

TALON

Community College of Denver

Spring 2022

Interview with Multimedia Artist Adama Bama

Article by Gabrielle Mendoza

Some Serious Me Time: A Float Tank Experience

Article by Stacy Fiske

You Got to Know When to Fold 'Em

Article by Greg Rucker

Here Comes the Sun

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MEET THE STAFF



DAN SCHAEFER
Assistant Professor,
Journalism & Communication

Dr. Dan Schaefer is an assistant professor of Journalism and Communication at CCD and faculty advisor for the Talon Magazine and the Digital Storytelling Student Club. He is passionate about those genuine true stories that resonate and help us make sense of our world. As a native Michigander, Dan loves two things: fishing and stories of fishing the third coast.



JENNA DUKE
Editor-in-Chief

Jenna is an English major with a passion for telling the stories of others through her writing; she enjoys diving into the backgrounds of individuals and looking through the lens through which they see. Because of this, she takes pride in her role as Editor-in-Chief and loves reading the work of student journalists. She also serves on the Student Trustee Council for the Society of Professional Journalists.



STACY FISKE
Editor

Stacy Fiske is a first-year student at CCD working on a transfer degree to MSU for Journalism. She has lived in six different states from New Hampshire to Washington but calls Colorado home. Her passions include politics and environmental conservation and she hopes to inform the masses someday, with her eye on the big picture. She lives in the Denver area with her two cats, Milo and Ruby.



GREG RUCKER
Editor

Greg is an actor turned bartender turned student turned writer. I'd tell you his major, but let's be real, it will probably change a couple more times. Creative at his core, he enjoys writing stories influenced by his lengthy time here on this planet. A California native, he is not here to ruin Colorado. Instead, he loves the crisp air, warm people, and endless adventures to be had in our backyard mountain range. He loves his mom.



GABRIELLE MENDOZA
Editor

Gabrielle is a first-year student at CCD majoring in Communications. She plans to transfer to CU Boulder after completing her Associates Degree at CCD next year. Her passions include hiking, running, and traveling. She spends her free time exploring different spots around Denver and Boulder, never going to the same place twice.



GRETCHEN OCCHIONERO
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Gretchen is a graphic designer with CCD's Creative Services and project manager for the Multimedia/Graphic Design Service Learning course. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, gardening and searching for new trails to hike with her daughter and golden retriever.



SARA BIENIUS
Creative Director & Designer

Sara is a visual artist and a budding designer. She explains her artist name, iamnotunique, as "everyone should remember they're not alone in how they feel, good, bad or otherwise." As a designer, she is excited to enter into the world of children's books and magazines.



ANDREA ORDUNA
Creative Director & Designer

Andrea is a multimedia creative designer based in Denver. Owing to unforgettable encounters, great professors, and personal ambition, this artist seeks to spread artistry on an international scale. She is a determined young lady who's eager to build her skillset. She is excited to graduate in May.



YURITZIA SERVIN
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Yuritzia is an artist and multimedia creative designer. She enjoys digital illustration and photo edition the most and is always willing to take on new projects and challenges. She's currently working on her Associates Degree in Graphic Design.



CARSON KAVATHAS
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Carson Kavathas is a Graphic Design student at CCD. She is excited to graduate in May and to be a team member for the Talon Magazine. She has passion for art and design and is excited to see what will come in the professional world.



JEROME SCOTT
Designer

Jerome Scott is a creative Human. Roaming in Denver, CO. The process is taking Idea to Reality. Jerome builds with cool people on fun projects. He experiments in print, and other stuff.



HEATHER THURSTON
Designer

Heather is a designer with a life-long love of creation and imagination. She first began drawing and writing at the age of four and has been honing her skills ever since. Her motto is "Think out, in, and all around the box!"

DEAR READER

I began as Editor in Chief of Talon in the fall of 2020 during my first semester of college, in the middle of a global pandemic, and after moving twelve hours to Colorado from my home state of Iowa. It was a difficult change in my life that brought me (and continues to bring me) to the brink of insanity, in a good way. It has taught me that challenge requires balance, and to balance, you need to make yourself a priority. This semester we wanted to highlight the differed definitions on how to take care of oneself – thus, the self-care issue was born.

On the pages to come, you'll find students grappling with their relationship to self-care. It may look like the confessional essay "Breaking Down Self-Care," or a firsthand account of a trip to a sensory deprivation tank in "Some Serious Me Time: A Float Tank Experience," or the desire for respite and solitude in "You Gotta Know When to Fold 'Em."

The articles proved that there is a deeper complexity to the hackneyed term than we all may have thought. It is not a linear objective nor a "one size fits all" commodity, it is an accessible, versatile pursuit for all because it bends to meet the needs of the individual. It is whatever we want it to be.

This semester marks my last issue as Editor in Chief before I move onto MSU Denver to finish my English degree. I can't help but reflect on the opportunities I've gotten and wonderful people I've met because of the magazine in the last two years.

On March 26th, 2022, I was honored to be able to meet First Lady Dr. Jill Biden when she came to CCD for the White House Initiative Latin Economic Summit. CCD's own President, Dr. DeSanctis, introduced Dr. Biden and the event buzzed with excitement and hope for the future – an emotion not easily encountered these days.

When it was time to meet her, nerves overcame me. Doubt crept in. Who was I to meet the First Lady? Surely there was someone better suited to be in this position than I. I tussled with these thoughts standing in line to shake her hand and take a picture with her, and suddenly I heard Brené Brown's voice in my head: "Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love."

It's important to recognize the balancing act in life, and even more important to recognize when one side may be heavier than the other. That's what this issue is all about: acknowledging how difficult it is to show kindness inward but honoring the moments when we do. I hope my time as Editor in Chief has made a lasting impact in that way.

Welcome to the spring 2022 Talon magazine and thank you for reading with me.

Take care of yourself.

Jenna Duke
Editor in Chief



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by Dan Schaefer

The Navy Seals Leap Frogs Team parachuted onto the Auraria Campus Tivoli Quad, Monday, Nov. 15 2021, for the Veterans Day Celebration.



CASH NOT CANS

Feeling Secure About a Solution to Food Insecurity

AUTHOR **CORY SCRIVNER**
PHOTOGRAPHY **CORY SCRIVNER & BRIANNA HOFFMAN**
LAYOUT DESIGN **YURI SERVIN**

There has been abundant research conducted about the paradoxical link between inadequate access to food (food insecurity) and the increased risk of obesity. Despite the ample time and resources spent researching the food insecurity obesity paradox, there is no clear and definite solution on how to create easier access to healthy foods in our low-income communities.

As the Program Manager of a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Food Pantry, I am proposing that we may better combat obesity amongst our disadvantaged populations by providing healthier food choices at local food pantries, whose clientele is predominately low-income households, the demographic most prone to obesity (Levine, par. 3).

This solution could be addressed by an increased call to action about the importance of making monetary donations rather than food donations to your local food pantry. An increase in monetary donations would allow food pantries to have access to purchasing fresh produce, meat, dairy, and whole grains rather than relying heavily on food donations, which are largely processed and nutrient-void; other benefits of cash donations include the ability to increase the capacity for purchasing fresh food in bulk, tailoring the offering to culturally responsive choices for clients, and the ability to hire and educate paid employees.





How does Emergency Food work?

In order to further discuss the importance of addressing obesity amongst food insecure populations by providing local food pantries with cash donations, one must first understand how the emergency food system works (Campbell, Ross & Webb, par. 4).

Most regional food banks participate in a national network, Feeding America, which “functions as a hub for procuring food through partnerships with national manufacturers and distributors, government commodity programs, retail partners, farmers and through purchases funded by grant money or individual donors” (Cooksey, par. 11).

Food is then sent on to food bank partners where it is later distributed to local food pantries, soup kitchens, senior centers, shelters, and other emergency food programs. This system allows food banks to sell these “commodity goods” to food pantries and other non-profit organizations for a very small per pound maintenance fee (Chapnick, par. 11).

Despite common misconception, discounted government commodity goods often consist of foods that rate higher on the Healthy Eating Index than the average American diet and there are growing efforts to make these commodity items culturally responsive, meaning they are more likely

“HELP THE POOR, STOP DONATING CANS

to be utilized by clients from varying demographics (Chapnick, par. 5).

For example, commodity goods include fresh and canned produce, meat/poultry/fish, whole grains and dairy, all of which are available at a heavily discounted rate. Though this model was originally created to meet emergency situations, a growing number of Americans are relying on food pantries as a regular source of food (Cooksey, par. 13).

Idea of Cash Donations

In this proposal, we will be focusing on how cash donations to local food pantries make purchasing healthy food options from both government commodity programs and private retailers more accessible, thus increasing the likelihood that clients will make healthier food choices. In addition to discussing the benefits of purchasing goods, we will also weigh the benefits of how monetary donations increase the opportunities for food pantries to purchase healthy foods in bulk, how increased cash flow allows food pantries to tailor to their demographic’s cultural needs, and how hiring paid staff positively affects the food pantry’s ability to create a clear plan towards creating a more healthful culture.

