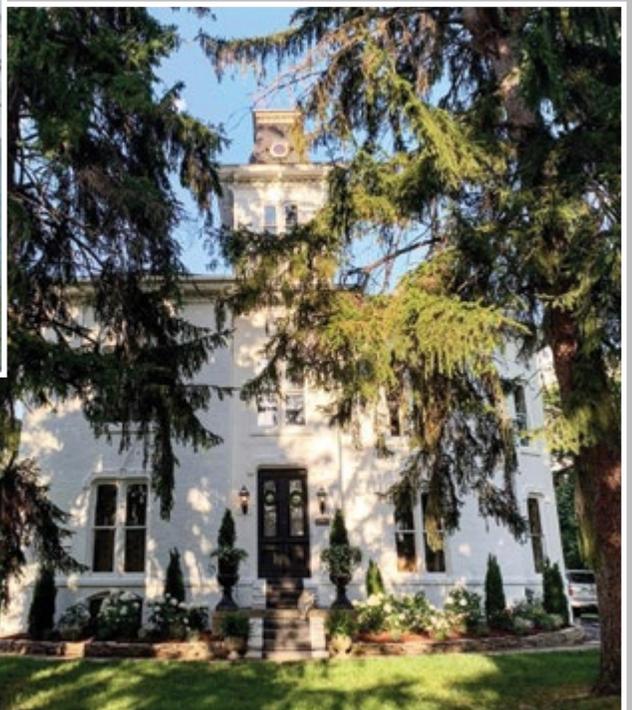
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THEY CALL THEMSELVES

Blessed



Sometimes blessings come when you least expect them. For Cristy Mazaris and Michael Pack, theirs came unexpectedly in the form of a century-old mansion that had remained empty for a decade in the historic downtown of Howell, Michigan. Now, just one year after starting their journey into home restoration, the couple is finding joy in the daily tasks of bringing the old home back to life, the townspeople, and each other.



“Michael is my favorite chapter of my whole life,” says Cristy. “He is my best friend, the love of my life, and my absolute favorite person in this world. He supports me, believes in me, and always makes me feel like the most beautiful girl in the world. I feel blessed for the life he has given me and what we share together.”

On their way to a birthday celebration in August 2018, they planned a detour through Howell to pick up a special birthday cake designed by a local bakery. As they made their way out of town, they passed the huge home for sale and had to turn around for a better look. A month later, it was theirs.

“We weren’t looking for a forever home, or a project per se, but my gosh, it’s been the best thing that’s ever happened to us,” says Michael. “It has become a place where we feel safe. It’s a place where our creativity can run wild; it has brought us to the most welcoming community and closer as a family; it’s a place that has shown us we can achieve anything together.”

Built in 1880, the Greenaway-Ballard mansion needed some TLC. Michael and Cristy are dedicated to honoring its architectural and historical character while still making their own imprint. They have renamed the mansion The Iron Victorian, giving credit to the original owner who was a blacksmith. Design-wise, the couple loves to use antiques and salvaged material. Michael is skilled at upcycling and Cristy has an exquisite eye for detail. They are a dynamic duo. As they labor on their “new” old home, they continue to build on their relationship as well.

“I feel blessed every day because I wake up each morning with a smile on my face knowing I share my life with someone who shares my hopes, dreams, and the same outlook on life as I do,” says Michael about his fiancé, Cristy. The couple became engaged during the summer of 2019 amidst the chaos of ongoing renovation. “I share my life with someone who thinks being kind is important. I feel blessed because I know Cristy loves me back the same way I love her.”

Their relationship blossomed over time and distance as they forged a friendship through phone calls and plane tickets. Eventually, that turned into a lasting romance.

“Michael is my favorite chapter of my whole life,” says Cristy. “He is my best friend, the love of my life, and my absolute favorite person in this world. He supports me, believes in me, and always makes me feel like the most beautiful girl in the world. I feel blessed for the life he has given me and what we share together.”

Recognizing the blessings around them is a natural part of their charm. Their authentic desire to embrace and share love and beauty makes them all the more lovable. People come from miles around to see the progress on the mansion and to bestow them with gifts, including items original to the home.

“We have pretty much a lifetime of projects in our home,” says Cristy. “When things get overwhelming, we remind each other of how blessed we are to have this opportunity and we find ways to always go back to why we love this house and why we decided to do this type of project.”



The photos are courtesy of The Iron Victorian and the one featuring the Cristy and Michael was taken by Jackie Palmer



They admit that sometimes the project gets scary. There's always the unknown. Uncovering problems that require extra time and money can be unnerving, but that's when they realize even more how blessed they truly are.

"We both have had our fair share of breakdowns, that's for sure," Cristy says. "But we try to pick each other up and remind each other of our 'why.'" Their goal is to build a happy life in a home of which they are proud – one that keeps their creative spirits alive; a place they can raise their future children and share with family and friends. In other words, they know blessings are infinite and shareable, and they relish in that belief.

"I really never thought anyone like Cristy existed. When I was a little kid, I would hope and dream about the person I would marry and I had high expectations of who that person would be, but Cristy is so much more than what I could even hope and dream for," Michael says. "I feel blessed because Cristy has only changed me for the better. She's never made me feel like I have to be something I'm not. The only thing that's ever changed is me becoming a better man, and being more myself than I ever have been."

The happy couple may go to bed exhausted from a long day of career work followed by home restoration, but instead of counting sheep, they count their many blessings. If ever there was a true love story, the tale of Cristy and Michael in their forever home is it.

► *Kim Hytinen is a Michigan native, freelance writer, dreamer, and lover of interesting vintage and antique goods. As a former small business owner, college administrator, and the mom of three teens -- one of whom is special needs -- Kim's experience adjudicates her propensity to writing on a variety of topics. This article is found on her website: KimHytinen.com.*



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