Monetary Donations

Monetary donations to local food pantries not only allow the organization to purchase fresh energy-dense foods but because of programs in place to make healthy foods affordable for emergency food assistance agencies (food pantries, shelters, seniors centers, etc.), cash donations allow food pantries to purchase much more food than the general public could purchase for the same price.

In some areas of the country, it is estimated that for every \$10 worth of food purchased and donated to food pantries, the organization could have purchased \$200 worth of goods (Cohen, par. 5). This means that for the cost of a few canned goods at your local grocery store, a food pantry could purchase more than 600lbs of dried pintos beans, which are not only a healthy energy-dense food but also a staple amongst Latinx communities, a marginalized

demographic most likely to be affected by food insecurity in the U.S. (Feeding America, par. 5).

In a National Post article titled “Help the Poor: Stop Donating Cans” the author matter-of-factly states, “Even the most skilled shopper must appreciate that however many cans of tuna they can buy, a food bank would probably have been able to buy five times as many.”

Since this is a proposal of both frugality and health, we must recognize that canned tuna is an excellent lean source of protein and an ever-sought-after item at your local food pantry. Food pantries aren’t limited to stocking up on healthy pantry staples, like pinto beans and tuna, for much more discounted rate than the average shopper, they can also purchase fresh produce for pennies on the dollar.

It is common practice for produce warehouses and grocery stores to sell their produce to food pantries for around 20 cents per pound (Wiles, par.9). Katrina Rosqueta, the Executive Director at The Center for High Impact Philanthropy, confirms “[It’s] nutritious food that for whatever reason can’t be used at the store, at the restaurant or at the supplier, but can be nutritious food for a family in your community who doesn’t know where the next meal is going to come from.” (Wiles, par. 10). This ability to purchase healthy non-perishables and fresh produce in bulk, is only possible through the cash donations that food pantries receive from philanthropic community members.

Another benefit to an increase in monetary donations is the ability to meet each local food pantries’ cultural needs. As mentioned earlier, Latinx immigrants are suffering from the highest rate of food insecurity in the U.S., and this is coupled with the fact that immigrant families are also facing growing cases of chronic health conditions.

A 2017 study affirms, “Although immigrants often arrive in better health and with more healthful diets than native-born U.S. residents, their body mass index increases over time and, along with it, their risk for chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and hypertension” (Cordeiro, par. 7). Though many factors exist between the correlation of food



insecurity and obesity in immigrants, there is research concluding that limited access to “healthful, culturally acceptable foods” is a contributing factor (Cordeira, par. 11). When food pantries have more cash in the bank, they can purchase goods that meet the dietary and cultural preferences of their clients. In yet another 2017 study on the factors affecting food pantry clients’ access to healthy foods, researchers concluded that “Client Preferences” were a large factor in why clients make choices against certain unfamiliar produce options (Chapnick, par. 15).

One participant in this study confirmed, “There’s a lot of resistance any time we get new produce, and the clients may not know what it is, [or how to prepare it]”. Of course, this is an opportunity to educate clients on how to prepare new foods, but education should occur while simultaneously offering produce items that are familiar to the food pantry’s predominant demographic. Cash donations allow food pantries the flexibility to offer their client’s culturally responsive food items while supplementing with produce donations from grocery stores and the community, rather than relying solely on these often American-diet focused food donations.

Lastly, we will discuss how monetary donations create the opportunity for food pantries to hire and educate paid staff. The author of an article titled “How Do Non-Profit Employees Get Paid?” states their point frankly, “The bottom line is that non-profit founders and employees are paid from the gross revenues of the organization” and non-profit organizations get their revenue from donations and grants (Morris, par. 11, 15).

Without monetary donations, non-profits organizations such as your local food pantry, cannot hire paid employees and thus rely on volunteers to operate the organization. The benefits of a non-profit organization having paid employees rather than being entirely volunteer-operated are abundant, but for the sake of this proposal we will focus on how the presence of paid staff can positively impact client nutrition.

In order to operate a food pantry that is focused on providing healthy options for their clients, there must be clear policies and procedures in place regarding the organization’s mission to improve the nutritional quality of their offerings. Policy and procedural changes are largely created and implemented by employees of an agency, rather than volunteer “staff”.

By having the ability to hire paid staff, an organization can define clear goals and implement plans for improving the quality of the food that is offered to clients. In addition to creating dedicated paid-staff opportunities, monetary donations could also be used to educate staff members about general nutrition.

A recent study concluded a factor affecting food pantries provision of healthy food is “pantry staff nutrition knowledge is often incorrect or incomplete.” (Chapnick, par. 58). When food pantries can hire employees who are dedicated to a mission of health and are provided with the educational resources to implement policies and procedures to create actionable change, the agency is far more likely to see consistent improvements in their mission to improve the quality of the food that is offered.

It’s Complicated

The prevalence of obesity amongst low-income households is a complicated issue to untangle. My proposal to encourage society to support their food pantries by making cash donations rather than food donations is undoubtedly not the ultimate solution to a very complex systemic issue, but I believe that advocacy for increased cash flow could help agencies empower their clients to make healthy choices.

Though monetary donations may not be the only way to solve the food insecurity obesity paradox, they are one way to aid food pantries in offering the most healthful environment as possible by making healthy options available and culturally relevant, while also giving food pantries the ability to hire and educate staff. ■



Fresh produce purchased with cash donations.

“

**NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE
IS OFTEN INCORRECT
OR INCOMPLETE**



BAKING WITH FRIENDS

A RECIPE FOR RELAXATION

AUTHOR **GABRIELLE MENDOZA**
LAYOUT DESIGN **JEROME SCOTT**



Two things everyone loves are good desserts and good friends. Now what if you mixed those two ingredients together? Imagine joking and having fun with friends while waiting for the delicious desserts you made together bake in the oven. The whole process of baking with friends is just so therapeutic, entertaining, and fun. For the past few months, I typically spend my Thursday nights in therapy with my friends Alysia, Alyssa, and Manuel baking. Thursday nights have been our designated baking day. We started this tradition of hanging out last semester. This past Thursday, March 10, we decided to bake blueberry muffins and document each step we took in our baking therapy.

Thursday nights are the one night of the week where we don't have to worry about anything except for what treat we're making that night.

FIND A GOOD TIME

In the beginning it was just coincidental that we'd end up hanging out on Thursday nights, and we didn't start out by baking, we'd do various other activities before we finally decided baking was what we had the most fun doing when we were together. Thursday nights are the one night of the week where we don't have to worry about anything except for what treat we're making that night. It's the day of the week we all look forward to because we get to hangout while we do something we enjoy. I think it's extremely important for everyone to set aside time for that, at least once a week if not more.

DECIDE ON WHAT TO BAKE

Baking is just so accessible. It's something everyone can do, it doesn't have to be complicated or stressful, just google what you want to make and find an easy recipe.

COLLECT THE INGREDIENTS

DRY INGREDIENTS:

All-purpose flour, Baking powder, Baking soda, & Salt

WET INGREDIENTS:

Sugar, Eggs, Vanilla, Heavy cream, Lemon juice, & Butter

STREUSEL TOPPING:

Butter, Brown sugar, Flour, Cinnamon, Salt

BAKE

While our desserts bake my friends and I usually put on a movie in the background and catch up on what's been happening in each other lives. Thursdays are usually the only day of the week we see each other so there's always a ton to catch up on. The night we baked our muffins we watched Diary of a Wimpy Kid while the muffins were in the oven. We like to pick movies that we've all seen before, so we don't mind getting interrupted in the middle of them or talking over them. Some of the movies we've watched so far include Shrek, Scooby Doo, and Twilight.

Scan the QR Code to watch how Gabrielle and the gang does it!



Pre

1 1/2 c milk
3 eggpl sep
1/2 + vanilla
1 c pecan

1 1/2 T flour
3/4 + salt

Mix dry ingred. Co
egg yolks + milk. Cook
thick. Add vanilla



Ignorance Is Bliss. Adama Bama

Interview with Multimedia Artist **Adama Bama**

A 2022 MEL CARTER SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

AUTHOR **GABRIELLE MENDOZA** PHOTOGRAPHY **ADAMA BAMA & CAMILA GALOFRE**
LAYOUT **CARSON KAVATHAS**

Responses edited for clarity, length, and coherence

What gear do you use to make your art?

The main gear I use to make my art are my DSLR cameras and my iPad.

I have two cameras that I use. My first camera is my Nikon D3100. This Nikon D3100 was the first-ever DSLR camera I ever owned. It was a personal camera of a mentor of mine who passed it down to me because it was her first DSL camera and it had been passed down to her. I use this camera for everyday use, going on walks, and just casual shooting. When I'm photographing something like a family event, I let my younger sister use my Nikon as backup and extra shots while I use my Canon. I have two lenses for this camera. (Nikkor 18-70mm, 1:3.5-4.5G ED, AF-S lens and a Nikkor 50mm, 1:1.8 G, AF-S lens).

The second camera I own is the Canon EOS Rebel T7. This is an amazing camera I saved up and bought after working so many night shifts. I use this one for professional gigs and events. I'll admit it can be stressful to carry this one casually around because it is an expensive nice camera. I have two lenses for this camera (the Canon Zoom Lens EF-S 18-55mm and the Canon Zoom Lens EF 75-300mm).

Finally, my third generation iPad and apple pencil hold a special significance to me and my art. If there was a house fire, my iPad would be the one thing I would retrieve (after my family). No question about it. I honestly just have a special bond with it. I use it to draw my illustrations, for quick sketches, and mockups/layouts for designs, artwork, and even sewing designs.

I also use other borrowed gear to make my art. Currently, I don't own a laptop, but I used to borrow an old Macbook from a nonprofit arts organization, Arts Street @YEA. I also sometimes use computers and Adobe Creative Cloud from school.

What inspired you to start making art?

If I think back as far as I can as to where that initial spark for creativity ignited, it would ironically be library books and libraries. Ironic, because I have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Book illustrations and designs in school libraries made me want to create art of my own.

I remember when I was going to school at an early elementary school in Denver that had just the most beautiful library. Stepping foot in that gigantic colorfully decorated library was a magical experience. There were just so many illustrated books from *The Hungry Caterpillar*, *Chicka Chicka 1,2,3*, *The Rainbow Fish* to the heavy thick scientific books like *The World Book Encyclopedia* that when placed together in the correct order, their colorful spines spelled "WorldBook".

What really got me into graphic design and photography was really all thanks to my high school experience. I attended High Tech Early College and I owe my high school graphic design teacher, Steve Wiant, and all of the wonderful people at the non-profit Arts Street for giving me the knowledge and experience that really built the foundation of my creative understanding. I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for them.

What really got me into graphic design and photography was really all thanks to my high school experience.



Encapsulated Exploration. Adama Bama

Where do you get most of your inspiration from?

The internet, various media, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, the world around me, and my younger sister's work.

Do you have any artists that you idolize?

There are many artists that inspire me.

Graphic design: Chris Do from The Futur and Zimri Mayfield. **Illustration:** María Dalli and Andry Rasoahaingo. **Photography:** George Edward (@_george_edward) for his places and things and Sorelle Amore for her portraits and Denver's own Juan Fuentes. **Painting:** Denver's very own and well-known Thomas Evans "Detour," as well as Peter Deligdisch AKA Peter Draws. **Poetry and writing:** I look to Shirley Jackson and Orion Carlotto who I love.

Where are you from originally?

I am originally from Côte d'Ivoire (the Ivory Coast) in west Africa. I was initially raised in Liberia. Most of my family and my mom's side is Liberian. I don't remember anything from my early childhood in Africa before I came to Denver in 2005 after my family escaped the war in West Africa.

Does your background influence your art?

Yes, my background influences my art. I am still exploring my strengths and weaknesses as an artist and figuring out my favorite medium.

This Gallery show should provide you with a glimpse of some of my exploration and development in areas such as my photographic eye, my design mind, the nature of my traditional and digital brushstrokes, and even how I decompress through words.

Who is the woman in the 'Tutugirl' cover photo?

The young woman is my sister, Tutugirl Bamba. (Yes, that is her full legal name.) I took the photo of my sister Tutu right after her high school graduation in 2021. She graduated from Martin Luther King, Jr. Early College and is now a Business Marketing student at the University of Colorado Denver. She finished off the year strong despite the pandemic and was grateful the high school was able to have a safe in-person ceremony.

Graduation day she was positively glowing.

When I was ready to take her picture, I positioned myself with my camera so that she would fill the frame leaving out all the distracting waves of other people at the graduation ceremony. This photo was going to be just about her and her accomplishment. In the frame, she almost seemed

larger than life. And for a moment, she closed her eyes with peaceful contentment and faced the sky.

I thought a photo like this was perfect for my exhibition titled Faces, Places, and Change because it seemed to encompass it all. I think it's a beautiful portrait that captures change. She's looking forward to the future and to moving on with her life. It's a transitional period from moving from high school adolescence life to the more mature and college life.

Who are the other people in your photos from your art exhibition "Faces, Places, and Change"?

In the photos "HOPE" and "Ignorance is Bliss" is my youngest little-sister Grace and both pieces were part of the Epic Arts Spring 2020 Exhibition & Virtual Showcase, here is a link to it: <https://www.redlineart.org/epic-arts-spring-2020-1>

Hope

This is a photo of my beautiful little sister sitting inside one of the car tires in my backyard. Due to the quarantine, we had been stuck at home with nothing to do and I really wanted to show my sister that being on her tablet inside or in front of the TV weren't the only places where she could have fun. So, we went outside to play on our phones while messing around with the junk we had sitting around our backyard, distancing together.

It represents the rediscovery of backyard fun pastimes, the quarantine, social class, the feeling of being trapped in something, perhaps even culture. I chose to take this photo and add the word isolation to it to express how we felt. This feeling of being out of our element, isolated, and trapped in our home. The look on her face seems to express the skepticism of others and the unknowns of the outside world.

Ignorance is Bliss

This is a photo of the beautiful ball of sunshine that is my baby sister Grace, hanging onto my leg and looking up at me, not asking for anything, just happy to be and to have us all at home with her.

It represents, well exactly what it says, HOPE, one big reason to keep going and to stay safe is for the protection and preservation of those who are too young to do so for themselves, to protect their change for a bright, joyful and impactful future.

This photo also reminds me that happiness is still possible amidst all of this and still will be in the future because life goes on and it is up to us to decide how we spend that time feeling. I hope when people see this they too can think about those things, people, and places in their life that bring them joy and remind them to hope on.

Condensation

This is a picture of a summer friend. It was a very hot summer day in the studio that day. The heat, my friend's makeup and the reflection of the red-light gel filter sheet bouncing off her skin, provided a good photo opportunity. I like the photo because it appears that she is heating up a window. Like how you breathe closely onto a cold window and create condensation. As a result, I posed her as if she was overwhelmed by the heat, while still looking effortlessly beautiful as she wiped the sweat off her forehead.

One of my favorite things about this photo came from a woman who came to see my exhibition and loved it for a surprising reason. She told me she was most drawn to this photo due to the simple fact, that the model in the photo had braces, and how braces aren't in traditional editorial photography work unless the focus is on the braces. Usually, you just don't see models with braces. The woman who loved the photo, liked seeing braces represented so positively in the photo. As a result, I was surprised that something like that can have such a meaningful impact on people. ■

The photo of my baby sister Grace reminds me that happiness is still possible amidst all of this.



"Faces, Places & Change" Dock Gallery Exhibition



FIRESTARTER

THE STORY OF ROCKY FLATS

AUTHOR **BRANDON NEVAREZ**

PHOTOGRAPHY **BRANDON NEVAREZ & DAN SCHAEFER**

LAYOUT DESIGN **YURI SEVIN**

IN the shadow of the Front Range Flatirons lies an unassuming odd corner of land, a place where gullies dip into small creeks and winds drift through dry grasslands over unimpressed soil. A plain brown sign at the entrance flatly greets visitors, “Rocky Flats: National Wildlife Refuge” without revealing that this plot of 176 acres of land holds a secret that started with a fire when Russia was the Soviet Union.

A more recent fire has reminded us of this ancient history. The Marshall Fire occurred December 30, 2021 and spread through the communities of Boulder, Lafayette, Louisville and Superior. While the fires were ripping through these neighborhoods, local news reported seeing officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, closely monitoring the situation from the edge of the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge. Which raised the questions for many in the public: What is Rocky Flats? Why were they so worried?

What is Rocky Flats?

Rocky Flats was a munitions factory that was established in 1952 as a direct response to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The two countries were heavily dependent on producing nuclear arms in the Nuclear Arms Race. The open undeveloped land and uranium deposits in the Western Slopes of Colorado provided an ideal location for building the plant.

“**EPA INVESTIGATIONS UNCOVERED ENVIRONMENTAL RADIOACTIVE HAZARDS.**”

Rocky Flats Lounge – A bar by the Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuge.



The secret purpose for the plant was to build bomb components including plutonium triggers called 'pits' – spheres of plutonium that provided the necessary triggers for nuclear bomb explosions. Even the workers were not aware that most of the components they were making because the parts were built and shipped to different facilities to maintain absolute secrecy.

The plant was finally shut down in 1992 as there was no longer a need to develop nuclear components with the collapse of the Soviet Union and more importantly and accurately, because of multiple EPA investigations that uncovered regular environmental radioactive hazards and abuse at the factory. These abuses turned the site into a \$7 Billion dollar superfund site to bury the facility under a forever wildlife refuge.

The wildlife refuge as a whole has seen dramatic change on the surface, a shift towards a natural state of healthy deer population grazing peacefully on wild grasslands.

Why were they so worried?

The officials were worried because, while the facility is no longer there, the legacy of radiation may again surface from the contaminated soil if disturbed.

Rocky Flats' worrisome past started with a fire in 1957 and again in 1969. In 1957 a fire spread through the glove boxes that housed the radioactive material where employees handled the components through plexiglass and leaded gloves. In 1969 there was another fire that occurred at the facility, and it was proved that there was inadequate fire suppression within the facility.

Other incidents and investigations revealed poor handling of radioactive material that resulted in damaging the environment. However, it continues to be hard to discern how much radioactive and toxic contamination has spread through the Denver metropolitan area. Different health studies have failed to provide a causal link between the superfund site and any increase in cancer or disease.

What was visible. What provided evidence of concern, was clearly evident in the officials' reaction when the refuge was threatened by fire. The Marshall Fires showed that there is still concern that this ground that once housed nuclear triggers for atomic bombs, might somehow release radioactivity in the forge of a grasslands fire.

This continues to be a cause for concern casting a shadow on an area that looks so unsuspecting with its dried grass and wildlife that roams around the refuge. ■



“RADIATION MAY AGAIN SURFACE FROM THE CONTAMINATED SOIL.”



"...you can let your devilish side loose."

EMERGING FROM THE SHAMBLES

Luci's Shambles and Provision is a Basement Bar with a Speakeasy Vibe

AUTHOR **STACY FISKE**
LAYOUT DESIGN **HEATHER THURSTON**

We are alive! After two long years, we are still alive. We are just now taking our first hesitant steps towards normalcy emerging from this chaos, this shambles of our world. The things that used to make us happy now seem new and fresh since we haven't felt that way in so long.

We are drunk on the memories of how it feels to be alive, seeing the sights, hearing the sounds, smelling the scents; we're alive. Bathe in the dazzle of the neon lights of the cool basement bar downtown. Feel the wind rushing through our hair. The chilly air stinging our scalps again as we stand on the Royal Gorge Bridge looking down from the unfathomable heights of it. Get out of town and walk a river trail or sit at a lake. Say hi to strangers, help others when you have the time and energy.

The nostalgia of yesterday and one of my first hesitant steps brought me to Luci's Shambles and Provisions. An intimate bar/speakeasy that I found balanced the pragmatism of a modern bar with a speakeasy's throw-back novelty. I was able to interview the owner of Luci's, Teryn Guadagnoli, over email March 11.

I was looking for the novelty of speakeasies in the Metro Denver area and stumbled on Luci's. Speakeasies were a type of bar during Prohibition (really after the last pandemic) that sold alcohol illegally and allowed customers to consume it secretly. Often the entrance to a speakeasy was concealed in unusual ways only to be revealed with the right password.

I chose this bar because their hours open were more like a normal bar's hours: stretching until 2am on the Sunday I was trying to go. I found the place by searching speakeasies on google maps and Luci's came up. I discovered the other (turns out) "actual" speakeasies had odd hours, ex. only open from 6-10pm or they weren't even open on Sunday. But, I was going with a friend and I wanted more time than that.

I really like the dark, dungeoney feel of Luci's location in a basement, it makes the bar seem more intimate, you can find a private, cozy corner for you and your special interest or you can get a big table to be loud and boisterous and to see everyone's faces. In the basement the sound is just a little more

muffled than it would be in an upstairs 'normal' bar. It has a unique decor to match: goats heads, artful photos of nude women, jackalopes and satanic references. It's just... it makes you feel like you've got a secret place that only a few others know about where you can let your devilish side loose.

How long had the idea for Luci's been percolating before you got the space to make it a reality?

Actually, Modis in the City was my main objective, I had always wanted to open a restaurant in Denver and when I found our Platte street location I knew it was the perfect place. The basement was this cool thing but I wasn't 100% sure what I was going to do with it.

At first, I wanted to do the whole speakeasy thing with the hidden door and name that just last names or something clever...but it never felt right. Luci's came about organically and while Tim Rentz (Exec Chef), Otto Werwaiss (Head Chef), and I were brainstorming. Shambles (there is a room that used to be a butcher's shop and may go back to that in the basement with Luci's) is what butcher shops or streets butcher shops were located on in the olden days and provisions are food and drink.

The name made us laugh and worked so we went with it! Luci's has literally evolved from there, everything that's in the space just felt like it belonged there!

We wanted to put a hidden entrance in but couldn't really because of fire department regulations. So we kind of just let the space lead the way in what it is! I like to say Modis upstairs is my exterior and Luci's is what goes on in my head!

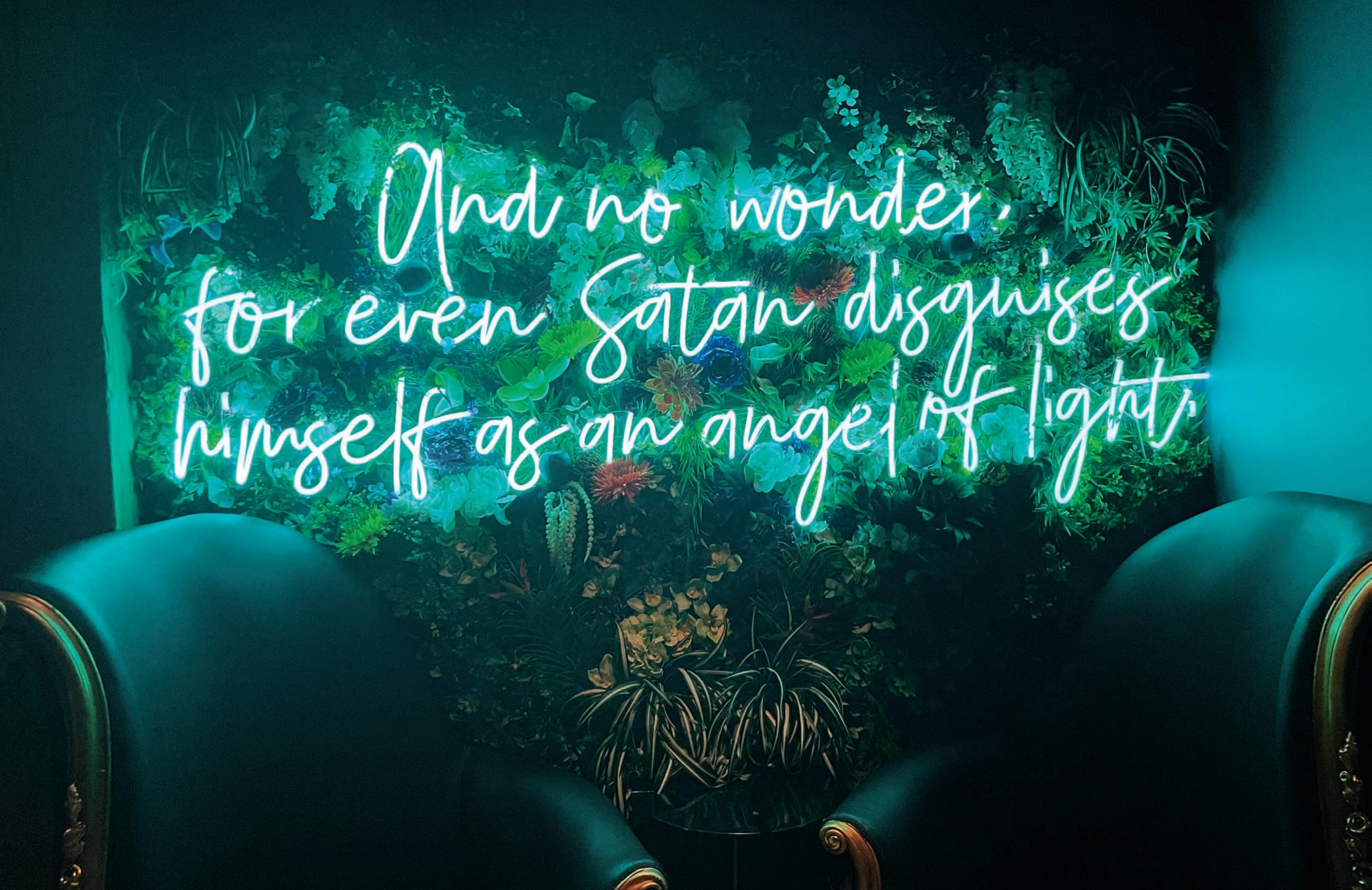
What is your mission statement for Luci's?

What purpose do you want it to serve for its patrons? The mission statement also keeps changing, but it's: "Come as you are or whoever you want to be, we celebrate you for who you are and where you have been. You are safe and welcome here. But don't be an ass."

Luci's is something different for everyone and we love that and we want all of our patrons to feel safe whether they are on a first date or just want to be somewhere they feel like they belong. We don't tolerate bullying, any sort of slurs, fighting (unless you are working through something with someone, we get that), or judging.

Continued on page 29





And no wonder,
for even Satan disguises
himself as an angel of light.



**"...it's more of a
dungeon of sin!"**

I am 6 years sober. I have grown through a lot of my own trauma (sexual, physical, and mental), and made it through a suicide attempt thanks to some amazing people so I don't put up with mean people on the staff or as patrons. I hope that answers that question...I think Luci's is ever evolving!

In what ways do you think Luci's (or the bar scene in general) affords people a place for self-care?

If you aren't going to just get obliterated, then I think Luci's or any place that prioritizes safety is a great place to go and relax. I'm a firm believer in sometimes checking out to check in.

Luci's offers that! You can go by yourself and meet new people or with a group of friends...the best part about Luci's is there are so many areas to be, quiet corners, loud and vibrant tables, the bar top!

We don't have a dress code so if you show up in your sweats or ball gown you are welcome - sometimes just getting out of the house is the biggest accomplishment of the day and we want to celebrate that with you!

Do you believe in "self-care?" What does self-care mean to you?

I absolutely believe in self-care, for me self-care is unplugging and just taking time to listen to my body and heart about what I may need. Sometimes it's a day binging tv in bed, going on an adventure with my husband and kids, or getting a tattoo...it's always changing!

Why did you choose the speakeasy-style for Luci's?

I didn't really, it's more of a dungeon of sin! I guess it's got that speakeasy vibe because the door isn't easily spotted and it's down an old staircase in a basement! I don't know if it is actually classified as a speakeasy because it's not hidden and there isn't a password to get in.

Is there anything else you wanted to comment on that is relevant to self-care/ speakeasies and you?

I think it's important that we all find places that we where we feel safe and that we belong. Like I said sometimes taking that first step out your front door is the hardest step and we applaud anyone who tries to help themselves!

When you speak about Luci's casually, do you call it a "bar?" or do speakeasies have a specific shorthand nickname?

We usually call it Luci's or the dungeon of sin! But a fun fact for you the logo was definitely based off the idea of putting the butcher's shop in there but in the end we really only went with it because it makes me laugh! After the last two years we've all had, it seems we appreciate the things that make us happier now. ■



Check out Luci's Shambles and Provisions. Luci's is located at 1553 Platte St Ste 110, Denver, CO 80202 720-420-9135



BREAKING DOWN SELF CARE

AUTHOR **SABRINA SPANN**
LAYOUT DESIGN **ANDREA ORDUNA**

I found myself sobbing on the floor frustrated and overwhelmed with everything not done on my self-care to-do list. I had been trying so hard to be good at taking care of myself by following every tip someone else suggested. But the more I struggled to achieve the goals I had with self-care, the more I felt like a failure.

But when I found myself, again, breaking down on the floor, I realized my problem. The things I practiced as self-care were prescribed by someone else and were starting to feel like superficial band aids, quick fixes that were good enough to manage surviving each day by keeping my head above water, but they never did enough to help me feel truly beyond the risk of burnout and often were sources of burn-out themselves.

The term “self-care” has been trending for years now. I think, by this point, most people recognize at least one of the most common “top ten recommended practices of self-care”: eat healthy, exercise, practice positivity, read a book, unplug, be creative, meditate, get plenty of sleep, establish a morning/evening routine, and cultivate your relationships.

Don’t get me wrong, all of these are valid and beneficial practices. What’s burnt me out these last two years, and what’s ended with me on my floor sobbing, is how often these evolve into frustrating additions to the to-do list that is maintaining my existence instead of being what they’re prescribed for: calming and healing antidotes.

On one hand, self-care has been the thing that’s helped me survive the last two years. On the other hand, I hear the word and want to scream. I have heard over and over that to care for yourself you must partake in these practices – which makes sense. Keeping your body and mind healthy should be a no brainer.

Every now and then, even I have moments where everything’s lined up perfectly, everything makes sense and I whole heartedly agree. But what sends me to the other end of the bell-curve is that we don’t always talk about when acts of self-care begin to feel like chores.

I understand that these practices have short term and long term physical benefits while also benefiting your mental health. But what are we supposed to do when these beneficial moments of self-care begin to feel like a herculean task just to complete?

The process of cooking, for example, has made me feel like I was fulfilling the task of caring for myself. Finding a recipe that sounds flavorful, supports all participating diets and preferences and is one that I have the ingredients for, feels like I've climbed and conquered Everest. I feel victorious and then I feel exhausted about the fact I have to climb down and clean the stack of dishes I dirtied.

If the cooking example is too niche, I love the fantasy of getting out of bed at 5:30 in the morning, work out half an hour, and begin my day on the right foot. The reality is, I haven't been able to do it once this year. Sometimes I can get out of bed before 6:00 in the morning, other times I can fit in a workout, but I'm rarely able to do both in the same day and never been able to get them done in the order I want. But I'm trying, right?

I battle with feeling like a failure who can't take care of themselves because I can't maintain an exercise or a meditation practice, while making perfectly balanced and healthy meals longer than seven days in a row.

I have made progress in understanding that self-care shouldn't end up making me feel worse, but I am working on getting better at recognizing when I need to reevaluate and adjust which practice has become a chore while finding other things to consider as self-care.

I've heard the "just do it" advice: just do it and just keep doing it, over and over, day after day. Which sounds easy enough. But after four years of this mentality, it left me sobbing on my floor wondering why I couldn't fit in ten minutes of medita-

tion and exercise into my day while also keeping a clean kitchen.

And it was the same story for any other of the "top ten recommended practices of self-care." I would succeed for a short period of time, feel proud and exhilarated that I was accomplishing so much, only to nosedive right off the wagon and lose any motivation to get back on for the next three weeks. So it's no wonder I found myself sobbing and breaking down on my floor.

This is where reevaluating comes in. Once upon a time I loved taking bubble baths as a practice of self-

"It was the closest thing to weightlessness I could find."

care. It was the closest thing to weightlessness I could find. If the tub was big enough to lay down completely, I would float and breathe and disconnect from everything that existed beyond my bathroom door. Presently, I consider my times of breaking down as self-care, which probably sounds counterintuitive. However, where my bubble baths allowed me to disconnect and breath and focus on me, my sobbing ses-

sions on the floor allow me to breath and focus on me, just in a different way.

Self-care comes in all shapes and sizes and while some people find success with the "top ten recommended practices of self-care," what's most important is defining self-care for yourself and then recognizing that when something stops working it's okay to find something else.

It's a never-ending balancing act and sometimes one thing works and other times that one thing needs to be replaced. Which is okay. Times change, we change, and we cope by adapting.

What matters is that the moments we are labeling as self-care are doing what they say they're doing, caring for ourselves, even if they're just bubble baths, painting, watching your favorite comfort movie, dancing to your favorite song, maintaining a mediation practice or an exercise routine, or even breaking down on your floor. ■



On 02.24.22, Russia tried to illegally take something from this world by invading Ukraine.

FROM RUSSIA *with love*

AUTHOR & PHOTOGRAPHY **YULIANA CHERNOVA**
LAYOUT DESIGN **HEATHER THURSTON**

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I TOOK GREAT PRIDE IN MY COUNTRY.

Every time someone asked me where I was from, I would happily answer with pride. Russia has contributed so much to shape this world from cutting-edge inventions in radio, television, to talented composers of Tchaikovsky, and Rachmaninoff and amazing scientists of Mendeleev, Popov, and Pavlov; and literary geniuses of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

Early in the morning of February 24, 2022, Russia tried to illegally take something from this world by invading Ukraine. This bombshell event shook the world with surprise and fear at the new uncertainty of war and conflict. It surprised everyone by the uneven support and fear from ordinary Russians back home. I am here to help make sense of this war from my family's and friends' point of view over there. Thanks to our conversations, I know what the citizens of Russia think, how they feel, and what they hope for.

The State of Russia today

I was born and raised in a small town in Russia called Mineralnye Vody (literal translation is mineral waters). Four years ago, I got a chance to get my third American visa and move to Denver, CO. Looking back now, I realize how lucky I was to move when I could.

Sadly, not all my family members and friends were as lucky. All my relatives, friends, everyone I grew up with are still back in Russia, facing the consequences of our corrupt, power-hungry leader. I try to keep in touch with them almost every day, not knowing which time is going to be the last one.

There is never-ending news about world leaders imposing never-ending sanctions on Russia. The response from the Russian State Duma “returning the favor”, and a flood of big companies shutting down their Russian locations (McDonald’s, Apple, Visa/Mastercard).

While all of this is done to provide leverage as a means of forcing the Russian military to leave Ukraine, the real victims are the people. Every day I talk to my mother and grandmothers. I hear how their lives are getting more and more difficult. Prices keep going up, like they worded it, “with a blink of an eye”: bills, groceries, public transportation, gas, and medication. While the same cannot be said about people’s salaries.

My family members and friends make less money now and their hours have been cut dramatically.

I used to send them money all the time in the past. Yet, one of the many privileges that Russians lost with the sanctions were international money transfers. It breaks my heart seeing the people I love most struggle and not being able to help.

Russians Do Not want this War

Based on my frequent conversations with family and friends back home, I believe the majority of Russians do not want this war. They show their support by posting true information online, donating to Ukrainian funds, and peacefully protesting all over the country.

As someone who participated in several protests back in the day, I am perfectly aware of how violent and terrifying they can turn because of the police officers. These protests are no exception. Russian citizens who support their neighbors get beaten up, detained, and put in jail by the authorities who once swore to protect them. I found out

from several sources that innocent people can lose their freedom for up to twenty years.

The media controlled by the Kremlin tries to cover up these protests by blaming it on “Western propaganda.” But, because of this disinformation war there are also many people who support Putin, his decisions, and the illegal imprisonment of others for protesting.

It shocks me how one can support war and tyranny, but stories about my mom’s co-workers and comments from other Russians I see online make me realize that these people exist, and they are serious about their violent views and beliefs.

What is happening between Russia and Ukraine is scary and does not seem real. I am appalled by my president, his selfish actions, and by his lack of empathy towards the Russian people that struggle because of his decisions. Decisions that stretch back to the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine by Putin in 2014.

During his long presidency, Vladimir Putin earned a reputation as a dictator, and just like any dictator, he has people who blindly follow him and people who disapprove his actions.

Almost nobody in Russia expected him to start an actual war under false pretenses with a neighboring country, citizens of which we consider our brothers and sisters. And right now, ambitions and greed of one person ruin the lives of people in two countries: Ukraine and Russia.

As I write this, on March 16, 2022, Vladimir Putin had another press conference during which he made it very clear how much he despises his own people if they do not support war and violence.

Of course, he started by blaming “the collective West” for dividing his country and people. Then he said something truly shocking. Putin said that there are patriots (those who follow him) and there are “scum and traitors” who deserve to be “spit out”. In his opinion, this is the way of society to self-cleanse and become stronger.

Spoken like a true tyrant and dictator.

Putin’s actions have consequences for Russians even outside Russia. There has been a spike in Russophobia because some people believe that every Russian is to blame for this morbid war. The owners of Russian stores and restaurants in Europe and North America face vandalism and hate. The only way to stop this madness is to end the war.

We, Russians, stand with Ukraine. ■

Putin said there are
“scum & traitors” who
deserve to be “spit out”.



FIVE LESSONS FROM THE FRONTLINES OF ADDICTION

AUTHOR **ROSEMARY BARNES**
LAYOUT DESIGN **SARA BISENIUS**

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” The beginning of Dickens’ novel, ‘A Tale of Two Cities’, comes to mind when I think of this time of intense demand for qualified rehab workers matched with the crushing grind of my daily servings of paradoxical anecdotes of wisdom, foolishness, belief, unbelief, hope, and despair. There were lots of life lessons and an atmosphere pregnant with opportunities for growth and self-care.

These lessons come at a pivotal point in the opioid addiction crisis. The New York Times reported March 3, 2022, that the Sackler Family and Purdue Pharma have reached a deal with several states to handle the hordes of lawsuits hounding them. This deal, if approved, would funnel billions of dollars from the family’s fortune to fund the calvary of community treatment plans and counselors.

I worked as an Addiction Counselor and Behavioral Case Manager in non-profit settings. My caseload was adults who had long histories of addictions and behavioral issues. The work was in inner-city rescue missions, transitional housing programs, and residential treatment programs.

The National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics offers some startling statistics. Currently this nation is experiencing some of its highest addiction rates among all ages and especially with young adults. Among American 12 year and older, 53 million or 19.4% are currently using illegal drug users or misusing prescription drugs.

Here are five of the most valuable lessons learned during my days on the job standing watch on the frontlines of addiction.

01

A degree in the counseling field does not automatically translate to being good in doing the day-to-day work in a rehab setting. Altruistic urges, sincere desires to “help”, or savior complexes will be the first thing that fall to the wayside, hopefully.

An example of this came years ago on my first full-time counseling job in a rescue mission. My supervisor reviewed my counseling goals for my first “real” client (middle-aged, long addiction history and relapses since he was in his teens). She said, “Rosemary, we have at most 6 months with him. Your main goals are stabilization, self-awareness, and relapse strategies. We must equip him for his departure. ‘Transformation’ may be your goal, but it is not his reality. This must be a plan he can work - not your dream”.



The work offers huge rewards but is hard, disappointing at times, confusing, somewhat low paying, high attrition rates, and burnout. There are a lot of ‘other duties as assigned’ tasks due to the nature of funding and the settings. I have helped at the front desk, de-escalated arguments, served meals, administered drug tests, filed police reports, and whatever else needed to be done. A sense of community goes a long way rather than just being concerned about my own counseling caseload.

I remember working 24 hours straight at a center when staff could not make it in due to weather. My priorities had to shift from my job (counselor for the men’s rehab program) to what I needed to do as part of the team to serve our families (homeless shelter). I was asked to do what was best for the entire mission rather than my small, familiar sphere within the mission. It was a hard day/night but very necessary. I got to know/help the families, realized my part was not more important than the program, and see a level of selfishness I did not want to believe was in me.

02

03

It is futile to try to 'play' life-long 'players'. I found that some of those in behavioral health or rehab programs, regardless of their long histories of addictions, are extremely discerning and wise. Their past lives have required they have street smarts. Cultivating a personal level of authenticity and transparency will go far in this line of work

There is not much credibility for addiction counselors who have not lived the life, in some way. In my earlier days, I tried to talk the talk and make myself seem knowledgeable. That failed miserably. Soon one of the men in my group said, "Miss Rosemary, you're not fooling anybody. We know you are scamming". I was busted, admitted my foolishness and our group progressed. I decided to just be the best counselor I could be without the 'war stories'. That worked well for the guys and me.

Always leave room for 'something new' to happen – you have not seen it all. We had a saying at work – "You cannot make this stuff up". This meant that when you thought you had heard and seen it all, one of our residents would add a new chapter to the book. Our index was constantly being challenged.

One incident that expanded my index happened in a women's residential treatment facility. During a surprise room inspection, staff found a female poodle with a litter of puppies in a client's room. Pets were not allowed in the facility – only service dogs. As her counselor, I had to be involved. When I asked her, she said with absolute surprise, she did not know how those dogs got in her room. She also said, in the most serious way, she was glad we came to remove them because "no pets were allowed in the facility."

04



05

Extend grace in all victories and defeats – there is wisdom in both. A resident graduating or a resident relapsing were equal causes to show grace. Both offered opportunities to come alongside a resident and meet them at that place first. It was never about us but always how do we help them in the place they are now and move forward. Also, justice without judgment was a skill we all had to develop and continue to practice.

I remember a day when two guys were leaving the mission. One was graduating and the other had failed his drug test (second time) - relapsed. An obvious example of the highs and lows in any treatment program. That day I saw staff rally around and support both of these guys with much sincerity and grace. Both took the van that day towards their next journey. One to the bus station going back home to his family. And the other to detox with the hope of restarting his recovery, once again.

My work as a counselor has been full of lessons on my journey. I have benefited from lots of teachable moments, opportunities for impact, and witnessing men and women overcome addictions and regain control of their lives. ■



SOME SERIOUS
ME TIME
A FLOAT TANK EXPERIENCE

AUTHOR & PHOTOGRAPHY **STACY FISKE**
LAYOUT DESIGN **ANDREA ORDUNA**

I am on a mission tonight. My goal is to become a body of nothing, floating weightless in a special self-care facility called a float tank tucked away in an obscure corner of downtown Denver.

As I'm looking for a parking spot on the corner of 26th and Larimer, I crane my neck to see if I can spot the Samana Float Center but I don't see any promising signs. Undeterred, I make a U-turn, park, grab my shower bag and start wandering down the street, looking for any sign of the float center. I get to the intersection and see a couple of shop doors on a side building to my right. One door had Samana etched on the glass.

Bingo! I'll admit that I'm a little sketched out and uncertain as I pull the door open and see a long white unadorned hallway stretching to a barely visible Samana sign at the far end. It sounds like there's a party going on somewhere in the building. I pass by a billiards place that's hoppin' this Sunday night, and though normally you couldn't stop me from grabbing my cue and shooting some pool, I stayed on my mission to become nothing.

The Samana Float Center is one of a handful of facilities in the Denver metro area that offer a different take on self-care. It's one-part classic spa and one-part futuristic next-level self-care. If you've never heard of "floating," a floatation tank is the same thing as an isolation chamber or a sensory deprivation tank. These "tanks" are like super-sized bathtubs filled with perpetually warm water that is mixed almost to saturation point with Epsom salts.

This technique of self-care lets your body float in the water without any effort. You don't have to tread water or use any muscles at all. You just lay there, in

the warm water, in a steamy chamber; and there's ambient light that you can leave on or turn off so that you are in complete darkness and there is also relaxing music that you can also turn on or off.

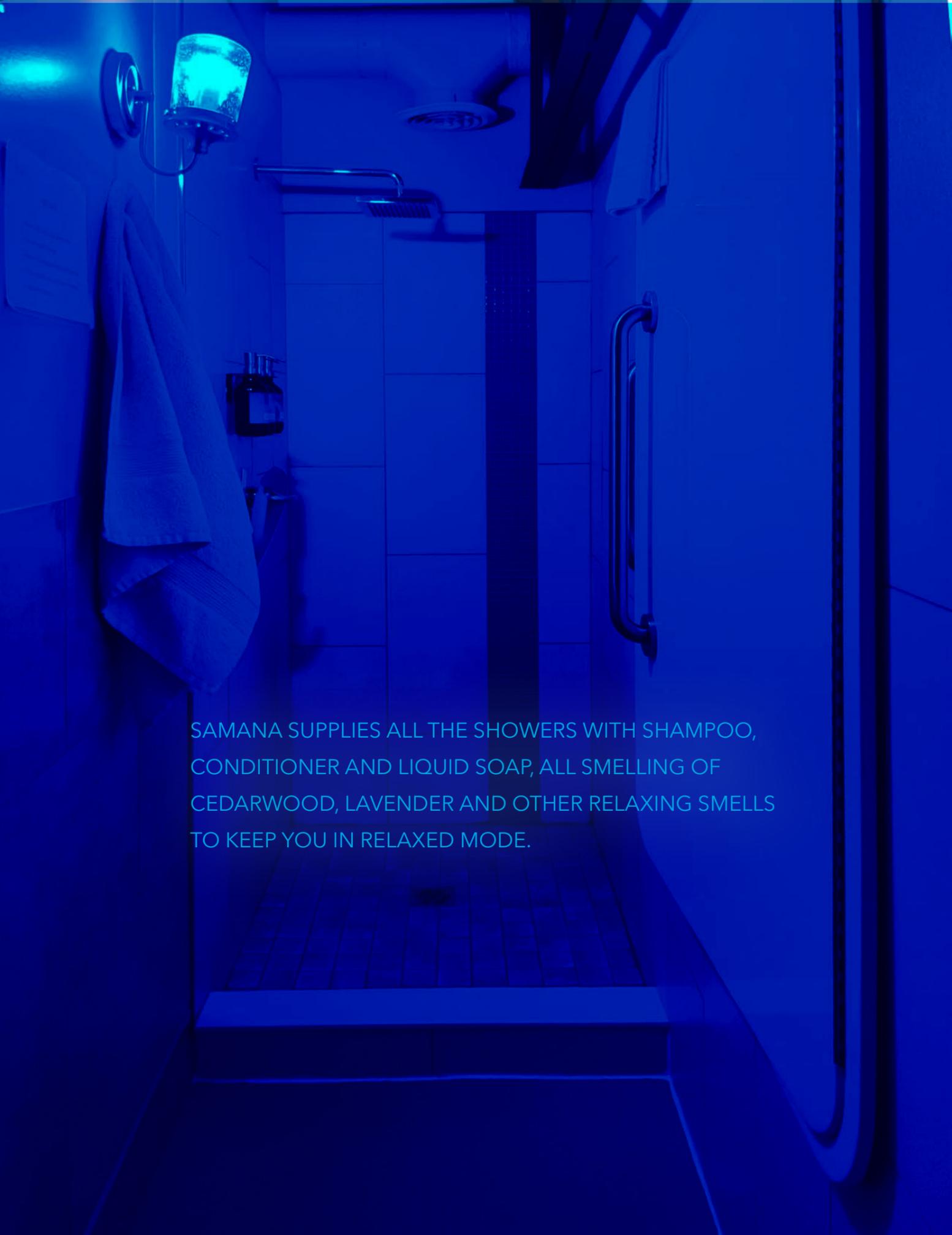
The entire point of this activity is to relax, refresh and reset your mind and body. If you opt for no external stimuli during your float, there is a very good chance that you will come to realize that you can't even feel the water around you anymore; it is a real zero-gravity experience, and it's absolutely wild.

I walked into the facility, a young man was at the counter, the name Dominic was written on a little placard on the desk. He was a soft-spoken gent, with dark, knowing eyes. I would find out after my float that he has racked up more floats than anyone on the client list and told me that he transcended to "the light" one time. He smiled at me and said, "Welcome!" The lighting was low and pleasant, with soft ambient music playing; it was just like walking into a massage room. I was a little anxious because I wasn't sure what to expect but Dominic answered any questions I would have, and he gave me a quick little tour of the place and instructions on how to float.

When I finally got in the tub, it was really easy to enjoy the experience: nobody is watching you, so you don't have to worry about looking weird, and you are in complete control of the environment, so you're safe. I left the blue light and ambient music on for a while and then took Dominic's advice and turned off everything for the majority of the float. After about 30 minutes, I realized that physically, I felt fabulous! The Epsom salts really do their

**"THERE IS A SUPERCHARGED
ATMOSPHERE IN AMERICA
THESE DAYS AND A LOT OF
PEOPLE ARE ACTING OUT
THEIR EMOTIONS INSTEAD OF
THINKING CRITICALLY"**





SAMANA SUPPLIES ALL THE SHOWERS WITH SHAMPOO, CONDITIONER AND LIQUID SOAP, ALL SMELLING OF CEDARWOOD, LAVENDER AND OTHER RELAXING SMELLS TO KEEP YOU IN RELAXED MODE.



job when you're lying in a tub chock full of them. I wasn't even halfway through my float and I felt like an acrobatic contortionist, slithering through the water, stretching all my limbs to their fullest extents. At one point, I did feel as though I wasn't in the water anymore and that I was just floating through space, but my anxiety-ridden, distraction-laden mind realized that I had lost track of reality and the sensation dissipated by my moving the water with my arms. But I thought to myself that if I can do this activity more, I know I can get to the point where I would allow myself to explore the alternate realities my mind will show me in there. It just takes a few more floats to get used to the experience enough to really relax, mentally.

At the 90 minute mark, a piano rendition of 'Where is my mind?' by The Pixies played over the speakers and I chuckled. How fitting, I thought. Dominic had told me that a different song would start playing when it was time to get out, so I used the shower in my cabin to wash up and move on with life outside of the tank. Samana supplies all the showers with shampoo, conditioner and liquid soap, all smelling of cedarwood, lavender and other relaxing smells to keep you in relaxed mode.

When I left the cabin, I went to the back of the facility and found journals for people to write in. I read some of the entries. Most of them were little tidbits of wisdom or words of inspiration like you might find on posters from the 90's. All of them, though, were thoughtful and encouraging and it brought me back to the thought that I could really

relax in the tank, and if given enough repetition to feel completely comfortable in there, I would have some profound thoughts about life, too.

I ended up talking with Dominic for almost an hour after I came back to the front of the store and I found that I was completely physically relaxed, but my emotions were kinda right on the surface. The experience made me feel a little vulnerable, but it was my first time there, and anything you do the first time, it's always a little shaky. Although it does take some getting used to, it was ultimately an experience I really enjoyed and one that I'd like to keep having.

With all the things around us that keep us from paying close attention to ourselves, sometimes we really need to check in. Honestly, we should be doing these kinds of check-ins on a somewhat consistent basis. How else can we find out what truly irks us or what we need in order to be better people? How can we grow as individuals if we don't even know what makes us tick?

There is a supercharged atmosphere in America these days and a lot of people are acting out their emotions instead of thinking critically about what made them feel the way they did. Being able to distinguish this is a large and important part our human experience together but our environment has been filled with distractions, and I fear that being self-aware isn't something a lot of people are familiar with.

Floating gives us that chance to check in with ourselves in a warm, safe environment where all you need to worry about, is you. ■



THE PHOENIX SOBER ACTIVE SOCIAL CLUB

AUTHOR **VINCE HUSEMAN**
PHOTOGRAPHY **THE PHOENIX**
LAYOUT DESIGN **SARA BISENIUS**

TODAY IT SEEMS
LIKE every social activity revolves around some kind of substance (drugs or alcohol) use. Whether it's sporting events, concerts, or amateur beer league sports, substances just always seem to play a central role. This is a real problem for people struggling with self care and substance abuse. A promising innovative solution is a sober-active social club.

The Phoenix is such a social club with locations in Denver and Boulder. They are part of the national Phoenix sober-active community that creates fun, safe, and supportive environments for anyone to participate in events like yoga, music lessons, meditation, hiking, CrossFit, concerts, boxing, art classes, and more, all for free to anyone with maintaining at least 48 hours of sobriety in the substance abuse epidemic.

To paint a picture of this epidemic, according to the Phoenix's White Paper, "It is estimated that more than 95,000 people die from alcohol-related causes in the U.S. each year, and over 67,000 die from drug overdose (Esser, et al, 2020; Hedegaard, Miniño & Warner, 2020). Fueled by the opioid epidemic, drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in the

"The Phoenix does not only serve individuals in recovery from addiction. It also serves the sober curious, those who choose to live a sober lifestyle, and those who have been affected by addiction in some way."



country (CDC, 2018)." Those numbers are stark, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened matters.

The Phoenix was started in 2006 in Boulder, Colorado, by founder Scott Strode. Scott realized that engaging in physical activity with others in recovery from substance use disorder worked wonders for his own recovery and mental health. It then dawned on him that he wanted to offer that same experience to others for free.

Since then, The Phoenix has expanded to running 354 events per week across thirty-six states, 124 counties and has now served over one hundred thousand people across the nation with free recovery support. In addition, by expanding the program offerings from a few outdoor-related events to fitness, social events, art, and music, The Phoenix has reached new communities of people in need of a sober community.

The Phoenix does not only serve individuals in recovery from addiction. It also serves the sober

curious, those who choose to live a sober lifestyle, and those who have been affected by addiction in some way. Anyone is welcome at The Phoenix, and the only cost for membership is 48 hours of sobriety. The Phoenix believes that many of us are in recovery from something, and we can all come together as a community despite the path we took to get there.

At The Phoenix, self-care is often the common bond between participants. They are all participating to improve their mental and physical health by exercising, enjoying the outdoors, or creating art and music with other sober individuals. People go to The Phoenix for the events, but they stay for the community, and a connection to a community is critical to thriving in life.

If you'd like to find out more about The Phoenix, visit their website at www.thephoenix.org or stop in at either of their Colorado chapters in Denver and Colorado Springs. ■

YOU GOT TO KNOW WHEN TO FOLD 'EM

AUTHOR & PHOTOGRAPHY **GREG RUCKER**
LAYOUT DESIGN **CARSON KAVATHAS**





Rustic cabin in Estes Park, CO

I couldn't imagine ice cream on a day this cold, so I opted instead to have an iced coffee for lunch, because I'm just that type of weird.



I had been living in Denver for a few years and still had not yet gone away to a cabin for the weekend. It seemed like a rite of passage for a Deverite, akin to skiing Snowmass, or attending a First Friday in the Santa Fe arts district. My new Denver friends would constantly preach of the "super close commute" to Estes Park, the proximity to Rocky Mountain National Park, and the myriad of small shops in the historic town center.

As I drove the 90 minute trek northwest out of Denver, and climbed nearly 2300 feet in elevation, the temperature plummeted and other cars on the road became scarce. I knew mid-February would be on the slower side of the spectrum for Estes Park's tourism scale, but I didn't expect to be confronted by an abandoned snowy ghost town.

Many of the restaurants were not open due to it being 2pm on a Thursday. Many of the cute little shops that I had been hearing about seemed to be shuttered. Perhaps the low point in the season caused this, or the inclement weather caused it, and some part was surely played by the nation's struggle to find employees in general that has

shop owners being selective about when to be open for business. Though disappointed in the lack of shopping options, I was bewitched by the silent and graceful blanket of snow that insulated this town. It was the quiet I needed, until I didn't.

The cabin was rustic at best.

Other cabins had fireplaces, wood stoves, and even hot tubs. My cabin at the end of the road had none of those amenities. I assumed it was last half-heartedly renovated during the Reagan administration, which would have been an enjoyable quirk had it not been for a snowpocalypse outside.

At 250 square feet, my cabin was a cozy place to spend a few days, if only it had been properly insulated. The front desk agent directed me to leave the heater on high the entire time I stayed and to leave the faucets at a light trickle to prevent freezing.

I would spend the next two days bundled up in long johns, snow hats, and thick sweaters, even while trying to sleep. My skin was dry and itchy, my bones felt frozen and cracked, and my mind couldn't focus on anything but trying to conserve heat.

Eventually I ventured into town, because hiking was clearly not an option and I wanted so badly

to have a memorable mountain experience. So if hiking wasn't an option, then spending money was really the only option.

I walked through one of the few shops that was open, which was selling some very fashionable clothing, and spoke with the kind gentleman working the register. He told me that this weekend was one of the coldest in the past few years and the town doesn't usually see much action in February.

I spent too much money on a sweater I didn't need and sought out food.

The Dairy Queen seemed to be the most popular place in town, ironic considering it was below freezing for 3 days straight. I couldn't imagine ice cream on a day this cold, so I opted instead to have an iced coffee for lunch, because I'm just that type of weird. I bought a frozen pizza from the grocery store to have for dinner later and sullenly headed back to the cabin.

I woke up on the third day with one night left to stay in Estes Park. I laid in bed, struggling to breathe from the ice cold air that involved the cabin during the deep-cold of the night. I was struggling to choose the best course of action. I wanted to en-

joy my trip so badly. I wanted a unique and refreshing mountain getaway.

At this low point in my self-care journey, I just wanted to be back in Denver, in my noisy apartment, in my warm and comfy bed. The place that I just spent time, energy, and money to leave was now the only place I wanted to be.

Without even making a pot of coffee, I packed up my stuff and left Estes Park around 7am. I made sure the sink faucets were running at a light trickle and dropped the keys in the drop box.

An hour and a half after fleeing Estes Park, I was back home. Bummed that I couldn't make the most of the weekend, but happy that I knew when to call it quits. There's a saying "Sometimes in life, you gotta know when to fold 'em". I always thought of myself as a pretty good poker player, but I couldn't hide my poker face, I didn't like the hand I was dealt, so I ate the cost and I folded.

I look forward to giving Estes Park another shot, I heard it's beautiful in the summer. But now I know to be more prepared when I venture out beyond the city and into the mountains. ■

WHAT DOESN'T KILL US **MAKES** US **STRONGER**

AUTHOR **BRENDA LENO**
LAYOUT DESIGN **JEROME SCOTT**

“At this point, we are all stronger, more resilient, and more self-aware as a result of the pandemic.”

Winter's best promise is Spring. We wouldn't appreciate the light warm days of Spring without first experiencing the cold dark days of winter. And after this pandemic's long winter terrorized by the Omicron variant and finally reaching a sustained lull, many of us are ready to welcome Spring, proclaiming the pandemic over and done with!

March 5, 2022 marks the two year anniversary of the pandemic reaching the state borderlines of Colorado. This unremarkably ordinary Saturday in March has made us reflect on this experience with the rise of toxic positivity and look to where we are going in this new post-apocalyptic world.

TOXIC POSITIVITY

The words 'toxic positivity' seems like an odd couple only sure of irony. It's normal to want to run back to normalcy and never look back. However, it's important to not run right into a state of drinking so much positivity that it becomes poisonous.

There's no question that the last few years have been hard in so many ways. The trauma is real and tangible. And it does count as a trauma; the pandemic was a terrible event that caused pain, spread fear, and created a climate of uncertainty that we'd never experienced before.

We're ready and anxious to live our lives without fear, but the reality is that the pandemic has evolved into the variant, the endemic, which means that this virus will never really go away.

And, the trauma of it will always be with us, in a similar way older generations may remember the different trauma from their past, such as the Great Depression. The trauma is now endemic as well.

Denying that this level of trauma exists is a fantasy born out of desperation. Not only do we need to allow others the space (when we have it) to air their own pains and fears that resulted from the pandemic, but we need to allow ourselves the same space.

Should we gloss over it, forget it, feel it, move on from it? It is a challenge deciding what to do. Glossing over the trauma doesn't erase it. Forgetting it by staying hyper-positive is not real healing. So feel it. Acknowledge your feelings whatever they are, and then let them go. There are brighter days ahead and you'll be in a better state to experience them if you've processed the dark days of the last few years.

POST-APOCALYPTIC WORLD

These were dark days. Survival was the name of the game since the first nationwide quarantine was initiated in 2020. In that context there should be no shame, no blame, and no guilt allowed towards the unhealthy habits people developed to cope with conditions of these dark days.

As everyone surfaces to the world outside of our living room windows, we need to take time to realign our post-pandemic selves. Maybe you walked more than you ever did before. Or gardened more. Maybe you drank or smoked more than you would have. Maybe you shopped more than usual.

Whatever it was that helped you get through the pandemic in one piece, take the time to reflect on how those coping mechanisms will serve you post pandemic. Some habits should be allowed to flourish (please keep gardening and going on regular walks). While others should be left in 2020 and still others will

need real help (not podcast help) to confront and deal with, again, without shame, without blame and without guilt.

At this point, we are all stronger, more resilient, and more self-aware as a result of the pandemic. Make the most of your newfound awareness and set yourself up to live fully as your most unburdened self in this new Spring – this brave new world. ■



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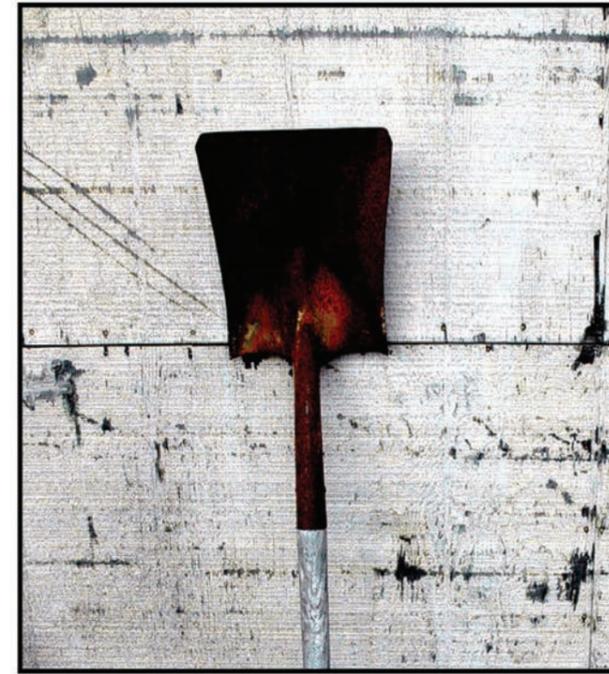
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